

# Concerned Farm Women amid self-evaluation

By Carol Stewart-Kirkby

About a year ago, the Grey-Bruce farm women activist group, Concerned Farm Women (CFW), began to flounder. Now after a lengthy self-evaluation, the group is on the verge of planning its future course — a course which is likely to be very different from the path taken in the early 1980's when the group was founded.

"In the early years we had several successes, including the book **The Farmer Takes A Wife**. Then we began to realize we weren't doing what we originally intended to do. Women were still losing their farms and a sense of frustration set in," explained CFW President Joy Ward. Soon the group realized it needed to take a look at what it was doing and where it was going. At the same time, CFW's contact person with Secretary of State suggested a self-evaluation might be helpful and funding may be available to facilitate the assessment.

And so, the process began. Originally a weekend-long conference was planned for the fall of 1987, to discuss the past, present and future of Concerned Farm Women. But it quickly became clear to organizers that members couldn't give a whole weekend. Instead the three sections were divided and a reunion, to discuss the past of the organization, was planned for early January. Many of the founding

members returned to reminisce about the early days of the organization. "The women were very willing to give an evening. People talked quite openly about what had happened and some gave advice," added Joy. "It was almost part of closing a chapter, or an era, in the life of the organization."

The next step was to discuss the present and future of CFW at the annual meeting at the end of January. Under the present situation, members looked at who they are and what skills they have. "Under who we are, we got bogged down on the amount of time we have to offer to the organization. And from that, came the motion to dissolve CFW," Joy explained. "I think we would have almost dissolved then and there, but we referred to our constitution and found we had to give written notice of a motion to dissolve," added Joy.

The written notice to dissolve went to about 75 members and supporters. It was the media who first called Joy to talk about the dissolution. "At that point, we were asking ourselves 'where are the farm women?'" Joy said. Eventually five letters of support and some phone calls trickled in. "We received quite a few calls from other farm women's groups encouraging and supporting us," Joy said.

The meeting to discuss the motion to dissolve drew 11 members and eight media representatives. The members voted not to dissolve, but to carry on. "When I thought about it afterwards, it seemed ridiculous to continue, but I think we were reacting to our feelings," Joy said.

Another meeting, to plan the future of CFW, was set for April (after this interview). "We've looked at the past and the present, now it's time to look at the future. I think the group is looking for a new direction, which is where we were a year ago, but now we do have a clearer understanding of who we are and what our limitations are," Joy said. It is important for members to realize they do not have to write a best-seller to be a successful organization, Joy added. Now is a time for the members of CFW to lie low for a while and recharge their batteries.



Joy Ward

"CFW members like to get together and that may be what we zero in on now, support for one another. It's not that we don't want to or don't care about tackling outside projects. It's just that this evaluation has helped us realize we don't physically have the same time and energy that went into those other projects," Joy explained.

The assessment has also helped members to realize that they haven't failed, but rather they have succeeded in raising the people's consciousness about the family farm.

Joy said many of the women had never planned a self-evaluation like this before, although some had seen similar methods used at conferences. A book they used as a guide is called **An Evaluation Guide for Women's Groups**. (It is available from the Women's Research Centre, 1666 West Broadway, Vancouver, V6J 1X6 for \$7, including postage and handling.) "The book covers self-evaluation as well as external evaluation. We used parts of it which fit into the purpose of our evaluation," Joy commented.

When Joy took on the presidency of CFW, the wheels of self-evaluation were already in motion. In fact, CFW always did an evaluation at every annual meeting. "Perhaps we just didn't look far enough into the future. At the beginning, we were carried by the momentum, but now as people's needs are changing, the organization must change its demands too," Joy said.

