



Ontario

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Home
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The Role of Women in the Modern Farm Business

*Mrs. Beverley Brown Carson, Home Economist and
Roy Richards, Agricultural Representative, Haldimand-Norfolk*

Such was the title selected for a day-long seminar planned and conducted in Haldimand-Norfolk in March 1980. Early in the planning stages the Committee of Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food Staff members agreed that we did not want to aim our program as a "ladies" day. We wanted to reach farm couples or family groups. However, the majority of the 125 persons who did pre-register and attend were women, in spite of the careful wording of the title. It seems that general farm business meetings are attended by men. With the word "women" appearing in the title the men tend to stay away. We would want to overcome this situation if a similar program is to be offered again.

Ralph Winslade, the Farm Management Specialist for the Niagara Area opened the seminar with an update of the size that farm businesses are developing in Ontario. Almost any economic unit today represents an investment of a quarter of a million dollars or more. Such being the case, farm women need to be involved and know what the situation is on their own farm operations with respect to debt load, interest rates, repayment capacity and the returns that can be expected for family living.

Roger and Rena Storp, a husband and wife team from the Township of Delhi provided some valuable evidence in regard to good communication and a willingness to share. While being interviewed by Roy Richards, Norfolk's Agricultural Representative, the Storps revealed that they are equal owners of a corporation which in turn owns and operates a farm. Rena recognizes her role as homemaker and record keeper, but still has a major influence on major farm management decisions. Roger is the crop producer. However, he still maintains a vigil on the monthly bank statements.

Of particular interest to everyone was the fact that Roger and Rena each have their own personal savings and investments. The audience was impressed with their businesslike yet loving and trusting attitude to each other.

As one person commented, "It is interesting to hear how other people started and the changes that have developed in their farm business over the years."

Mark Boot, an Agricultural Specialist with the Bank of Nova Scotia, reviewed the services offered to farm businesses by the chartered banks. Audience participation was created when Mark distributed cards and asked each person to write the answers to the following types of questions:

- What production per cow, yield per acre, pigs per sow, etc. was achieved on your farm last year?
- What was the gross income from your farming operation last year?
- What is your present debt load including mortgage, intermediate and short term debt?

While few of the audience had been able to answer all of the questions, Mark assured them that few farm men would have been able to provide the answers either.

He indicated that the establishment of objectives is important, but first we must know where we are now so we can decide where we want to go, how long it will take us to get there, and what routes we are going to follow. Thus, the first step, taking inventory, is significantly important and a thorough knowledge of the farm business status is essential.

Ralph Winslade reviewed some of the more recent changes in tax legislation which can enhance better farm business arrangements between spouses and for all family members. Our audience told us through the evaluation sheets that this topic could have been given more time than the half hour allotted this year.

The afternoon program was handled by Doug Sheppard of Sheppard, Sheppard, MacIntosh & Harlow, a law firm in Simcoe. As requested, he dealt with the topic Family Law Reform.

Any laws are difficult to explain and while the digestion of the Family Law Reform Act was well done and thorough, many of the participants felt that this topic did not concern them as they were not anticipating a marriage breakdown. We hope they are right and are not going to be among the one in three who statistically may be faced with the implications in the Family Law Reform Act.

Evaluation sheets completed by the participants indicate to us that the program was appreciated. Some of the participants may have expected a deeper learning experience.

We have learned that it would be of benefit to include some of the potential participants in program planning.

Our objectives were to create the setting where both spouses are equals in the farm management team and to provide sources of information that the participant might further explore.

We would definitely try to attract couples or spouses next year.