

PR1499 - 7 March 2011

### Dumfries Farm Assistant named Aquaculture Learner of the Year

**Farm Assistant, Harris Wright from Dumfries has been named 'Aquaculture Learner of the Year' at the eighth annual Lantra Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year awards ceremony. This highly prestigious event, held at the Crieff Hydro Hotel, attracted 140 guests and was attended by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead.**

Aquaculture is the world's fastest growing food producing sector, accounting for more than half the fish supply for human consumption. To reflect the increasing importance of aquaculture as a key part of the food and drink industry in Scotland, the awards ceremony changed its name to include this industry, and is now known as 'Lantra's Land-based and Aquaculture Learner of the Year awards'.

Harris, who is currently studying for a Higher National Certificate in Fish Farming with Barony College, is employed on a part-time basis with Selcote Fisheries Ltd.

"After leaving school I enrolled on the National Certificate course at Barony College to study Fish Farming, which I really enjoyed. I passed the course with a distinction, and was awarded the medal and shield for the best overall theory in the course. I'm currently completing a Higher National Certificate course which offers a good mix of practical and theoretical knowledge; this is really beneficial to me as I can apply what I've been taught to a situation I'm working in. After I complete the HNC course I hope to apply to Stirling University to undertake a degree in aquaculture."

Dr Brendan Gara from Barony College said: "Harris is an enthusiastic and competent practical worker. During his studies Harris volunteered to work on neighbouring fish farms to learn additional skills that were unavailable on campus, working full days on commercial farms to gain extra hands on practical experience."

The 'Aquaculture Runner-Up of the Year' award was presented to Robert Wyvill, a Fish Husbandry Technician with Marine Harvest. Robert, who is currently enrolled on the Modern Apprenticeship in Aquaculture with Inverness College, has recently completed a SVQ Level 2 in Aquaculture, and is also working towards an Open University degree in Environmental Science.

Murray Stark from Inverness College said: "Robert has gained considerable practical experience within the salmon farming industry, but also recognises the importance of training and gaining qualifications. He is a great student who always shows willingness and determination."

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."

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:

172 - Harris Wright receives his prize from Cabinet Secretary, Richard Lochhead and Vicky Ferguson, Marine Harvest

#### 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).