

## Professional Pilot Helps Government of Ontario's Tree Planting Program Soar toward 50 Million Goal

### *Local man awarded Green Leader status by Forests Ontario*

AMARANTH, ON (January 31, 2018) – Local pilot, Jeff Roney, is Forests Ontario's newest Green Leader, nominated for his work with the government of Ontario's 50 Million Tree Program (50 MTP). He and his wife, Samantha, a nurse practitioner, planted more than 2,000 trees through the program.



Jeff is not only a pilot but a farmer and proud family-man with a passion for forests. Early in his career, Jeff worked as a water bomber pilot for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) in Thunder Bay, suppressing forest fires.

In 2014, Jeff and Samantha moved south to Ontario's rural Amaranth Township, where they

purchased a 100-acre farm.

**From left to right: Jeff Roney, with daughter and wife, Samantha.**

Working the farm was a steep learning curve for the couple, but Jeff knew the basics from time spent on his grandparents' farm as a boy, and there was no shortage of neighbours and relatives to lend a helping hand. They began raising grass-fed cattle, free-range chickens, and growing non-GMO grains. Realizing the value of pollinators, they also welcomed a bee keeper – Glenn Roberts of Grandview Honey – to use their land for his hives.

The couple's farm, Bennington Hills, had been hit by a severe ice storm in the early 2000s, causing many of the property's original trees to die. Jeff knew that he wanted to plant trees, so he contacted Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) and learned about the 50 Million Tree Program (50MTP). The 50 MTP significantly reduces large-scale tree planting costs for landowners, thus increasing tree planting across the province.

Jeff worked with GRCA to develop a strategic site plan, creating wind breaks – long rows of trees or shrubs planted along the edge of fields or property lines to reduce wind – in beneficial locations throughout the farm.

"I knew that wind breaks could mitigate soil erosion and improve crop yield," Jeff explained. "And trees are such an important part of any ecosystem. They bring in wildlife and help to cycle nutrients." The

windbreaks will also provide shelter for the family's cattle as the trees grow, which will allow them to graze outside in cooler months, reducing the need for hay. Several rows of spruce and cedar trees were planted to line the fields.

"The trees planted by the Roney family will not only help their farm, but help to sequester carbon and mitigate the effects of climate change in Ontario," said Rob Keen, CEO of Forests Ontario. "We are honoured to recognize Jeff and Samantha as Green Leaders." The Green Leader program acknowledges individuals who have planted trees with the 50 Million Tree Program, and have made a dedicated and lasting commitment to re-greening the province.

"Jeff and Samantha are setting a positive example for Ontario landowners," commented Nathalie des Rosiers, the newly appointed Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. "Every tree planted helps us move towards our goal of planting 50 million trees across our province."

The couple considers farming to be a learning experience, one in which they are constantly evolving and trying new techniques. "It's about finding a way to make work your leisure and leisure your work," muses Jeff. "For us it's not just a job, it's where we live." And for Jeff and his family, it wouldn't be home without trees.

For more information on the 50 Million Tree Program, contact Forests Ontario at 416-646-1193, or visit [www.forestsontario.ca/50MTP](http://www.forestsontario.ca/50MTP).

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### **About 50 Million Tree Program**

Forests Ontario administers the government of Ontario's 50 Million Tree Program, part of the United Nations Billion Tree Campaign. The United Nations' goal is to plant one billion trees worldwide each year. Ontario is committed to planting 50 million trees by 2025.

The 50 Million Tree Program is designed to significantly reduce the costs to landowners of large-scale tree planting and thereby increase the number of trees planted across the province.

### **About Forests Ontario**

Forests Ontario is the voice for our forests. Working to promote a future of healthy forests sustaining healthy people, Forests Ontario is committed to the re-greening of Ontario through tree planting efforts on rural lands and in urban areas, as well as the renewal and stewardship of Ontario's forests through restoration, education and awareness. Visit [www.forestsontario.ca](http://www.forestsontario.ca) or follow us @Forests\_Ontario.

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