

Regional Council

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NFU in Ontario

Newsletter

WINTER 2007

Regional Coordinator's Report.

Wow – what a fantastic convention we put on in London in November! A big thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make it such a success and for all those who attended – you are the crucial part!

If you missed it and wonder what all the fuss was about, come out to the regional convention in the spring. There will be interesting speakers and fellowship with family farmers that feel exactly the same way as you. Wouldn't it be nice to know first hand that you are not alone.

Conventions, whether national or provincial are an important part of the NFU. They are where policy gets debated and decided. Officials in the NFU do not cook up policy in some back room. Members decide and direct policy at conventions and local meetings. It is why the NFU is so much more responsive than other organizations.

This year's national convention was no exception. Several important resolutions were passed at convention. As well, the NFU report to Ontario's Ombudsman was released. Delegates also heard about some ground breaking and down right scary information on synthetic biology.

Some people will not agree with everything in the NFU brief to the Ombudsman, but it is important to move the discussion back onto the central themes of farm income and the health of rural communities. Only the NFU would have

stood up this way for farmers. NFU officials put the interests of family farmers in front of all other considerations. Without the NFU no one would be forcefully challenging government and the bad decisions that have gotten us into this mess. You can find the entire report at www.nfu.ca/on - or contact the NFU office for a copy.

Coming out of the convention the NFU has a broad mandate from the membership to go after assistance for pork and beef farmers suffering through this price collapse. Government must take action if we are going to still have pork farmers a year from now, and the situation is not much better for beef, particularly in the cow-calf sector. The NFU will be promoting graduated payments directly to livestock farmers outside of the CAIS program and capped at \$100,000. The NFU is adamant that any assistance needs to start with family farmers and those farmers need to get the bulk of the assistance. No other general farm organization is making this request. They are asking for the same old kind of approach that saw the packers and packer-controlled feed lots take almost all of the BSE payments. The NFU will be fighting for family farmers – we'll let others speak for Cargill and Tysons.

You will hear some speak about the need for one voice. The NFU believes what we really need is a strong and courageous voice not afraid to speak out, stand up and be counted.

(continued on page 2...)

(Regional Coordinators Report, from page)

That's why I joined the NFU a few years ago. There is a lot of work to do in the coming year and beyond. I hope you will continue to add your voice to your fellow farmers across Ontario and Canada.

The NFU has just recorded its 6th straight year in membership growth in Canada. The stronger the NFU is, the more government and big agri-business worry. This year talk to a friend or neighbour and tell them what the NFU stands for and tell them they should join us this year. Together we can take on these powerful forces.

In these sometimes hard days, I hope you, your family and friends have a Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year.

Grant Robertson
Ontario Coordinator

NFU GATE SIGNS



To receive your NFU gate sign,
please call:

—in organized locals, your Local
President (see contact info page 8)

In unorganized areas, where you do
not have a local, please call:

—the Ontario Office at
1-888-273-5545

Reflections on the NFU National Convention 2007

When I weighed the pros and cons of attending the NFU conference in London, at first the only pro was that it was within commuting distance of my farm. Then I received an offer to attend at no cost, since my local is 'unorganized'. This tipped the balance. I figured I could at least give it a try and only invest some time.

Thursday, when I arrived home in the late evening, I was a bit surprised by how relieved my husband was when I told him what a great time I had at the conference. There were so many like-minded and amazingly friendly people talking about the kinds of issues that really matter. Two more days at the conference left me with the feeling that I had been given many gifts, including knowledge and friendship. No disappointment. No waste of my time.

I was impressed by the diverse speakers and the level of participation from the delegates. Lots of passion and concern, blended with intelligent debate and positive suggestions for ways forward.

At first, I planned to be reimbursed for the cost of the conference and banquet. By the end of the conference, I just felt grateful that I hadn't missed this opportunity to attend an NFU conference. I decided that I would like the NFU to use the money elsewhere and gladly paid the cost of the conference.

Thanks to the NFU executive for the invitation, and all those who extended their welcome. I've attended a lot of different types of conferences. The NFU conference was unique in many ways and definitely the most welcoming.

Thank you.

Chris Dancey, RR#1 Aylmer, ON

Haldimand/Norfolk/SE Oxford: An executive meeting will be held on **December 13/07** and details will be discussed about an upcoming public forum on local, fresh, wholesome, raw food in cooperation with food activist Pam Killeen. Date and location to be announced. A membership meeting is scheduled for **January 31/08** at 7:30pm in the Lions Hall in Courtland. Guest speaker to be announced. For more information, please call Garry Proven 519-842-6532 or Martin Driese 519-863-5050

Wellington/Waterloo: A board meeting will be on **January 09/08** at Mapleton Organics, 8548 Wellington Rd 7, Moorefield at 7:45pm. Members are always welcome. For more information, call Ron Weber at 519-343-4803.

Frontenac/Addington: 8th Annual NFU Winter Fun Day, **Sunday, January 20, 2008**. To be held at Orbit Valley Farm, home of Jeff, Sue, Garnet and Haydon Peters, 3683 Moreland-Dixon Road between Inverary and Sunbury. Join us for Games, sleigh rides and skating start at 12:30, a potluck lunch starts at 2:30. Please bring a potluck dish, plates, cutlery and mugs. There will be lots of fun for all ages.

Prescott/Russell, Stormont/Dundas/Glengarry, Ottawa: A general information meeting will take place **January 21st 2008** at the Monkland Recreation Centre at 7pm. Monkland is on Hwy 43, just east of Hwy 138. NFU Regional Coordinator, Grant Robertson will speak. For directions or details call Christine Estermann at 613-538-2331.

Elgin County Membership Meeting: An information and organizing meeting will take place on **February 11, 2008** at 7:30pm and will be held in the Carnegie Room at the St. Thomas Public Library, 153 Curtis St., St. Thomas (519) 631-6050. Invited speakers include Joe Dama from National Farmers Union Ontario speaking on Local organization and a representative from FarmStart discussing new opportunities in the ethnic food market. For more information contact Chris Dancey—519-773-5273 or Joan Brady at the NFU membership office—519-237-3163

Huron County AGM: to be held on **March 13** at the OMAFRA office in Clinton at 7:30, more details to follow. For more information, Call Tony McQuail at 519-528-2493

Region 3 Convention/NFU Ontario AGM: to be held on **April 05, 2008** at the John Knox Christian School in Woodstock, 800 Julianna Dr. (at the 401 and Hwy 59) More details to follow.

Connect with NFU Ontario at These Upcoming Events

Southwest Ag Conference: "Innovative Farming Solutions", January 3&4, at Ridgetown College for more information - www.southwesternagconference.ca

Grey Bruce Farmers' Week: January 4-8 at Elmwood Community Centre - www.greyagservices.ca

27th Guelph Organic Conference: "Building a Sustainable Organic Business", January 24-27 at the University of Guelph - www.guelphorganicconf.ca

Canadian International Farm Equipment Show: February 5-7 at the International Centre, Toronto - www.torontofarmshow.com

Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Convention : February 20 & 21 at Brock University, St Catherines

Eco Farm Day - 2008: "Soil-the Foundation of Agriculture" - February 22 & 23, Ramada Inn, Cornwall, Keynote Speaker: Joel Salatin, Polyface Farms - www.cog.ca/ottawa

The Ecological Farmers Association, the
National Farmers Union & Heifer International Canada
PRESENT

Meeting Local Food Needs

A FARMER TO FARMER DIALOGUE

February 8th: 12 noon—5 PM & February 9th: 10 AM—3 PM
Storrington Hall, Sunbury

This educational and networking event will provide both beginning and established farmers with the skills needed to produce and market the food that their local community is asking for. Discover community connections, sustainable growing techniques and product promotion by sharing ideas and information with other like minded folks. Sponsored by Heifer International Canada, an organization devoted to grassroots rural development on a national and international scope. Heifer International provides resources and training to individuals and communities interested in agriculture. Also sponsored by EFAO and NFU Local 316.

To Register:

Contact the EFAO office at 519-822-8606 or info@efao.ca
Registration fee is \$30/person or \$50/farm

The Farm Line Support Service – Need Someone to Talk to?

Phone: 1-888-451-2903 (Monday to Friday – 8:30 AM to 8:00 PM)

The Farm Line Support Service is a telephone support help line for farmers and rural families in Ontario. It provides a toll free, confidential, anonymous, bilingual helpline that offers emotional support and referral service to farmers and rural families in Ontario. Trained telephone peer support staff talk to the caller, identify local resources and help determine steps to address the caller's needs. It provides access to information on agricultural subjects and addresses issues and situations, ranging from financial to legal to personal, family and mental health. The Farm Line Support Service also offers On-Line resources to farmers and rural families in Ontario. Various documents and a resource listing of services sorted by geographic area is available at www.thefarmline.ca.

NFU Ontario supports **The Farm Line** and Region 3, Women's Advisory Kim Delaney, and Women's President Colleen Ross sit on the Board of Directors.

Women Elders Chronicle: The Wealth of Life Experiences

This is the title of a book I picked up at national convention this year. The theme of the convention was *Food and Democracy: Reclaiming Food Sovereignty* and much of what we discussed at convention is echoed in the stories found in this book.

Marilyn Gillis, NFU Women's Advisory committee member for Saskatchewan, collected the life stories of Saskatchewan elder farm women and put them together in this book to inspire and educate us. These women write about food sovereignty on their home farms and in their communities. They write about the knowledge and skills needed to grow and preserve the food that sustains our bodies and our communities. This information is so valuable today when there is such a disconnect between eaters and food production. Recently, while selling his chicken at a local market, Grant Robertson was asked by a customer how to cook a whole chicken. Clearly knowledge is disappearing. I am willing to find some funding to put together a collection of Ontario stories. Wouldn't it be great to get similar projects going across the country? Is anyone out there willing to help? You can contact me at 519-343-3375 or kim.hawthorn@sympatico.ca.

Thanks to everyone that brought items for the women's fundraising table at convention. There were so many donations I can't list them all, but a special thanks to Deb Tremblay and Marilyn Gillis for the beautiful quilts they made and donated. We sold tickets on the quilts and the lucky winners were Dave Phelps and Donna Arie.

Women's caucus was another highlight for me. Colleen Ross, National Women's President, asked participants to tell us what they learned or appreciated most about convention. People talked about being invigorated, about their pleasure in being surrounded by like-minded people, about being inspired by the activity of some of the locals, about the importance of local food and about the need to reclaim knowledge. One associate member is looking forward to doing her dissertation on local food. To get in the right frame of mind, she has put herself on the 100 mile diet. I hope to stay in touch with her and report on her progress.

Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) had asked us to apply for a seat on their International Ag Committee and we found out at caucus that we were not successful. After much discussion we decided to focus our international efforts on the work of Via Campesina and to focus our work with ACWW at the local level. If you have some ideas on how to get our message out to the local women's institutes please get in touch with me.

There was so much information presented at convention. I am still reading material and checking out web sites. So many of the ideas presented were inspirational and some, like synthetic biology, were down right scary. I want to support and learn more about local food projects like Local Food Plus, Food Secure Canada and Kingston's Food Down the Road Project. I want to learn more about, and fight against, ideas like synthetic biology and the globalization of food. I hope to meet more of you along the way.

In union,

Kim Delaney, Women's Advisor

The snow is falling outside, and at last I have time to update you all on the latest happenings with the NFU in Ontario. Along with the first snow of the season, came the annual National Convention, held this year in London, Ontario. Almost 200 NFU members from across Canada attended and it proved to be not only interesting, educational, and inspirational, but also really fun. I'm only slightly embarrassed to admit that the three days I spent in London were probably the most social as well as most sleep-deprived I've had since the beginning of this growing season. I met a number of fascinating farmers who continue to work for positive change in Canadian agriculture: fighting to maintain the family farm; promote local food in their communities; and raise the profile of food and farming issues across the country.

The convention theme this year was "Food and Democracy: Reclaiming Food Sovereignty", and with such an important theme, I couldn't help but wish that more young people could have been there to hear about it...after all, we are the future of farming and if anyone is going to reclaim our food sovereignty it's going to be us.

