

The future is the focus for Ontario Farm Women's Network

By Carol Rock

"Women in Agriculture, Building the Future" was the theme of the second annual meeting and conference of the Ontario Farm Women's Network (OFWN) held in Mississauga at the end of March.

In her address to the conference, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues Mavis Wilson, paid tribute to OFWN as their members deal with the economic and social challenges which face farm women today. "I regard the farm women's network as a trailblazer...a pioneering voice for farm women," Wilson said. "Farm women's issues like the need for child care are starting to take centre stage. In large part that's due to the persistent voice that this organization has had in encouraging the policy makers to recognize your very special needs and issues, and respond to them." In closing, Wilson pledged her support to bring farm women's concerns to the attention of cabinet and specific ministers.

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food, Rita Burak gave a report on the priority planning process currently underway in the ministry. She pledged continuing support of the family farm as the most viable unit in the agri-food industry today.

In two different workshops, participants learned how to present themselves and their organizations. They also heard a debate on the pesticide and food safety issue, and reports on child care, federal and provincial legislation and the recently formed Canadian Farm Women's Network.

At the annual meeting, the board of directors presented an update on the progress of recommendations made by Molly McGhee in her 1984 report *Women in Rural Life--The Changing Scene*. To stimulate more action on some of the issues, delegates supported resolutions on farm women's access to education and other support programs.

OFWN presented Molly McGhee with a special award of achievement for the work she has done with farm women in Ontario.

The 1990-91 executive and board of directors were elected.

- Past President - Rennie Feddema
- President - Donna Lunn
- Vice President - Linda Millson
- Secretary - Carol Rock
- Treasurer - Elizabeth Wagner

Directors

- Claire Belluz - North West
- Anne McKenzie - North East
- Marg Elliott - South West
- Beverlie Nelson - Mid West and Niagara

- Jacky Schmidt - Central
- Dorothy Middleton - East
- Marie Rose Paquette - Francophone

Eleven resolutions were passed at the annual meeting. They covered a variety of topics from land development in Middlesex to adult training techniques of Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food staff to Agriculture in the Classroom.

Carol Rock is the secretary of OFWN.

"The times, they are changing..."

By Chuck Bokor

Is your organization relevant? Will it survive the decade? How will it look in the year 2000?

"Change", "leadership", "vision", "renewal". These are not just the words of survival for rural organizations entering the '90s, but of progress. They should not be treated lightly.

Change is happening all around us. Farming, the rural community, the entire agricultural industry: what changes have you seen in the last five years? The issues that come out of these changes, from food safety to water quality to economic survival can be overwhelming. But that's what our organizations are here for--to deal with the issues that affect us. Are they doing their job?

All across rural Ontario, organizations are springing up in response to the changing needs of its people. New organizations to deal with new commodities being introduced to Ontario; environmental groups concerned about our place in nature; educational organizations determined to bridge the gap between urban and rural. All these groups are young and vital. They're listening and planning the organization's activities based on what they've heard.

But what about the organizations that have been around for a while? The temptation is to fight the brush fires that always

accompany change. This crisis management is necessary and important, and sometimes dictated by our limited resources. The future, however, is where we should look if we are to survive this decade; to progress rather than stagnate.

The executive, chair, president--whichever name you call the people in leadership positions of the organization--these are the people who should have a vision of the future. After looking at themselves and their organizations, at the changes taking place and the trends that are emerging, they must decide where their organizations is going. What should it look like in five to 10 years? What should it be doing? Who will be its members? Can we continue to do the same things we do now and confidently say we are vital to the community? These are the questions people in leadership positions must ask. It's part of their job.

Renewal does not happen by accident, or by spending all your time putting out brush fires. It happens as a result of leadership with vision, resulting from opportunities that are born out of change.

Chuck Bokor is a rural leadership consultant with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Guelph.