

Increased awareness is aim of

By Carol Stewart-Kirkby

The desire to improve the agricultural awareness of children and their teachers prompted members of the Southwestern Ontario Women for the Support of Agriculture to start the Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) program.

For Jean Johnson, past chairman of the Education Committee, one particular incident brought home the need for AITC. "My son was in Grade 2 at the time and the teacher was discussing dairy cattle. He said it was possible to have red and white Holsteins. She disagreed. When my son came home, he was quite upset. The next day, he took a copy of the **Holstein Journal** to school to show the red and white Holsteins. The teacher apologized to him," Jean explained. "I realized the teachers may want to teach agriculture, but they don't know where the current resources are," she added.

Suzanne Leitch, a co-founder of AITC, was first alerted to the need for an AITC program after reading an article quoting the then Minister of Agriculture and Food Dennis Timbrell. "It talked about the large vacuum which exists between agriculture and urban people and the lack of knowledge about agriculture," Suzanne said.

At that same time, information was coming from the



Jean Johnson



Suzanne Leitch

United States about AITC programs and shortly after, a national Agriculture in the Classroom Conference was held in Washington D.C.

After attending that conference, interested WSA members approached the board of education and supplied information and resource packages to teachers. From

there, the program has mushroomed to include videos, puppet sets, exhibits, slides, all of which have received rave reviews and have travelled to many locations outside southwestern Ontario.

"After a while, we started getting interest from different parts of the country. Then, we decided to organize a national conference to bring together people from agribusiness and government and education to share information," Suzanne explained. With "super support" from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Agriculture Canada, the conference was held in 1986. "Eight out of 10 provinces were represented. As a result of that AITC programs are flourishing in other provinces," Suzanne said.

One thing that emerged from the national conference was the AITC program was getting beyond the volunteers. "We were beginning to run out of steam. We are busy on the local level trying to offer programs and we haven't even touched the private schools yet in this area. There are more and more demands and I think a coordinator on a provincial level would help to streamline the program," Suzanne explained.

What would be the ideal situation? "If we could work with groups to get them started in their areas that would be good. Also, if there was a training program endorsed by the Ministry of Education for