

women's Institutes lobby for abbatoirs

Embro-area resident Carol Innes, president of the Federated Women's Institute of Ontario (FWIO), led a delegation of WI members meeting Monday, Feb. 7 today with Huron-Bruce MPP Carol Mitchell, Ontario's minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). According to a news release, the goal of the visit was "to discuss the FWIO's concern over the continued closure of small abattoirs in Ontario."

FWIO has about 500 branches across Ontario and is part of a national and international network of rural women.

"We are entering a danger zone where Ontario's ability to support the growing demand for locally produced and processed meat and poultry is at stake," Innes stated on the day of the meeting.

"It is ironic that as consumer demand for safe, local, organic, culturally specific and environmentally sensitive meat and poultry is growing, we are losing our capacity to supply that market" she added.

Reflecting on the meeting, Innes explained that "we asked the minister for her cooperation in working with producers, small processors and the local food community to help ensure that small abattoirs are both viable and responsive to government regulation for safe food.

"Food safety is absolutely our overriding concern. We have a good regulatory system in Ontario and we support it. Let me be clear on that." However, Innes added, "we believe that small abattoirs are over-regulated and do not pose the same challenges to public health and safety as large processing plants."

The FWIO president reported that Mitchell "was supportive and has promised to work with us and our network of concerned citizens and organizations as we move ahead on this issue."

"We are pleased with her response and look forward to helping ensure that Ontarians have the choice of locally produced and processed meat and poultry" Innes concluded.

In the FWIO news release, Mitchell commented, "I was very pleased to meet with the FWIO today. We share an understanding of just how important local abattoirs and meat plants are for livestock and poultry producers, and for our rural communities."

The OMAFRA minister added that "we've made progress in recent years, and I look forward to continuing to work with FWIO and industry, while maintaining our shared commitment to food safety."