Our sheep farms smaller than those in Australia

by Stefan Ruhl

When it comes to sheep farming, there's just no comparison between Australia and the Castor area, says a man who should know.

Australian sheep farmer Brett Crook recently passed through the area as part of an International 4-H exchange program. He stayed with Martin Reichert, director of Russell County Junior Farmers.

In Australia, the farming approach is extensive while here, it's intensive, says Brett who expects to return home in January.

Australia is the world's largest producer of sheep for wool and mutton. An average size flock in Australia is about 3,000 head while 400 sheep here is considered a lot.

Thanks to relatively warm weather, Australian sheep can

graze outside all year at little expense to the farmer. They require a small amount of oats as supplementary feed.

In Canada, hard winters mean the animals have to be brought in and fed at least part of the year. This costs the Canadian farmer more to raise sheep and severely limits the number of sheep that can be kept. Brett saw snow for the first time in his life while he was in Russell.

Australian sheep are about four and a half times cheaper than Canadian sheep.

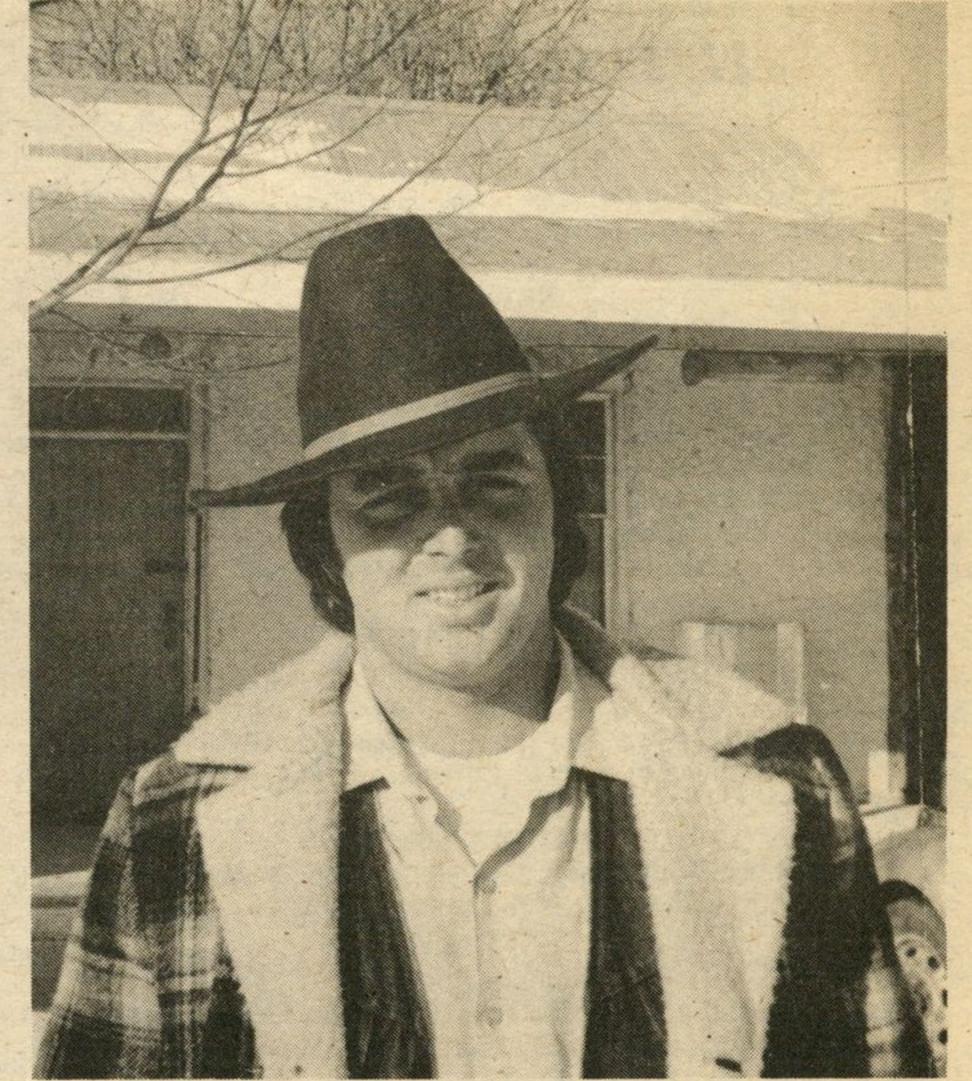
Dairy farming takes a distant second place in importance to sheep farming in Australia but the methods are the same, Brett said. The average herd is about 100 head on a 500-acre farm. The cows graze outside year round but

