

Farming in the eighties. . .

"It's just not fun anymore"

By Jerry Fallis

Local media people were invited to view a special preview showing of an upcoming television program entitled *Season To Season - A Farmer's Story*.

Produced by CFPL-TV in London, the program focuses upon the life of an Ilderton farm family for a period of one year. *Season To Season* was broadcast on Jan. 29.

Reporter John Mack, in introducing the one-hour presentation, said the purpose of the film was to give an urban audience a more complete picture of the difficult struggle involved in maintaining a farm operation. "We didn't think that the one-and-a-half minutes we did on farm stories during our news broadcasts did not give adequate coverage of farm life," he said. "So we decided to do an in-depth program on local farming conditions aimed at city dwellers."

Middlesex Family Highlighted

The family chosen for the program is that of John and Mary Walls, who, along with their three children, live on a 100-acre farm just north of London. Typically, the Walls must rely upon a financial institution to get by from year to year -- and that situation lies at the heart of their dilemma.

The broadcast attempts to bring out the frustration of the modern farmer, who must be an accountant, handyman and mechanic in addition to the traditional skills necessary to survive the business of agriculture. The poignancy of the film is enhanced through random commentary by family members. "I just can't see myself doing anything else," says Walls.

He tries to remain optimistic; but he also knows it is the end of the age of optimism. He knows he can no longer be the sole determinant of his future. Larger economic forces beyond his control menace that future. It is now Big Brother -- personified by John's banker -- who will decide whether or not the family will fulfill its destiny on the land or be forced to pursue a different venture.

'The Fun Has Gone Out Of It'

"It's not really a way of life anymore," he surmises after preparing a year-end cash flow statement. "The fun has gone out of it. It's just a business."

And not a particularly profitable one at that, we learn. In 1985, John's net profit was \$10,000 -- roughly what a part-time salaried employee would earn in an office or factory.

"City people think farming is just backbreaking work," he goes on. "That we wear straw hats and overalls. Our image is all wrong."

In fact, the introduction of heavy mechanized equipment has taken much of the drudgery out of farming -- at least the kind of drudgery John's father or grandfather would have known. The real problems have become more psychological and emotional rather than physical -- just as John's city cousins.

John's son Greg may be the first generation that will seek another life away from farming, even if his dad manages to hang on. "I don't want to push him into it if he doesn't want to farm," said John. "He can find better opportunities elsewhere."

The Opportunities Are Off The Farm

When John sells off some of his cattle at 81 cents a pound, we are told that it cost him 85 cents a pound to raise the animals. When we learn that John grows corn at \$300 per acre, only to sell it at \$250 per acre, we understand why Greg is considering those other opportunities.

Although John has managed to convince the bank to keep him in business for another year, five months go by before the money is finally

approved. Like many of his neighbours, he feels that government agricultural programs are a necessary ingredient -- helpful in the short run, but probably harmful if

they become permanently ingrained. For it is understood that a farmer has to have his price from the marketplace, as he has always done. He does not to be a junior partner

in a triumvirate with his bank and his government.

As the film clearly indicates, the farm is not what it used to be. It just isn't fun anymore.



THE SUBJECT -- of a documentary on farming in the 1980's, John Walls of Ilderton appeared at a special preview showing at London's CFPL-TV

studio. Seen here with cameraman Richard Johnstone and reporter John Mack, Walls is presented with a framed family photo.



TALKING TO REPORTERS -- Mary Walls and son Greg answer questions after viewing a

television special on the family's life on a local farm during the course of an entire year.