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### Islander scoops top agricultural prize

**Learners in agriculture scooped the top prizes at the eighth annual Lantra Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year awards ceremony.**

Scott Simpson from Rothesay on the Isle of Bute scooped the top award for 'Overall Winner - Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year', which was sponsored by Skills Development Scotland. He was also awarded the 'Agricultural Learner of the Year' award and was among the winners who met the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead.

Scott, who completed a Modern Apprenticeship in Agricultural Engineering with Oatridge College, is currently employed with Hamilton Brothers. Scott said: "Growing up on the island of Bute I was surrounded by tractors and farm machinery. Watching visiting technicians repairing the equipment gave me the desire to do this sort of work. Going to Oatridge College and studying for a Modern Apprenticeship allowed me to do the job I love, it has also given me the opportunity to get hands on experience while also learning the theory behind the practice."

His supervisor at Hamilton Brothers, David McKinstry said: "Scott's work, on the job and as part of his studies, is always meticulous. He is keen to learn and always puts into practice what he has been taught."

Craig Connell from Wanton Walls Farm was awarded the 'Agricultural Runner-Up of the Year' award. Craig who is completing a Modern Apprentice in Mixed Farming with Borders College said: "The variety of subjects covered during the course has given me advantages in my day to day role, teaching me different ways to do things. Along with my father, we want to push our farm forward and continue to farm to the highest standard and be able to produce top quality crops and livestock."

A total of 25 prizes were presented during the awards ceremony which was organised by Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for land-based and environmental industries. The awards, which attracted over 60 nominations, are designed to inspire new entrants to take up a career in the land-based and aquaculture sector and make employers aware of the benefits of a well trained workforce.

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead said: "This is the third year I have been honoured to attend the Lantra Awards and, like both previous occasions, I have been impressed by the enthusiasm and skill of the trainees."

"Farming and rural industries face challenging, but interesting times. Scotland's economy is recovering, our food and drink sector is world renowned and we are on the cusp of an energy revolution which is opening up new and exciting opportunities."

"Rural Scotland is very well placed to take advantage of many of these new opportunities and I am sure that many in the hall tonight have the talent to make a significant contribution."

Willie Fergusson, National Director said: "The Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year awards attract a very high calibre of candidates who are committed to further developing their skills and knowledge. It is vital for the future of these industries that we continue to encourage new entrants and demonstrate how employers can see the bottom line benefits that highly skilled new entrants can bring to the business."

Willie continued: "Recognition of the importance of the awards by industry, their commitment to them, and their generosity in sponsoring this event has grown significantly over the years and we are indebted to the sponsors who make this event the success that it is."

Some 140 guests attended this highly prestigious event at Crieff Hydro Hotel, including learners, employers, farmers, crofters, land managers, training providers, key stakeholders, journalists and members of the Scottish Parliament.

Skills Development Scotland, Marine Harvest and Scottish Natural Heritage were the main sponsors of the event.

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Full list of winners:

- Overall Winner Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year: Scott Simpson
- Overall Runner-Up Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year: Rebecca McWilliams
- Agriculture Learner of the Year: Scott Simpson
- Agriculture Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Craig Connell
- Aquaculture Learner of the Year: Harris Wright
- Aquaculture Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Robert Wyvill
- Equine Learner of the Year: Rebecca McWilliams
- Equine Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Susan Torrance
- Floristry Learner of the Year: Debbie McKenna
- Game and Wildlife Learner of the Year: Joshua Bunton
- Horticulture Learner of the Year: Daryl Russell
- Horticulture Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Ryan Mooney
- Higher Education Learner of the Year: Zane Pretorius
- Higher Education Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Graeme Dunlop
- Land-based Curriculum for Schools Learner of the Year: Danny Watson
- Land-based Curriculum for Schools Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Ryan Munro
- Modern Apprentice of the Year: Stuart Burns
- Trees and Timber Learner of the Year: Eamonn Staunton
- Trees and Timber Learner of the Year Runner-Up: Carina Convery

Special Awards:

- Algo Blairgowrie Ltd - Endeavour Award: Righa Purvis
- Algo Blairgowrie Ltd - Endeavour Award: Eve Schulte
- Taypack Potatoes Ltd – Endeavour Award: Debbie McKenna
- CARAS Scotland Award: Zane Pretorius
- CARAS Scotland Award: Fraser Mitchell
- CARAS Scotland Award: Righa Purvis

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CREDIT FOR PHOTO:

282 - Overall winner, Scott Simpson with (l-r) Willie Fergusson, Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead and John Gillan

EDITORS NOTES:

- Lantra is the Sector Skills Council for land-based and environmental industries, working to ensure these businesses access the training, qualifications, skills and knowledge they need.
- Lantra in Scotland represents the interests of approximately 24,500 businesses (13% of all businesses), which employ 115,700 individuals (representing 2% of all employment across the workforce) and 40,000 volunteers.
- Lantra represents 17 industries: agricultural livestock and crops; animal care; animal technology; aquaculture; environmental conservation; equine; farriery; fencing; fisheries management; floristry; game and wildlife management; land-based engineering; horticulture, landscaping and sports turf; production horticulture; trees and timber and veterinary activities.
- By working together with the sector, Lantra leads research on skills issues and business needs, sets national standards and develops qualifications to meet modern business needs and help businesses grow through skills.
- For more information see [www.lantra.co.uk](http://www.lantra.co.uk).