they give only about two thirds as much milk as a Canadian cow because they only get small amounts of supplementary feed.

Brett's farm, which he works with his father, has 6,500 acres and the same number of sheep. He also grows wheat and barley as a cash crop on 3,000 acres, rotating the crops every few years to keep the land from being exhausted.

Brett, who toured the U.S. for six months before coming to Canada, says the U.S. and Canada are similar. But he notes Canada more closely resembles Australia because of their common heritage with Great Britain.

When he gets home Brett expects to lecture to his fellow countrymen and share his impressions of North America.



Brett Crook

-Stefan Ruhl photo

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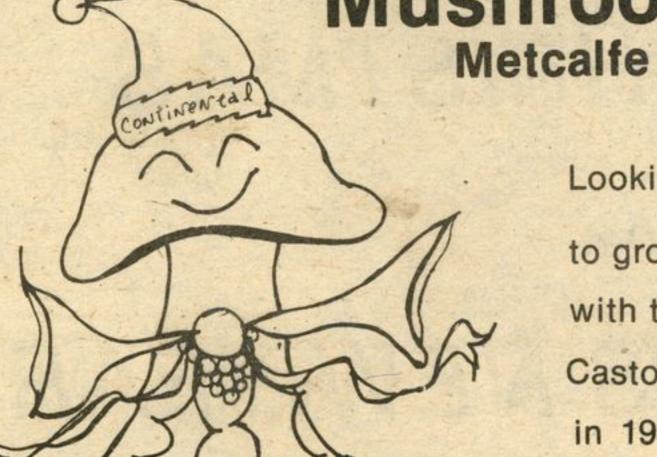
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Farm women unite

by Kim Seale

Farm women are Canada's largest untapped resource, says the president of a local action group.

"Farm women are important because we provide man's most basic need — food," says Dianne Harkin, head of Women for the Survival of Agriculture.

Mrs. Harkin chaired part of the first annual Farm Women's conference held at the Chateau Laurier early this month.

The Winchester area resident called farm women a "driving force in agriculture and society."

"We're a force that deserves and demands recognition."

Women from across the country attended the conference and tackled issues pertaining to their status and the problem of communicating agriculture to the public.

Guest speaker Eugene Whelan, Minister of Agriculture, told delegates to expect retroactive tax changes which would translate into the right for them to earn a wage for farm work.

Delegates received expert advice on how to lobby to influence decision-making and the preparation of briefs.

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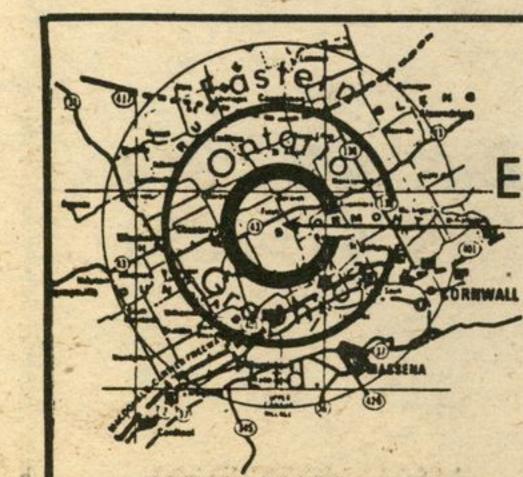


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