

Lanark: Grant Robertson, NFU-Ontario Coordinator will be speaking about "The Farming Crisis" on **Thursday, Feb. 28th at 7:00pm at the Lanark Civitan Hall.** For more info., call 613-259-5757.

Grey County: Join members for a regular evening meeting on **March 10th, in Markdale, 7:30 pm - 10 pm, at Grey Gables** (ground level back door to boardroom). John Riddell and Suzanne Weiss of Toronto will make a presentation. They are members of the "Venezuela We Are With You Coalition". They will focus their talk around farming issues, the cooperative movement in Venezuela and what lessons there are for us in Grey Bruce. For more information, contact Rae MacIntyre 519-376-0859. On **March 28th, Grey/Bruce CFFO invites NFU members to participate in an all day workshop in Elmwood.** The day will include the topics of Food Sovereignty in the morning and Local Food in the afternoon. Contact Rae for more information.

Brant/Wentworth: Members of Brant and Wentworth counties are invited to an information and organizing meeting. The meeting is to be held on **March 11, 7:30pm at the Copetown Community Hall at Hwy 59 & Hwy 99, Copetown.** The meeting will include a speaker on Local Food and discussions on organizing a Brant/Wentworth Local of the NFU. For more information, contact Ted Shelegy at 519-446-1824.

Huron County AGM to be held on **March 13 at OMAFRA office in Clinton at 7:30 pm.** Brian and Gisele Ireland, former coordinators of the Queens Bush Ministries Help Line, will share their experience and offer suggestions for navigating through tough times. Also invited are Tony and Fran McQuail to present a brief overview on Holistic Management as a decision-making alternative. For more info., Call Tony McQuail at 519-528-2493.

Lambton County AGM: Lambton Local will hold their AGM on **March 20 at 6 pm at the Wyoming Legion, 493 Erie St., Wyoming.** Join them for a catered dinner (dinner to start at 6:30 pm) and guest speaker (to be announced). Dinner tickets are \$7.00. For more information and tickets, contact Mac Brown at 519-844-2024 or Tammy Van Troost at 519-864-0939. Lambton Local's next **regular Information Meeting will be held on April 15 at the Brigden Community Church,** Hwy. 80, Brigden at 7:30 pm.

Kent County AGM: Planning is underway for an AGM to be held sometime in March. Notices of the upcoming meeting will be sent to the membership. For more info., contact Ed Cikatricis Ph: 519-674-3190.

Prescott/Russell; Stormont/Dundas/Glengarry; Ottawa: Planning is underway for an **AGM to be held the week of March 18-26.** Speaker and location to be determined. Please look for a mailed invitation and public announcements in the farm publications for more details or call Christine Estermann Ph: 613-538-2331 or Marlyn O'Conner Ph: 613-989-2652. Members are encouraged to bring forward resolutions to send to the Regional AGM on April 05.

Renfrew County AGM: Renfrew County NFU will hold their **AGM on Wednesday, April 2nd at 7:30 pm at the Sacred Heart Church Hall, Cobden, Ontario.** Guest speaker will be Grant Robertson, NFU Regional Coordinator. For more info., contact Laretta Rice at 613-649-8211 or Dave MacKay at 613-256-2361.

Leeds/Grenville: will hold their **AGM on Thursday, April 3rd at 12:30pm, Athens Restaurant in Athens.** Guest speaker: Grant Robertson, NFU Regional Coordinator. For more info., contact Jim Earl at 613-359-5164.

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 found on newsletter insert.

ATTENTION SIMCOE, DUFFERIN AND NIAGARA MEMBERS: Plans are underway for information meetings in your areas. Contact Joan Brady at the Member Services Office (519-237-3163) if you would like to participate in the organizing of an official County Local in your areas.



NFU in Ontario Newsletter

SPRING 2008

Regional Coordinator's Report.

I want to thank all of you for re-joining the NFU this year. Your continued support is vital to the struggle for economic dignity for farmers. The NFU is growing and as we do, we are able to make the voice of family farmers heard more strongly in the halls of power.

For those of you who are receiving our newsletter for the first time as new members – welcome and thank you. You are definitely not alone in choosing the NFU this year. We are a grassroots organization so please make your voice heard and participate where and when you can. The stronger the participation the stronger and more powerful our voice becomes.

For those of you who are, or have participated as Local Executive members, thank you for your continued leadership and the time you take away from your farms and families. We know it is rewarding work, but we are all busy and the commitment you show to make things better for us all is both commendable and personally awe inspiring.

I have had the real honour to visit some locals since the last newsletter. It is amazing the smarts, commitment and dedication I see everywhere I go. Whether I am in Eastern Ontario, on my own home turf in the Southwest or somewhere in between I am always struck by how similar our members are. They are funny, smart, understand and see the connections between issues, and are dedicated to trying to do something about them no matter where I go. It can be hard work getting away from the farm to go visit Locals but the people I have met have always made the trip worth it.

The NFU Council has been, as usual, quite busy working on issues that affect us all.

The NFU was the first farm organization to recognize the inherent problems in the recent aid package announced by the provincial government for beef, pork and horticultural producers. It is a package that unfairly penalizes those who have diversified farm operations and needs to be changed immediately. However, unlike another general farm organization we did not just find this unfairness puzzling, we went to government to point out the problems and ask for changes. But once again that other farm organization brought up the rear following the NFU lead on this issue, just as they have on a number of others, from local food initiatives to finally recognizing that one of the goals of a general farm organization should be to advocate and fight for farmers' need to make a living from farming.

On another note, you may have noticed that there is some talk of a fee increase for joining the General Farm Organizations (GFOs). The Ontario Regional Council of the NFU is not supporting this drive. We believe with so many farmers working off the farm just to pay the bills, this is a bad time to be asking for such a thing. It may come to pass that with increased costs for everything since 1992, some future Council may believe such an increase is warranted. However, we will start our process up front with members and leave it to members to decide, not cook up a back room deal somewhere. At this time though, look for the NFU to not support this change.

We have an Ontario convention coming up in April. If you have never attended, they are interesting, informative and fun, plus this is where policy gets decided for the NFU Council to follow. Plan to attend – you will be very glad you did.

All the best, