

# Brigid Pyke

Women have to face the fear of making mistakes head-on, if they want to have more impact in the mainstream agricultural organizations in Ontario, according to Ontario Federation of Agriculture President Brigid Pyke.

"When people make the decision to step outside their ordered lives, they instinctively go where they will be appreciated and their views listened to. They go where they think they can make an impact. Some people deliberately pick safe havens. Some women feel safer expressing their opinions amongst a group of women," said Mrs. Pyke.

Women and men should challenge themselves right now, added the president, explaining some people wait too long, for the moment to be just right, and then the opportunity has gone. "It's a lot like motherhood actually, if women waited until they were absolutely sure they were ready, there would be fewer children in this world. Instead we get in there and just do it." She suggested the same applies to working with rural/agricultural organizations. "Get in there and let the chips fall where they may. If you make a mistake, tough, everyone makes mistakes," she added. "If you always do things and go places that are safe, you are cutting yourself off from some valuable experiences," said Mrs. Pyke.

The president of Ontario's largest farm organization (about 24,000 members), feels there are probably some justifiable reasons for women forming their own organizations rather than joining the OFA. Perhaps the OFA doesn't meet their needs, for instance. But, Mrs. Pyke said some of those reasons could be overcome through better communications. Although she hasn't taken any affirmative action measure yet, she said, "I feel that just by being here I'm sending a message that women are welcome in the OFA."

In an effort to improve communications with Women's Institute members in Ontario, Mrs. Pyke has accepted an invitation to speak on a panel at the 90th anniversary convention in North Bay this summer. "I want to explore our (the OFA's) relationship with other rural organi-



zations. It's a matter of having the time to get around to them all, but certainly Women's Institutes are on my list," said Mrs. Pyke. The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario are one of many commodity groups and other rural organizations who are on the board of the OFA. "The purpose of having a seat on our board is to communicate their issues and concerns to us. We view that very seriously. We expect to be lobbied by the Women's Institutes," explained Mrs. Pyke. Informal communication lines are kept open with other groups who are not represented on the board. "I talk on a regular basis to Women for the Survival/Support of Agriculture," added the president.

Like many other organizations in rural Ontario today, the OFA is facing little or no growth in terms of memberships. "If people understand the issues, they are more interested in joining the OFA. I think I can convert

just about anyone I get a chance to talk to," said Mrs. Pyke. But, she feels there is apathy amongst potential members. "Some people are quite content to let their neighbor do their part. They know we need a farm organization and they know we need the money to run it, but they conveniently forget the structure that's needed to maintain the organization," she added. People who don't belong to some sort of organization in support of farming, be it the OFA, Concerned Farm Women or anyone else, is not doing their share. "There is no excuse for not belonging," Mrs. Pyke added. She feels the OFA is open to opinions and ideas, and like any other group, they are listened to, and voted on. If they are voted against, then that's the way the system works, and on to the next project.

The OFA has observed no particular trend other than attrition for

*continued on p. 15*