It's no secret that the average age of farmers is old (no offence intended) and getting older, so it is even more important that those of us young people choosing to make a life out of farming, get together to support each other and carry on the work of the NFU.

The Youth Caucus met on the Friday of the convention and there are some great plans in the works for the upcoming year including some NFU Youth gatherings and a more informative website. In Ontario there are also some exciting developments on the horizon in terms of programs designed to encourage and support young farmers in the province. Stay tuned for more information...

I'll end this update with an important request. If you are a young farmer, if you want to be a young farmer, if you know a young farmer, if you're a farmer with kids, or if you're a young person concerned with food and farming issues, then please get in touch.

In Union, Caitlin Hall

Via Campesina, December update by Allan Slater, Region 3 IPC representative

2008 is going to be an exciting year for the involvement of NFU with our global partners through La Via Campesina.

The first of these events will occur in late April in Region 3, Ontario. NFU will be hosting the regional meeting of Via Campesina, which includes USA, Mexico and Canada. This meeting will be held in Southern Ontario. About 20 people, including delegates and translators will need an appropriate place to meet. We may have visitors who will be available to do some public speaking. Funding for this event is badly needed. If there are locals who have extra money that would like to support this meeting please contact our International Programme Committee coordinator, Martha Robbins as soon as possible. Several Mexican groups have already found money to host these events. Now it is our turn, so let's find the resources to give these delegates a warm welcome. Start now to think about suitable meeting places and just how speakers from overseas could be utilized. Martha Robbins can be reached at robbins@nfu.ca.

Watch future issues of this newsletter for updates — Allan

Renfrew County Takes up the Challenge

The recent National Convention held in London challenged all locals in Ontario and throughout Canada to send a message regarding the plight of beef and hog farmers and the need for immediate relief from both governments.

On Monday following convention a fax was sent off to the Hon. Gerry Ritz and Agriculture critics Wayne Easter M.P., Alex Atamanenko M.P. and Andre Belavance M.P.. The fax briefly outlined the severity of the financial crisis and its effect on local cattle and hog farmers and the rural community at large. It requested immediate relief up to cost of production for the affected producers and warned that inaction would cause a continued loss of beef and hog producers and the ultimate destruction of the family farm.

A related fax was sent to local M.P. Cheryl Gallant and M.P.P. John Yakabuski urging them to review the provided information and continue to speak on behalf of their farm constituents. M.P.P. John Yakabuski was thanked for his recent visits to three area farmers and his letter of support addressed to the Hon. Leona Dombrowsky urging her to take action.

In another related action, Renfrew County adapted a National NFU news release outlining the plight of an Alberta hog farmer and his \$2.34 received for a 700lb cull animal. We incorporated it into a letter to the editor, signed by president Dave Mackay and submitted it to area newspapers in order to further explain the market collapse to the community at large.

Renfrew County urges other locals to similar actions. "It is important to keep the issue in front of both our elected officials and the public at large," said Renfrew President Dave Mackay.

The Challenge of Food Sovereignty

In the fall of 2007 Renfrew County, in partnership with neighboring local Leeds/Greenville, developed a mail in card campaign encouraging the public to put their support behind food sovereignty. The card was addressed to the Hon. Gerry Ritz M.P., federal Minister of Agriculture. Made available at the International Plowing Match, the card asked the question, "Do you want a food system that is safe and nutritious for your families?". The mail in portion stated, "We strongly urge your government to adopt policies which promote environmentally sustainable policies that restore economic justice for family farms in Canada". These cards are available in electronic and paper versions and we encourage you to set a goal to connect with the public on this issue. Every card received by the Minister of Agriculture will make a difference.

Upcoming Federal Election

Renfrew County has already scheduled meetings with federal candidates in preparation for an upcoming federal election. In January, kitchen table meetings are planned for both Liberal and Green Party candidates. A prepared discussion document is prepared for these meetings and serves as the basis of the discussion and provides take away information.

For more information or to receive copies of the Renfrew releases or other documents contact Local Secretary Lauretta Rice at 613-649-8211 or contact Joan Brady at the member services office at jbrady@hay.net or 519-237-3163.