

# "Fun, Food, Facts, Fees and a Fascinating Future!"

I have always been fascinated by alliteration – words beginning with the same letter arranged to follow each other in a sentence. They tend to grasp our attention and reinforce a point. Shakespeare would have added "they trippeth lightly off the tongue."

So the words above bring special meaning to us as Women's Institute Members. How we treasure the moments of shared fun we all enjoy; how dear to our hearts the friendship forged in our organization – at branch, district, area, national and international levels; and how food brings us all together, whether over the tea cups or in cooking courses or in sharing what we have with others. Indeed, the WI was built on food, nutrition, food safety and food preservation. It is what we have shared with our communities, and what we have shared through ACWW with our counterparts in the developing countries of our world. It has been our foundation: food, which brings with it the fun and fellowship of friends.

But there has always been more to the Women's Institute. We deal in facts. We've been focused on a broad range of issues. We look ahead and plan for a strong financial basis.

In 1991, those basic tenets of our organization are even more important than in the past. Rural women have a vested interest in the environment, and in the three environments of women: personal development to enrich our own lives; the family and community that surrounds us; and, the global ecology whose management challenges our deepest problem-solving ability. And if we are to serve as our predecessors did in the past, we must find a clear and open path into the future.

To do so we must first look at some facts:

## *Changing Relationships with Government*

Funding for administration – that is the day-to-day running of our organization – will be cut in the very near future or when present contracts expire. Governments at all levels will, however, continue to fund programmes

upon application and meeting of certain criteria.

## *Falling Membership*

For the first time membership in the Women's Institutes of Ontario has dropped slightly below the 20,000 mark. This, of course, can be explained by the decreasing population in rural Ontario, and by the age of our organization.

## *Perceived Image*

"The Women's Institute," I was told by a recent interviewer, "has to be the best kept secret in the country. You have an amazing record of accomplishments!" "And," says our Public Relations Officer, "we must do a better job of telling it."

So let us look at the future. In order for us to grow and to take our rightful place in it, we must do so as a united provincial organization as we have done traditionally. Our early planners recognized this necessity in 1913 when they set up the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario. Why did they choose a federation over an association? Because it allowed – as our native peoples knew – for each branch, each district and each area across the province to be "mistress in her own house," but joined together at the provincial level as a force to be reckoned with. That strong provincial voice is needed even more today.

To continue as a strong and credible voice, funds and a strategic plan for the future of the FWIO are essential. The Provincial Executive have spent many hours developing that plan to carry us into our second century.

In order to address the three basic facts listed above, the following plan has evolved:

1. Due to the changing relationship with governments, the funding, although it may be augmented by project funds and corporate grants, must be borne in large part by our own members. As we are used to government support, this comes as a major change for all of us. But, the Women's Institute has always

realistically tackled its problems. The Provincial Board has set the fees, necessary to fund FWIO, to gradually rise as follows:

- 1991 - \$6.00 - to cover the cost of producing our own **Home & Country** magazine
- 1992 - \$9.00 - to cover the cost of our own office space, equipment and telephone
- 1993 - \$11.00 - to cover the possible loss of an annual government grant
- 1994 - \$15.00 - which brings the fee in line with other provincial memberships across Canada and to work toward the Centennial Celebrations of 1997

2. Falling membership has been addressed by the intention to organize new branches to meet the needs of a new generation of women, and to extend those branches into urban areas.
3. Through **Home & Country**, continued press releases to the media, as well as by extended networking with other organizations and government ministries, and with a higher profile at provincial and national events, successive Public Relations Officers will continue their outreach. But may I note here, that the Provincial PRO expects each of us, as members, to act as public relations officers and marketers for our organization wherever we are – even to making guests feel warmly welcomed to our own branch meetings.

Yes, the focus for the future is in our hands. Fees make us part of a branch, provincial and national organization, and an international network of country women in 72 countries. And all of us are tied together in fun, fellowship, friends and a fascinating future.

*Peggy Knapp*  
*President, FWIO*