

Farm women tackle rural issues in PEI

Yvonne
Wettlaufer



The opportunity to discuss and take action on key issues facing today's farm families was what drew WI member Hilde Morden and some 300 other Canadian women to Charlottetown, PEI in November.

Hilde, vice-president of Clachan WI and secretary-treasurer of West Elgin District, was one of Ontario's 10 voting delegates at the National Farm Women's Conference.

In all, there were nearly 60 Ontario women at the conference, representing such various organizations as Women for the Support of Agriculture, Women for the Survival of Agriculture, Concerned Farm Women, National Farmer's Union and also the Uni-Farm Women's Group from Alberta. According to Hilde, the goals of the conference were as follows:

- 1) to establish a network of farm women from across Canada;
- 2) to initiate a change in the financial situation for family farms through networking, lobbying and education of farm women; and
- 3) to create an awareness among farmers, consumers and governments of the importance of Canada's agricultural industry.

Guest speakers, including the Honorable John Wise, Gisele Ireland, Brigid Pyke, Dianne Harkin, Elaine Driver, addressed these areas. After group discussions and presentations, the delegates voted on key issues and a list of recommendations was drafted to be forwarded to various government officials including the Prime Minister, Provincial Premiers, and all Ministers of Agriculture.

The participants of the National Farm Women's Conference recommended that action be taken on:

- 1) Farm credit/debt issues:
 - establish immediate debt moratorium
 - re-enact farmers creditors arrangements legislation
 - change farm credit policies to lower interest rates and make more money available



Hilde Morden

- establish debt review boards of farmers and financial experts
- 2) Establishment of fair prices of commodities
- 3) Opposition to free trade
- 4) Education for farm women and farmers, consumers, media, bankers, government officials, etc.

The delegates have decided to form a national network among farm women to improve communications across the country by means of a newsletter.

These were, indeed, three very productive days and a fantastic opportunity to get an insight into similar concerns in other provinces. Hilde feels self-esteem and confidence are

built in this type of participation and has seen a great deal of leadership developing among the women over the past five years.

The learning experience is most valuable, however. "It is extremely important that women attend these events so that there is a better understanding among the farm commodity groups as to what the crises are," Hilde states.

She believes the opposition of free trade and education of the consumer are the main concerns related to the farm crisis today and it's women like those who attended this conference who will play a major role in bringing financial security back to the family farm. Saskatchewan has offered to play host for the National Farm Women's Conference to be held in 1988.

Hilde has been an FWIO member for more than 20 years. She also makes appearances as a freelance public speaker. She and her husband farm a 450-acre farrow to finish operation near Rodney, Ontario, assisted by their son and daughter-in-law.

Yvonne Wettlaufer, an employee of the ROS Branch in Guelph, is a regular contributor to OMAF publications.

Your neighbors may be

Reflections from ROS Joyce Canning



At the end of November, I attended the second National Farm Women's Conference in Charlottetown, PEI.

It was an interesting three days of speakers and discussions with 300 farm women from across Canada. One message that came through loud and clear from all the discussions and presentations is that farmers, in general, must get a better price for their product in order to continue in business. In Ontario, over the past couple of years, an alarming number

of family farms have been lost, often through no specific fault of the owners. The consequences of this kind of trauma to family members can have many negative and far-reaching effects.

"So — that's too bad, I feel sorry — but what can I do?", you may be saying. What you can do, I think, as a group of caring women in your community is to be aware, to be sensitive to the fact this is happening, maybe to neighbors — neighbors too proud to ask for help or admit that they need help but who need it none the less. You may be able to offer financial support in the way of food and clothing; you may be able to offer emotional support; you may be able to offer practical advice in ways