

Agriculture in the Classroom Update

Since its inception in the early '80s, the Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) program has increased the awareness of teachers and students about agriculture and the food system in Ontario. Several diverse initiatives have become focused in the AITC program to provide teachers and volunteers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for agricultural education.

In January 1988, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food sponsored a Provincial AITC Think Tank with the purpose of getting more people and counties involved in the program. One of the outcomes of the meeting was that OMAF initiate the establishment of a committee whose mandate was the development of a long term structure for the AITC program. This Steering Committee, consisting of representatives from OMAF, the Ministry of Education, agribusiness, universities and colleges, farm commodity groups, and rural organizations, reported a year later on their recommendations.

In 1989, the AITC Steering Committee recommended that initiatives be undertaken in the areas of communications, resource development and evaluation, professional development, organizational structure and funding. In April '89, an AITC Implementation Committee was appointed to make these recommendations a reality. Presently, they are working towards fulfilling the following recommendations.

- The development of an Agri-Food Education Trust, to eventually assume the management and financial responsibility of the AITC program.
- Developing a strong communications network with all involved ministries, educators, volunteers, and the agri-food sector through workshops and training programs, newsletters, promotional materials and displays, and a distinctive provincial logo and program name.
- The provision of workshops, conferences and special events to enable teachers and volunteers to increase their knowledge of AITC resources and programs, and to promote the exchange of ideas and the development of local resources.
- Working with faculties of education to provide teacher-in-training workshops. The development of an AITC



Summer Institute for Teachers will also be initiated this year, August 14 to 17, at the University of Guelph.

- Evaluating existing material for objectivity, accuracy, relevance to the curriculum, and ease of use, as well as outlining guidelines for the production of new resources.

Currently, the AITC program staff consists of an Education Specialist and 4 seconded Teacher/Consultants (one who is bilingual) based in Guelph, Kemptville, Milton and Ridgeway.

In a recent publication of *Earthkeeping* the Ontario Federation of Agriculture

representative on the Implementation Committee, Carolyn Fuerth, explained the AITC program and the need for public awareness of the agri-food system. She wrote, "Why do students need to be taught about agriculture? The answer is a complex one. At one time, most Canadians had relatives living on the farm and spent some time there, especially during summer holidays. Today farmers are only three per cent of the population and many people don't even know a farmer, let alone have any first-hand interaction with a farm. Even in rural areas, non-farm residents make up 86 per cent of the community. The result is agricultural illiteracy."

But through the united efforts of all the participants, the AITC program has begun to address this problem and combat agricultural illiteracy in Ontario schools.

Anyone interested in more information about Ontario's Agriculture in the Classroom program contact a Rural Organization Specialist at the OMAF office in your county or district.

Resolutions Approved at FWIO Annual Meeting

The resolutions passed at the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario annual meeting in November follow the "Women and the Environment" theme. They include:

1. seeking funding for health support persons to assist in improving hospital patient care;
2. pursuing funding for social service agencies to help abused children and to better educate the public in the symptoms of child abuse;
3. urging the enforcement of legislation to eliminate PCB's;
4. pressuring to enforce legislation to prosecute infractions pertaining to PCB's;
5. petitioning to legislate a drastic reduction in packaging;
6. urging to legislate for the reduction of styrofoam and plastics used for meat and vegetable packaging in stores;
7. requesting the establishment of guidelines for waste disposal apart from landfill sites, and the attending legislation to make an efficient and uniform recycling program mandatory in each province in Canada;
8. persuading the legislature to pass a bill to provide for the legal enforcement of a Living Will; and
9. requesting that education in the arts not be taxed.