

The Vineland Conference

Report

By Mrs. C. Diamond

THE PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD held at Vineland, October 25-28, was most enlightening and worthwhile, from my point of view, because facts, figures and problems were presented and discussed in the open.

The Conference was officially opened by Hon. W. A. Stewart, Minister of Agriculture and Food, who stressed that it was called to examine and re-examine the agriculture and food industry in the light of rapid changes and to discuss and consider guidelines for the future pattern of agriculture in Ontario. Although the Department of Agriculture and Food and the committee members, representing leaders in their fields, had done an excellent job of setting up the conference program, they were conspicuous by their absence in the discussion of the farmer's problems, dispelling any doubt that pre-conceived ideas were going to be presented for acceptance.

It was evident from the opening that there was one predominant factor worrying the Ontario farmer and that was the net income he receives in return for the longer hours of labour in his production program. Added to this was the extreme concern for good agricultural land being devoured for non-agricultural purposes, and the distorted public image from which the farmer has suffered.

Of the more than 300 delegates, there were approximately 20 women with Mrs. Charlton and myself as your delegates from F.W.I.O. The other delegates were farm people, captains and kings of the agricultural industry, specialists in their own commodities, economics personnel from our land and the British Isles, representatives of all farm organizations or boards, Federal and Provincial departments of Agriculture, political parties.

Looking back on the two and a half days spent there trying to concentrate and absorb speeches on Ontario's future needs, sales talks on future projection statistics on farm economics, etc., one realizes how extensive the preparations were as speakers from Scotland, England, and the United States were included on the rostrum as well as the best in their field from our own country. The first full day's papers, called sales talks, dealt with many phases of agricultural production and calculated the needs for the next 20 years. In the view of these professors and economists,

a 40-60% increase in production would be needed but technology is available to make the farm more efficient and Ontario farmers will produce the extra quantities if they receive adequate returns.

These papers made an excellent stamping ground for the next day's presentation of marketing forecasts in all fields of agriculture. Each day's proceedings were fully analyzed by a different group of commissioners whose job it was to summarize the points made and on the closing morning the rapporteurs for the three different commissions presented their summations for acceptance by the conference body. Group discussions around the tables provided some lighter moments when, for instance, delegates discussed the question of what piece of legislation they would implement first if one of them was the new Minister of Agriculture and wished to retain his portfolio.

The Consumer's Association entered freely into discussions because food costs, packaging, gimmicks etc. are receiving their scrutiny. One resolution, passed unanimously, was to recommend legislation to ban trading stamps.

In this era of bigness in all operations, it was heartening to hear various speakers extol the merits of the efficient family farm owned by the farm operator. General opinion of the conference was that we do have a "cheap food" policy, not indicative of poor quality food produced, but in comparison with other increased costs. All were agreed that the cost cannot be borne by the farmers, and many voiced their opinion that the income of the family farm should be augmented without raising food costs. Subsidies, capital grants and incentive income rewards for efficiency were all suggested. On the last day a resolution was passed asking Hon. Mr. Stewart to appoint a committee to study ways of achieving income incentive payments or other techniques to farmers. This committee was named immediately and under the chairmanship of Everett Biggs, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food, has lost no time in getting down to business and is now receiving briefs from commodity groups telling of their problems. These will have a bearing on the committee's study.

Although the appointment of this committee seemed to be the paramount conclusion reached at the conference, to a layman, it would appear that one of the most important happenings was the open questioning, discussing and reviewing of each other's prob-