

# Ministry's wolf strategy a concern, says federation

Recent postings by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) on the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) Registry are a cause for concern for many Ontario farmers.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) sees no reason for the MNR proposals to protect wolf and coyote populations from hunters and trappers.

The ministry's own calculations tell us the wolf population in Ontario stands at more than 8,800, making it the largest wolf population in any North American jurisdiction.

The OFA and the farmers regularly hit by the preying of wolves and coyotes see no scientific justification for the implementation of closed wolf and coyote hunting and trapping seasons.

Ontario farmers recognize the benefits of healthy ecosystems and the role played by predators such as wolves and coyotes in maintaining the ecosystem. Wolves and coyotes, however, prey on farm animals and poultry as well as deer and moose and cause severe economic losses for farmers.

The OFA supports initiatives to develop a better scientific basis for making wolf management decisions, and reminds the MNR that appropriate decisions can't be made in an information vacuum.

Of particular concern to the OFA and its 40,000 members across Ontario is the MNR's decision to extend the wolf harvest controls to coyotes. Information gained from compensation records clearly indicates that coyotes are the primary cause of losses of livestock and poultry in Ontario.

The OFA can't accept the MNR premise that coyotes merit the same protection as wolves when the ministry's own information states that coyotes only appeared in Ontario at the beginning of the 20th century. There's no historic reason to protect coyotes from hunting and trapping.

The OFA can agree with the MNR's search for effective

## OFA Harry Brander Commentary

and low-cost options to reduce livestock losses. In spite of all measures taken, however, wildlife predation will occur. Current compensation coverage for wildlife predation needs to be revised and updated.

Any additional costs put on the farm community because of this latest initiative must be met with enhanced financial support.

Farmers must have the ability to protect and defend their livestock. The OFA and its members aren't prepared to accept the restrictions being proposed by the MNR if they negatively limit the ability of the farmer to respond to wolf and coyote predation.

There has been no demonstrated need for the mandatory reporting of wolf and coyote harvests as described in the ministry's EBR Registry proposal. Statistics provided by the ministry indicate no justification to limit the number of hunters and trappers through mandatory licensing. The OFA is opposed to the ministry's proposal to impose a limit of two hunting seals per year on hunters and trappers.

Instead, the OFA would recommend a reasonable limit on the number of seals made available, in particular Wildlife Management Units, and free distribution until the limit has been reached.

The OFA will take its concerns with the MNR's proposals to government officials and encourages farmers across the province to discuss these issues with their elected MPP.

*Harry Brander is a member of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture executive committee.*

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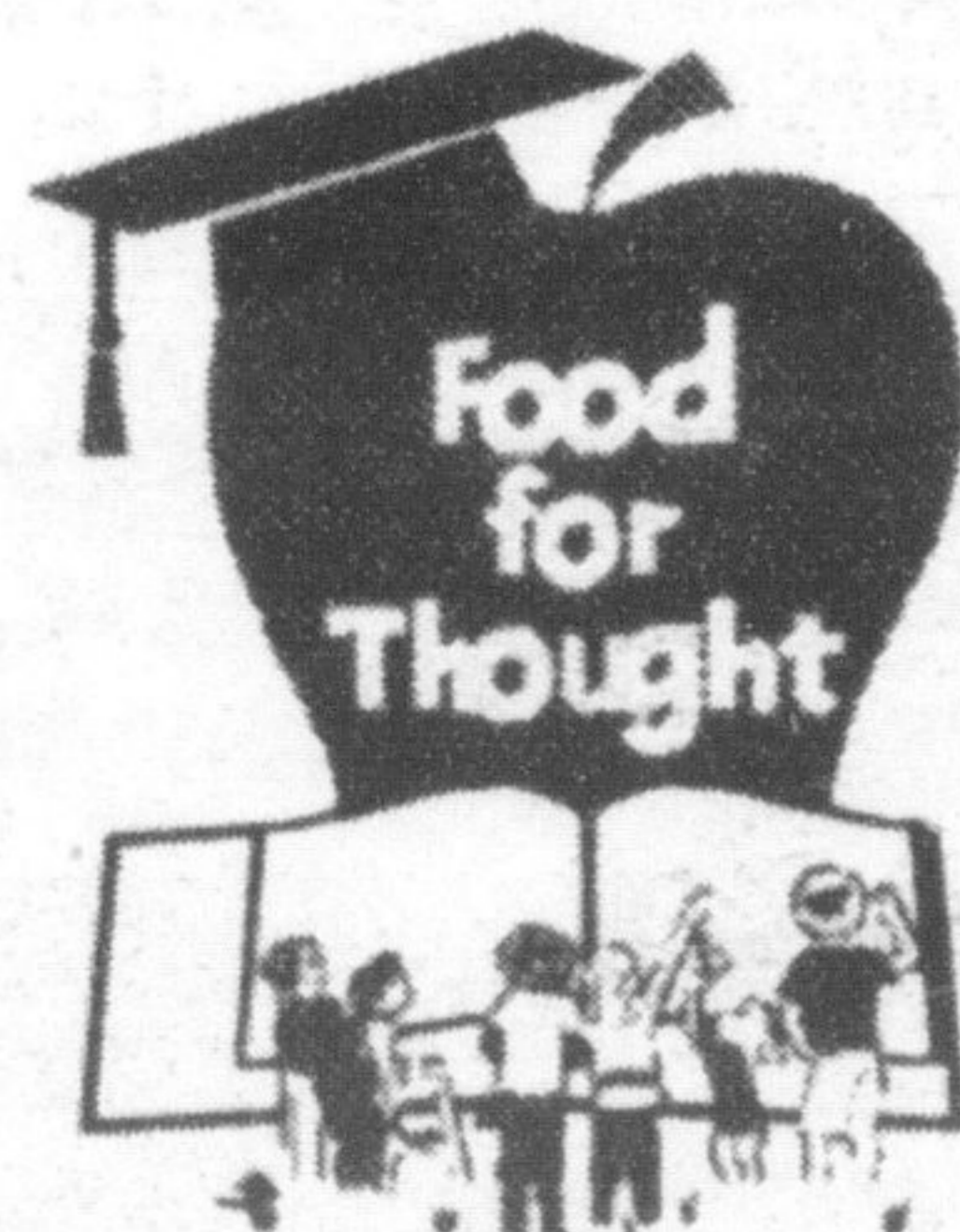
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