

Farm women's groups face challenge

The emergence of groups like Women for the Survival/Support of Agriculture in the early '80's was a dramatic illustration that the needs of rural women had changed as Molly McGhee documented in her report **Women in Rural Life-The Changing Scene**.

Because of the increasing complexity of farm operations, the stress of farming with high interest rates and low commodity prices, farm women felt a need to meet with others to educate themselves about the legal, financial and emotional aspects of living in a high tech rural society. They also needed peer support and opportunity to air mutual concerns. Many farm women wanted to be involved in the decision making of the farm business but needed more information.

Playing the triple role of homemaker, career woman and mother, the young farm woman today has limited time to pursue extracurricular activities. Her priority has become continuing education, not social get togethers or fund-raising activities.

The scope of the other rural women's groups is much narrower than the broad general objectives of the Women's Institute. Rural self-help groups emerged because action was needed immediately. To compete with traditional organizations was never the intent of the new rural women's groups.

The goals of WSA are very specific to the needs of farm women. WSA strives to encourage more farm women to become active in farm organization work. To motivate women to become effective communicators in order to develop a strong public relations outlet and lobbying group for agriculture. To work in harmony and cooperation with existing farm and rural organizations. To develop an effective communication network among Canadian farm women and speak with one voice on issues that concern us.

In the beginning, the major activities of WSA were monthly meetings with speakers on agricultural issues, short courses and seminars open to all rural women. It wasn't long before

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the concept of Agriculture in the Classroom, a program with its roots in the U.S. caught the imagination of WSA who developed and sponsored P.A. days for teachers and resource kits for classroom use. They are now organizing the first National Ag in the Classroom conference to be held in April 1987.

WSA has dealt with important issues like Rural Child Care, Right to Farm and Debt Review legislation. They have written briefs, organized projects in cooperation with other groups and represented farm women on liaison committees.

Farm women have networked with other groups across the country. Their status has improved and they are now recognized as individuals, not just as appendages of their husbands.

The prime motivation behind all the recently formed rural women's groups is the preservation of the family farm and the many advantages that rural life has to offer their children. Farm women today are proud of the contribution they and their families make to the Canadian ag-food industry. There still remains a great need for dedication, hard work and political will to preserve the dignity and viability of the family farm and the rural lifestyle it represents.

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