



## Optimizing government contact

by Ron Bonnett, President  
Ontario Federation of Agriculture

There will always be a need for interaction between farmers and governments — as long as we operate under the present democratic system. That interaction is not always at the provincial and federal levels. We must use all available tools to enhance this interaction.

Farmers must work with politicians who are the law makers, the people who ultimately establish the rules and regulations for agriculture, not only in this country but in the international trading scene. Our role is to provide advice and influence to ensure that sound decisions are made.

Because the majority of government people find agriculture and its terms a foreign language, farmers must be prepared to help them understand our industry. Without this approach, farmers can expect to face rules and regulations that are unproductive for agriculture. Farmers need to be willing to take the time to meet with politicians to explain the industry's needs.

One tool that we need to use is the political party structure that exists in this province. Farmers have an opportunity to get involved in the political process that reviews and elects the people ultimately responsible for running the country. This begins at the local level with elections of riding associations.

There are two key components to this local involve-

ment. The first is to provide input into the policy process and the second is to help select the women and men who will carry the party banner during elections. This gives OFA and its members the opportunity to not only influence the message, but also help decide who will be carrying that message.

All parties have a policy development process that, one way or the other, has connections to the grassroots local organizations. It is not uncommon for a resolution put forward by a local farmer at a riding association meeting to work its way through the resolution process and become part of a party's agricultural election platform.

Equally important is the need to make sure that the right people are elected. Most voters have no influence on the name that is on the ballot locally or who is selected as party leader. Farmers who choose to get involved at the local level can become part of this choice. Four or five votes at an nomination meeting can separate winners and losers. Getting the right people on the ballot is a critical part of the electoral process.

Involvement doesn't guarantee the results the farming community might want, but through the democratic process, farmers can ensure their message gets public attention. By participating in the political process, farmers are more likely to be given

an opportunity to speak out on issues as they arise.

Grassroots involvement in party level political activism by farmers is a way of reaching the policy-making individuals from the various parties. From this level, the positions put forth by farmers can be debated, non-farm people will be informed and

involved, asking questions and gaining a more complete understanding of farming's issues.

Farm organizations like the Ontario Federation of Agriculture must take advantage of every available opportunity to discuss agriculture's issues and concerns with participants at political

party events. This approach puts OFA's members in contact with the politicians who play a role in deciding what policies and programs will be available to agriculture.

At the provincial level, OFA is developing policy positions that we believe should be part of every party's agricultural platform.

These positions are being used by some as the template they will work through the system.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture wants to use every tool available. When farmers get involved at the rank-and-file level of party politics, they are sowing the seeds of success.

## Experts offer children advice on farm safety

BY CRYSTAL KOTOW

Over 110 children, parents and professionals gathered at the Eugene Whelan Experimental Farm in Woodslee July 7 to participate in a safety workshop.

Children of various ages spent the day rotating through 11 stations designed to give them safety advice for everyday life. The stations were manned by local professionals, who offered tips for water, sun, animal, chemical, electrical, fire and farm machine safety. The children also toured the inside of an ambulance and went through a simulated fire emergency to teach them how to escape a house fire.

Anne Anger works for the Essex County Federation of Agriculture and said the workshop has been offered annually for over 15 years.

The ECFA helps organize the day, which is hosted by the Essex County Farm Safety Association.

"We feel safety should be routine," she said. "We want kids to be able to make quick, easy choices and if even one child is saved because of what they learn here, it makes the day worthwhile."

One of the features of the day was a robotic girl named Oprah. Her job was to keep the flow of the day by honking the horn on her kid-sized tractor to signal a change of stations.

Lucia Lilborne, Ontario Farm Animal Council communications coordinator, said Oprah makes the day more fun because she's "a robot that talks to the kids." Oprah's official title is "farm animal care specialist." Her station at the end of the day was designed to teach kids about caring for animals of all sizes.

Anne Baldo, a representative of Farm Credit Canada, organizes a raffle for two bikes each year at the farm safety day. This year the FCC asked children to bring in one canned good for the FCC's "Drive Away



Ron Jones of the Ontario Farm Safety Association shows a group of kids a "power takeoff shaft," July 7 during the safety workshop at the Eugene Whelan Experimental Farm in Woodslee. Jones' station focused on farm safety including how to be safe around farm equipment and how to avoid dangerous situations while on a farm.

Hunger" tour.

"Farm Credit Canada is a big advocate of farm safety," Baldo said. "It's important to raise awareness in both the rural and urban community about farm safety. A lot of rural kids don't live on farms but they may have grandparents or other relatives who do."

Montana Strong and Hannah O'Neil each won a bike and helmet.

Tom Williams of Sun Parlour Ambulance Service was glad to be part of the workshop because he wants kids to be aware of their abilities when faced with emergencies.

"This gives them an understanding of what should be done in an emergency," he said. "They find out they don't have to be afraid of us and this gives them the knowledge of when to call for help."

When asked what they learned throughout the day, Grace Mullen, 10, her cousin Eric Mullen, 10, and Dawson Anger, eight, showed none of the presenters had wasted their breath.

"I learned the right way to act with animals," Dawson Anger said. "I also know how to use chemicals so I don't get hurt now."

Parents also felt the impact of the day's lessons. Denise Gillan-Kuznair's children have gone to the farm safety day two years in a row. She wanted her children to know the dangers when they visit family members' farms.

"My parents have a farm and my kids spend a fair amount of time there," said Gillan-Kuznair said. "It's important to know safety rules and it's presented in a fun way. Now I'm a little more at ease when they go to their grandparents' for the day."

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