

Ontario Forage Masters Competition

KEN PARNELL, ONTARIO FORAGE MASTER 1999

THIS COMPETITION IS JOINTLY SPONSORED BY OSCIA AND NOVARTIS

Ken Parnell, R.R. #3, Elmvale, ON L0L 1P0, Simcoe North, earned top forage honours when he was declared the 1999 Ontario Forage Master at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

Nineteen of twenty-three contestants competed in the 12th Annual Ontario Forage Masters Competition at the Royal and had the opportunity to present to their peers and to visitors, their innovative ideas and techniques in forage management. Novartis Seeds Inc., Agri-Food Laboratories, and the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) sponsored the competition.

Following the announcement of first runner-up Larry Dickieson of Wellington County, Ken Parnell, who represented Simcoe North, expressed his thanks and commented that the competition was very impressive. "I'm honoured to have been chosen to represent the Ontario forage industry for the coming year" he said, "and I'm looking forward to fulfilling my ambassadorial role."

Ken is now qualified to compete in the American Forage and Grassland Council's Forages Spokesperson Contest that will be held in Madison, Wisconsin in July of 2000.

Forages are a family affair for the Parnells and a high priority in their operation. Ken and his brother Art operate a 1200 acre cash crop and Holstein, family-owned farm.

Forage Masters provide inspiration for all to re-examine forage practices and search out innovative and improved ways of making forages reach their productive potential, economically, environmentally, and sustainably in Ontario agriculture.

The following associations are now entered for the 2000 Ontario Forage Master's Competition:

Brant, Carleton, Dufferin, Durham East, Frontenac, Grenville, Halton, Nipissing West, Oxford, Peel, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Victoria, Waterloo, Wellington, York.

The competition is planned to take place at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto on Friday, November 10, 2000.

MAKING GOOD HAY AND FORAGE RUNS IN THE PARNELL FAMILY

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Forages are the mainstay of the Parnell family farm operation near Elmvale and have helped build a 1,200 acre dairy and cash crop business into a success.

This year, Ken Parnell will get to tell other farmers how top quality forage can be the backbone of any farm operation. The 59-year-old Parnell was declared the Ontario Forage Master at the 1999 Royal Winter Fair.

Ken and his brother Art milk 40 Holstein cows and grow about 250 acres of forage crops every year, along with soybeans, edible beans, corn, wheat and spring cereals. It was Ken's first year competing at the Forage Master's program that has run for 12 years at the Royal.

Growing top quality forage has been something the two Parnell brothers have been doing for a long time. "There's not any secret about it really," says Ken. "It all has to do with what you put into the ground and how you harvest it. If you use good seed and keep the fertility up, forages will treat you pretty good."

Red clover is used in rotation with some of the other crops the family grows on their farm near Wasaga Beach on the southern tip of Georgian Bay. The crop is harvested as seed and Ken finds red clover does wonders for improving soil organic matter and aids in providing nutrients for the following cash crop.

A 24 x 80 silo is filled with haylage and another 5,000 small square bales of hay are put up to feed the cattle. Some dry hay is added to the TMR mix to get more dry matter into the cows, Ken says. Some 4 x 5 bales of hay are put up as well to feed dry cows and heifers.

The Holstein steers are raised and finished on the farm using a haylage-grain corn diet.

Winning the forage master program means Ken will have to do some ambassadorial work as part of his win. This July, he heads to the American Forage and Grassland Council Spokesperson contest and will speak about his forage operation.

"I'm not going to give any other message than tell everybody what I am doing myself at home on the farm."

Brother Art has his own award to crow about this year. For the third year in a row, he was named the winner of the World Hay Championship at the Royal Winter Fair. He has been entering the hay class for 10 years and seems to have found the secret of success.

"Making good hay is all about cutting early, getting a higher percentage of leaves and getting it off the field without any weather damage," says Art. "It's a real challenge to do these things right."

At the 1999 Forage Master Program, Larry Dickieson of Wellington County was named the runner up to Ken Parnell.

The forage program is sponsored by Novartis Seeds, Agri-Food Laboratories, and the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

The competitors must win at the county level before moving to the competition at the Royal. A panel of judges looks at the field of hay and a sample of the harvested crop. The sample also goes through an ingredients test at an accredited lab. After these three test phases, the county winner goes to the Royal.

Once there, all competitors start on an even footing. Part of the competition at the Royal involves public speaking and presentation skills. This year's competitors proved to be very good at making their presentations.