

# Halton loses an ag rep and farmers lose a friend

By NORMAN NELSON

The pastures may not be greener where Phyllis McMaster is going, but there are certainly more of them.

After six years as the popular and well liked provincial agricultural representative for Halton, she is heading for the heartland of rural Ontario in Dundas County, trading her office in Milton for one in Winchester.

Taking her place will be Marie Hartley, formerly a farm management specialist working out of the Orangeville office in Dufferin County.

It's a six-month assignment while the provincial government ponders whether to amalgamate the Halton and Peel offices of the provincial Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

"I've really enjoyed working here," she told *The Champion* in an interview last Friday. "The agriculture industry here is very progressive. Halton has a reputation for being on the leading edge."

The impetus spurring her to make the change is an age-old one — a new challenge.

The change she is making is trading an agricultural outpost in Halton, threatened on all sides by urban development, for a more traditional eastern Ontario farming community.

Halton, she said, has about 200 farms with gross sales of more than \$75,000. The major crop is cereal (corn, soybean and wheat), but there's also a dairy industry (about 50 milk producers) and many fruit and vegetable growers.

By contrast, she noted that there are 350 dairy producers alone in Dundas county.

Farming in the shadow of the CN Tower, as is the case here, presents its own host of problems, she said.

Headaches range from having to share the rural roads with an ever increasing number of city-bound commuters to noise and odor complaints lodged by neighbours.

She said a major factor to contend with is that half the land being farmed in Halton is now owned by developers, most of whom would love nothing more

than to replace the fields of corn or herds of cattle with rows of houses or industrial parks.

"Most of the landowners are speculators. Farmers have short term leases or no leases."

There's also the international situation. Thanks to external pressure like the Canada-United States free trade agreement and the multinational General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), she said the cost of farm products simply hasn't risen nearly as fast as farmers' production costs.

Yet forged out of all these uncertainties is a small but vibrant Halton farming community "deeply committed" to agriculture.

The kind of help provided by provincial ag reps depends on the season. It ranges from assisting farmers in the preparation of loan requests during winter to helping tabulate harvest yields from test plots in the fall.

City folk also utilize ministry resources. Their concerns, she said, range from the spreading of sewage sludge on nearby fields to identifying and dealing with garden pests.

One of the more unusual calls was from an urban Milton resident concerned "about stuff coming down on a field from the sky."

It was a farmer sowing winter wheat from an airplane, she remembered, chuckling.

As she cleans her desk out for the last time today in her Milton office, there's one scrap of paper that will certainly end up in her new Winchester office.

It's advice that all those who have known her in the past six years can attest that she holds close to her heart:

- Bite off more than you can chew, then chew it*
- Plan more than you can do, then do it*
- Point your arrow at a star, take your aim, and there you are*
- Arrange more time than you can spare, then spare it*
- Take on more than you can bear it, then bear it*
- Plan your castle in the air, then build a ship to take you there*



Photo by NORMAN NELSON

Provincial agricultural representative Phyllis McMaster is moving on to a more rural community, one with a broader agricultural base, after serving Halton for the past several years. Although agriculture is not as prominent here as it once was, the mix of urban and rural lifestyles posed constant challenges for Ms McMaster, challenges the well-liked rep welcomed. Today (Friday) was her last day in the Halton office.

5—The Canadian Champion, Friday, October 5, 1990

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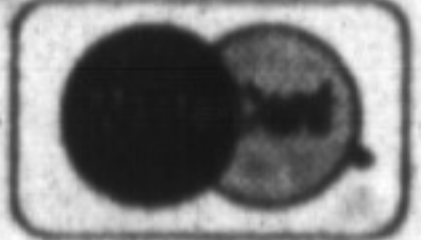
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