

# Search for improved farm income continues

The search for improved incomes for Ontario farmers is ongoing, and may take more time than many farmers are prepared to wait.

Last month, representatives from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) were giving a preview of the complexities they face in the search for more income for their farmers.

It was all part of a two-day session organized by the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute (CAPI), charged with understanding the factors affecting the current and future farm income prospects. An impressive agenda of international presenters provided their views of influences impacting farm income, today and into the future — everything from domestic regulations to global market forces.

Expectations voiced by participants for positive results from CAPI may be impossible to achieve because of the enormity of the forces at play internationally. Agriculture is so much more than just the production of food.

As the sessions progressed, it became obvious how big an influence U.S. farm programs have on Canadian farm incomes. Overcoming this influence will be given priority because of the dependence on cross-border trade in some commodities.

Emerging export dominance by countries such as Brazil is another huge competitive feature Canadian farmers must contend with as they search for improved returns from the market place. Protection of domestic producers from cheaper imports from countries with lower environmental, food safety and labour standards may have to be considered.

Ontario farmers are the losers when products imported from such countries are allowed into Canada. With the packaging and labeling done in Canada, the suggestion is that the contents are the product of Canada. Our government must do more to protect Canadian producers and consumers in these circumstances.

## OFA Paul Mistele Commentary

Presenters at the CAPI forum appeared to ignore the importance of Canada's supply management system. Future sessions need to recognize and discuss the role our supply management programs have played in providing profitability for some sectors of Ontario agriculture. There are clear examples of producers playing a key role in establishing successful farm product marketing systems.

Discussions at the CAPI forum suggested Canadian agriculture needs to shift away from particular commodity marketing systems, and instead turn to value-added processing production systems. For this to happen, regulations encouraging value-added production will be needed — everything from farm assessment review guidelines that govern modification to processing facilities. The CAPI forum presentations dealt with agriculture labour issues. It became clear that a highly skilled farm labour force is critical for a successful and profitable sector in Canada.

No mention was made at the CAPI forum of who the next generation of Canadian farmers will be or how they will get into agriculture. This is a significant factor to be considered in the future of farming in Canada, and must be part of future CAPI discussions.

Another session examined the varying levels of profitability on today's farms with the conclusion that efforts need to be made to improve management skills for all farmers. The OFA and its national partner, the CFA, will continue to be involved in the search for ways of improving the profitability of farming in Ontario.

*Paul Mistele is vice-president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.*

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Milton Youth Soccer Club

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