

Concerned Farm Women decide to fight on



by Randy Hicks

After an emotional meeting Wednesday night, 10 members of Concerned Farm Women (CFW) decided not to dissolve the organization.

The meeting was called after a year of uncertainty for the group, with them having an insufficient amount of active members to carry on in their usual fashion. The CFW has always been an active group. Its members have appeared at lectures, written books, conducted surveys and gathered and spread information via videos and slide presentations, among other projects.

A book distributed by the CFW (*The Farmer Takes a Wife*) has sold over 3,000 copies in Canada and cracked the best sellers list. Because the small membership (27 before the meeting got underway) was busy juggling off farm jobs and CFW projects, the organization has suffered recently and has been unable to accomplish as much. There are no more copies of the book left and it needs to be reprinted.

Three letters recognizing CFW for their past achievements read at the start of the meeting set the sentiment of the gathering. The letters came from Barbara Klages, rural organization specialist for

Bruce County and two other individuals (Muriel Lush and Eleanor Currie). The letters gave the tired CFW a pat on the back and let the members of the group know that they were not alone in their fight.

Prior to the vote there were suggestions to shut down the CFW for a year and make an evaluation on its fate at the end of that time. There was also a suggestion to slow down their operations and have only two meetings a year, but this was more or less dismissed as an option by the members. They felt that a big part of CFW was the amount of work they had done and issues they had confronted in the seven years since the group was formed. The members felt it wouldn't be the same CFW if they weren't as active.

There were suggestions to deal with the membership problem by active recruitment, something the group had never done in the past. Without new members the organization won't be able to accomplish as much in the future, said Blake.

"We never recruited," said Blake. "We felt if the group was worthwhile people would join. I think that's a bit naive."

Going into the vote, she felt that the small turnout at the meeting by concerned citizens interested in

joining CFW (two people) indicated the Chesley-based organization may be near death.

"Where are the bodies?" asked Blake. "If they're not here now we can't expect to get them."

The vote of whether or not to dissolve was made after a few hours of debate by the representatives of the group. They wanted to delay what they felt was inevitable, the breakup of the CFW.

After the results of the secret ballot had been tabulated the score was 6-4 for the group wanting to preserve CFW.

The mood in the council chambers of the Elderslie Township offices turned from that of a wake to a christening of a reborn outfit with this disclosure. The faces of CFW members were ecstatic with joy and they motioned to adjourn to a nearby watering hole to celebrate the victory.

Joy Ward, director of CFW, explained afterwards that having one new member and a phone call from two others interested in joining the organization may have prompted the members to preserve the group. She voted to keep the CFW alive, but didn't come into the meeting with that conviction.

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spoke out at the meeting that she would be willing to donate her time to the CFW. She said that she didn't know very much about the causes being fought by the group, but she was willing to join. After this show of interest Wasserfall learned

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Gertie Blake, a member of the CFW board of directors, said there are no real rules for joining the organization.

"It's not a prerequisite of joining this group to have any knowledge of anything," said Blake. "We've even had a few male members. We said they could join as long as they were concerned."

One of the reasons for uncertainty of the group's survival was the number of members on the board of directors (6). The CFW constitution states that there should be at least 10. At the Wednesday night meeting two more names were added to that list including Wasserfall.

Wasserfall started her contributions to CFW by taking the votes for the secret ballot. She was asked if she was made uncomfortable by joining the group and immediately landing up on the board of directors. Wasserfall said she wasn't, at least not until she was asked to become director when Ward voiced reluctance at being leader of the group.

Ward said she would have to "eat crow" when facing the press after they learned about the vote because she had told them that the CFW would probably dissolve. Ward was reassured of her effectiveness by members of the group and told that she was wrong in this assumption.

In the coming months the CFW has a number of issues they must be concerned with. During the meeting the members voiced their concerns on what shape the future of the CFW should take.

There was a suggestion of a name change to make the group affect a wider chunk of the population of Ontario. The members agreed that some of the issues they confront concerns not only farmers but also people living in small towns and villages.

The suggested new

C.F.W.

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name was Concerned Rural Women. There was also a suggestion to change the name to encourage men to join, but Ward said after the meeting a name change is unlikely because the group made its reputation as CFW.

When the group was formed it was called CFW because the founders felt something should be done to help suffering Ontario farmers. The men were too busy spending most of their times working on the family farm and at off farm jobs, so the founders felt it was up to the women to crusade for the causes of the family farm.

There is also a question of what direction CFW will take in the future. Will they slow down their efforts and will they change their focus?

It was mentioned at the meeting that some of the original goals of the CFW had not been accomplished. They had not succeeded in keeping the family farm from being dropped by the next generation. Statistics were read which shows the average age of the Ontario farmer has increased year after year.

After the meeting Ward said the original main enemies of the CFW will remain the same (banks, international politicians and large multinationals).

Another issue brought up at the meeting was the size of the board of directors. At the end of the night they remained two shy of the goal of 10, but Ward said this is unimportant.

"A lot of good things were accomplished when we were flying by the seat of our pants, without getting bogged down by ritual by-laws," said Ward.