

OFA Bette Jean Crews
Commentary

Farmers' challenges increasing

Canadian farmers find themselves deluged with calls for safe food and production systems that are both environmentally friendly and humane to their animals. They have been evolving these requirements for decades, but now verification is necessary, and farmers are struggling to keep ahead of the demands for more formal recognition of farm management systems.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) has been working with its partners in the agri-food sector to find the best ways to meet the requirements. As the file expands, so do the anticipated costs. It's obvious that an integrated approach will be necessary to get the job done and at a reasonable cost.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) just hosted a two-day session in Ottawa — New Farm Management Systems: Taking Control — providing an opportunity for all stakeholders to review the situation as it has developed, and attempt to identify the best way to put on-farm systems in place that will work for consumers and for farmers.

Many farms produce more than one commodity and would face staggering costs for inspections and audits if each commodity was to be handled separately for certification. CFA President Bob Friesen's invitation to the session pointed out that 'producer fatigue' is developing as farmers strive to cope just with paperwork requirements.

Those attending the session were asked to develop a strategy to harmonize and coordinate all existing and emerging programs aimed at ensuring production facilities meet food safety standards, environmental standards, and humane animal production standards.

It has been a tall order, but Canada's agri-food representatives at the meeting were diligent in their search for solutions. Integration and co-ordination were the key words on everyone's minds as participants at the sessions went to work.

Speakers at the Ottawa sessions came from the United States and the United Kingdom with the majority from various areas of Canada. Governments, producer groups, wholesalers and retailers were all invited to present their perspectives at the sessions.

Details have to reflect the on-farm systems farmers from coast to coast will need to incorporate into their operations. Dealing with something this expansive will require an equally large data base.

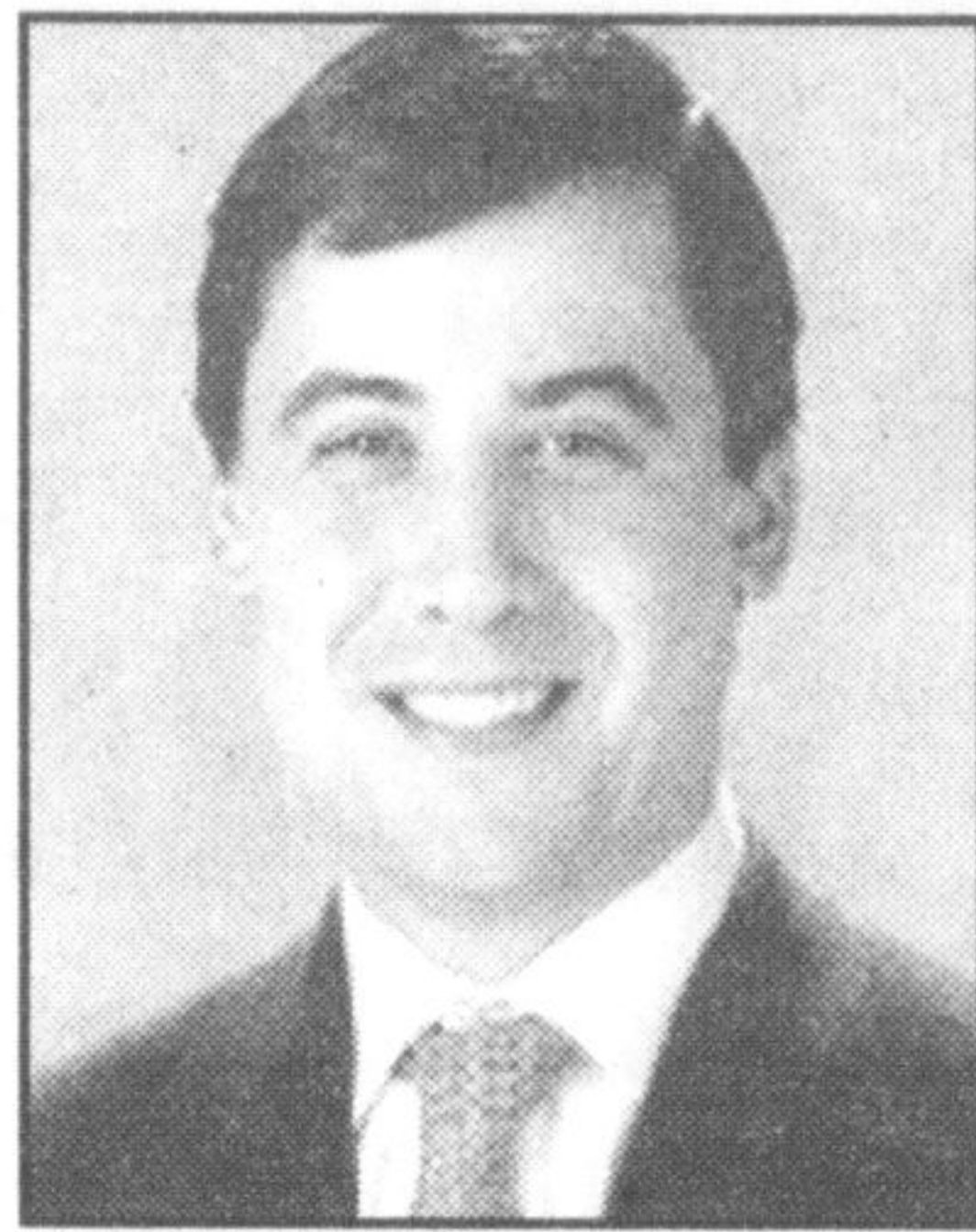
Participants in the Ottawa session acknowledged the need for a staged implementation process, introducing the levels of involvement over a period of time, gradually increasing the accountability of the initiative.

The OFA believes it's critical that the systems being designed accommodate small and medium-sized farming operations. Simplicity and affordability are key. The systems are here! They must be designed by farmers, for farmers.

Bette Jean Crews is an executive committee member of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

Chong to represent Conservatives in Wellington-Halton Hills riding

Mike Chong will represent the Conservative Party of Canada in the Wellington-Halton Hills riding during the next federal election.



Mike Chong

Mr. Chong, 32, who lives outside of Fergus, was named the candidate at a nomination meeting in Guelph last Tuesday night that drew more than 300 party supporters.

"It's a privilege and a responsibility, but I'm looking forward to it," said Mr. Chong, an information technology executive.

Mr. Chong beat out Marty Burke of Guelph for the nomination.

At one point former Halton-Peel MP Garth Turner was also vying for the position, but later withdrew from the race.

"The vote was very close," said Mr. Burke, 43, an Air Canada pilot and former military veteran.

"I do believe probably the difference is that Mike is a local fellow."

He added he wishes Mr. Chong the best in the campaign.

Mr. Chong said he plans to run a good campaign focusing on issues that concern the people of the riding and will propose constructive solutions.

He admitted that the party has a lot of work ahead of it and candidates need to tell Canadians what "this new party is all about."

"They're going to examine us — take a look at us, but we're going to have to earn their trust," said Mr. Chong.

Mr. Chong, who has been involved with Conservative Party federally and provin-

cially for several years, ran unsuccessfully as the PC candidate in Waterloo-Wellington during the 2000 federal election.



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