



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rural Urban Awards Return to Ridgetown Campus, Celebrating 79 Years of Agricultural Excellence in Chatham-Kent

RIDGETOWN, ON — The Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce (CKCC) proudly welcomed community leaders, innovators, students, and farm families to the **79th Annual Rural Urban Awards** at the **University of Guelph Ridgetown Campus** on November 27, 2025. Hosted in one of Ontario's most respected centres of agricultural education and research, the evening celebrated the people and businesses whose leadership is shaping a resilient, future-ready agri-food sector in Chatham-Kent.

Now in its 79th year, the Rural Urban Awards are a signature CKCC tradition that elevates agricultural achievement across rural and urban Chatham-Kent—recognizing excellence in innovation, stewardship, mentorship, and community impact.

A Night Framed by Partnership and Place

This year's event underscored the powerful connection between **education, industry, and community**, with the Ridgetown Campus serving as a fitting host. CKCC extended gratitude to the campus leadership, faculty, staff, and students for their ongoing contributions to agricultural advancement and to the future workforce of Ontario's agri-food economy.

"Tonight is about the people who feed our communities, power our economy, and invest so deeply in the future of Chatham-Kent," said **Rory Ring, Executive Director, Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce**, in opening remarks. "Together—sponsors, nominees, guests, our hosts in Ridgetown, and the students who represent tomorrow—we embody the partnerships that make Chatham-Kent such a remarkable place to live, work, and grow."

2025 Rural Urban Award Recipients

CKCC congratulates the 2025 recipients, whose work reflects both the proud legacy and the bold future of agriculture in Chatham-Kent:

- **Future Leader of the Year: Kane Brown-McKerrall**
- **Friend of Agriculture: John Zandstra, University of Guelph Ridgetown Campus**

- **Agriculture Innovator of the Year (Individual): Jay Cunningham, Executive Member, Kent Federation of Agriculture**
- **Agriculture Innovator of the Year (Business): Country Market Garden, c/o Alex Wingrove**
- **Agriculturist of the Year: Brad Snobelen, Past President, Kent Federation of Agriculture**
- **Woman of Agriculture: Sarah Graham, Sarah's Farm Market**

Each recipient was selected from a slate of outstanding nominees and revealed live during the ceremony, creating an “academy-awards style” moment of celebration shared by peers, sponsors, and the wider community.

“Tonight, we paused to celebrate the people who keep Chatham-Kent fed, grounded, and moving forward. Farming is more than an industry here—it’s life’s work, built on grit, skill, and heart, and when agriculture succeeds, our whole community succeeds. These awards remind us of a simple truth: we rise together, and the Chamber is committed to ensuring your voices are heard, supported, and championed as you lead our region into the future.” - **Sarah Molnar, Chair, Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce**

Honouring Award Sponsors and Event Champions

CKCC extends heartfelt appreciation to the sponsors whose commitment to local agriculture made the 79th Rural Urban Awards possible:

Title Sponsors:

- **Pride Seeds**
- **Enbridge**

VIP Sponsors:

- **AgriRoots Diversified**
- **Farm Lending Canada**

Award Sponsors:

- **Libro Credit Union** (Future Leader of the Year)
- **Mainstreet Credit Union** (Friend of Agriculture)
- **RBC Royal Bank** (Agriculture Innovator—Individual)
- **TD Canada Trust** (Agriculture Innovator—Business)

- **AGRIS Co-operative Ltd.** (Agriculturist of the Year)
- **CIBC** (Woman of Agriculture – inaugural sponsorship)

Additional Event Sponsors:

- **FCC (Farm Credit Canada) and Salus Mutual Insurance**— Program Sponsor
- **BMO and Maizex** — Presentation Sponsors

“Your support does far more than put your name on a program,” Ring noted. “It makes it possible for us to tell the stories of our leaders and bring this community together in celebration.”

Guest Speakers Illuminate the Future

The program featured remarks from distinguished leaders who reinforced the region’s role as a provincial agri-food powerhouse:

- **Sarah Molnar**, Chair, CKCC Board of Directors
- **Dr. Steven Loewen**, Interim Director, University of Guelph Ridgetown Campus, whose research strengthens Ontario’s tomato and crop innovation pipeline
- **Dr. John Cranfield**, Dean, Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph
- **Megan Shannon**, Advisor, Municipal & Stakeholder Engagement, Enbridge, who welcomed guests on behalf of a title sponsor deeply invested in rural prosperity
- **Keynote Speaker: Daniel Tisch**, President & CEO, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, who spent two days in Chatham-Kent engaging with local businesses and agriculture leaders.

Tisch’s keynote echoed the urgency and opportunity facing Chatham-Kent’s agri-food economy, highlighting its \$4-billion sector, innovation strengths, and the critical need for infrastructure and talent to keep the region globally competitive.

A Message of Empowerment and Community Impact

Beyond trophies, the Rural Urban Awards stand as a catalyst for confidence, mentorship, and momentum across the region. The awards process—and the stories celebrated on stage—empower individuals and teams to lead boldly, invest locally, and inspire the next generation.

From youth leadership to lifelong stewardship, the 2025 recipients demonstrate what is possible when innovation is rooted in community values: collaboration, resilience, and pride in feeding the world from right here in Chatham-Kent.

As the Chatham of Commerce looks toward its upcoming 80th Anniversary in 2026, we reaffirm our commitment to **engaging, empowering, inspiring, and impacting** the people and businesses that sustain Chatham-Kent's prosperity—today and for generations to come.

Media Contact

Rory Ring

President & CEO, Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce

Email: rory@chatham-kentchamber.ca

About the Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce

"The Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce exists to cultivate a thriving business ecosystem and collaborate with like-minded stakeholders so that members can broaden their economic horizons, inspire success, and contribute to a prosperous and vibrant community for generations to come."