



Many issues in agriculture

by Paul Mistele, Vice-President
Ontario Federation of Agriculture

When planting a field of grain, you know when the job is done. You can look back at the end of the day and admire your accomplishments. Farm people involved in agricultural politics rarely have the opportunity to say their work is done, regardless of the effort and long hours spent.

Measuring success is also elusive. Just when you think you're on the cusp of success, something happens to prove you wrong.

This has been a year of much activity by farmers — those willing to participate in the task of lobbying government. Farmers have staged rallies across the province. They have had measurable success in moving governments to recognize the direction agriculture needs.

We have realized advances in dealings with the Ontario provincial government, and after getting several thousand farmers on Ottawa's Parliament Hill in April, the May 2nd federal budget looked full of promise. Being able to get a handle on the 1.5 billion dollars outlined in that budget continues to be a challenge.

Improving farm income is job one for OFA and our lobby efforts. Hearing government leaders acknowledge that Canadian farmers need increased income and protection from foreign subsidies gives us a strong feeling of accomplishment.

That feeling quickly fades when we ask for details. Farmers need those details to facilitate their business plans, but government officials stall, giving us details that are far too sketchy.

OFA is working in conjunction with its federal partner, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, and our commodity partners to develop policies and programs that would become part of the second generation Agricultural Policy Framework. We know the importance of effective income protection for farmers, and getting the APF II right the first time.

One of the more positive issues between farmers and the provincial government has been around the energy file. This government wants to demonstrate to society that it is focused on developing new and renewable sources of energy, and

farmers are in an excellent position to help. Wind energy is literally popping up around the province as farmers make their lands available for the installation and operation of wind turbines.

Ethanol and biodiesel are

gaining in popularity with consumers as a clean and renewable source of fuel. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is also lobbying for the production of renewable fuels from sweet potatoes which may be one option for displaced tobacco growers. We have to make sure mechanisms are in place so farmers reap benefits from new technology.

Because so much of what farmers do is directly relat-

ed to the environment, part of OFA's focus is currently about changes to legislation concerning species at risk. While farmers strive to take all the necessary measures to be good environmental stewards, OFA finds it necessary to protect our members' interests when government ministries and other organizations don't understand how their efforts would put agriculture communities in jeopardy.

Source water protection legislation is another example of OFA working to ensure farmers and their ability to farm, using good farm management practices, are not compromised. Farmers have always lived on and operated their farms, fully aware of agriculture's special relationship with the environment and the rest of society. Getting science-based legislation is critical and OFA will continue to monitor and provide input

to the provincial government on this issue.

These are just a few of the issues OFA has been involved with, as our organization also moves through the internal process of reviewing our governance structure. We're inviting input from members now that will form the basis of recommendations to be presented at our November convention. This will effectively position OFA for future challenges.



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