

John Duynisveld, Holdanca Farms Finalist for 2009 Farm Environmental Stewardship Award



“Pasture is the key to our farm,” says John Duynisveld. Visitors to Holdanca Farms, located in Wallace, Cumberland County, can easily see this for themselves. Duynisveld raises certified free-range, pasture-fed livestock—cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry—which he direct markets to customers around the province. Successful pasture management is also the key to Duynisveld’s approach to good environmental stewardship.

His dedication to such stewardship has made him one of five finalists in the first annual Farm Environmental Stewardship Award. This award was established to highlight producers who make good land, water and habitat stewardship a significant part of their farm operations. Eligible farmers are participants in the Nova Scotia Environmental Farm Plan, a voluntary program that helps farmers identify, assess, and reduce environmental risk on their farms. Since the program’s inception in 1999, more than 1270 farmers have become involved and developed Environmental Farm Plans for their operations.



The farm’s non-woodlot acres are naturalized permanent pastures, where Duynisveld free-ranges all of his livestock in rotational grazing. His pastures are subdivided into nearly 100 paddocks, and he moves his large livestock through these paddocks for up to ten months of the year. Poultry go out on grass when they are 2-4 weeks of age, and get about 30 percent of their diet from being moved daily to fresh pasture.

Each paddock is supplied with water from a watering pipeline system that Duynisveld has been developing for more than a decade. As a result of this system, livestock don’t require watering from ponds or streams. Because they’re on pasture for most of the year, nutrients from their manure go directly back into the pasture soil, enriching it and in turn providing quality food for the animals.

Several years ago Duynisveld created an artificial wetland, which filters wastewater from his on-farm poultry processing plant. The wetland also catches all runoff from the barnyard and manure storage area, filtering nutrients down before dispersing them into nearby pastures.

Poultry is processed at a provincially inspected plant located on the farm, with the beef, swine and sheep sent off-farm to other plants for processing. Offal from the plant and composted poultry manure is only applied to pastureland that will never be grazed by chickens or turkeys.

The cooler and freezer in the chicken plant are both water-cooled, because most of the farm's processing is done in the summer and a water-cooled compressor runs more efficiently than an air-cooled one. Duynisveld is able to recycle some heat from the system to the in-floor heating system in the chicken brooder pens. He's hoping to install a solar hot water system in the not-too-distant future, again for use with his poultry production.

Duynisveld has sound business reasons for advocating effective and continual pasture management. He says, "Grass is one of our most cost-effective feeds. It is also one of our most environmentally friendly ones." His customers are willing to pay a fair price for his pasture-raised, free-ranging livestock. "They appreciate the environmental benefits, the health qualities, and the flavour," he says.

"There's always something new to learn with pasture management," he says. "I like to show the interrelationships between our different livestock species, diverse pasture species, and the way pasture management ties them all together." This year he's experimenting with swath grazing, to keep his animals out on pasture longer during autumn and winter.

John Duynisveld says the most satisfying aspect of improving his operation is in knowing he's doing the best he can for the farm and for his local environment. "This gives me confidence when talking about our farm and its role in our local ecosystem, with my children or with the public." He keenly recommends that other producers participate in an Environmental Farm Plan. He says, "Go for it." "It [Environmental Farm Plan] gives you a greater awareness of how your farm connects to the environment around it."

The Farm Environmental Stewardship Award is a part of the Environmental Farm Plan Program. It was created through a partnership of the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the NS Environmental Farm Plan Team and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture. The Environmental Farm Plan Program is an initiative under the Canada-Nova Scotia Growing Forward Agreement.