



# Farm Environmental Stewardship Award

2013 FINALIST

Situated in the farming community of Waterville, Nova Scotia, Aviator Farms Ltd. is a 3,500-breeder mink ranch on 30 acres of arable farm land, where neighbouring farms grow soybeans, corn, carrots, and winter wheat. The farm produces high quality mink pelts which, unlike synthetic fibres, are natural, organic and compostable.

Extensive planning went into choosing the site and creating this leading-edge facility. The site is flat, with no watercourses nearby. To the north and east are trees, while to the south and west are rural roads and other farms. Bright, airy enclosed barns were constructed to house the mink. Manure is stored underground in concrete manure tanks, so surface water never comes in contact with it. The manure is spread on fields at application rates recommended in the farm's Nutrient Management Plan. It does not need to be hauled long distances.



Nipple drinkers have been installed in all barns to conserve water and reduce the waste that occurs with traditional cup drinkers. A diverter was installed under the drinkers to reduce water entering the manure gutters, reducing the volume of water going into the manure tank. In most of the barns, manure troughs do not require water for flushing, but instead, use mechanical paddles. There is no waste feed produced on the farm. A computerized feed cart, brought from Europe, ensures proper feeding rates. Mink feed is comprised of byproducts from fish and poultry processing and slaughter facilities -- waste that would otherwise be sent to a compost pile or rendering plant. Mortalities are stored in a freezer and taken to the pelting facility. As a result of good management practices and cleanliness at the farm there are no fly or odor problems.

The farm has diesel and gasoline tanks on concrete pads. The electric pumps use automatic shut off nozzles to prevent overflows. Access to the pumps is restricted through strategic placement of controls and the use of a timer.

Energy efficiency is evident on the farm. The design of the barn allows for plenty of natural light year round, eliminating the need for daytime lighting. The side curtains and high roof eliminate the need for fans for air movement or heating. There are future plans to install geothermal heating for the farm office, staff room and storage area.

“Dan and Karen have put a lot of thought and planning into the design of their farm, effectively reducing concerns that are typically associated with mink and other agricultural operations,” says Kathryn Bremner, Lead Coordinator for the Environmental Farm Plan. “Looking for innovative and practical solutions to common issues, the Mullen’s have shown true Environmental Stewardship.”

Dan and Karen Mullen’s dedication to farm stewardship has made them one of three finalists for this year’s Farm Environmental Stewardship Award. The award is part of the Environmental Farm Plan Program created through a partnership of the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Nova Scotia Environmental Farm Plan Team and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture.

The award recognizes producers who make land, water and habitat stewardship a significant part of their farm operations. To be eligible for the award, farmers must have an environmental farm plan. The voluntary plan helps them identify, assess, and reduce environmental risk on their farms. Since the program’s inception in 1999, more than 1,700 farmers have developed Environmental Farm Plans for their operations.

The Environmental Farm Plan Program is supported under *Growing Forward 2*, a five-year agricultural agreement between the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia.

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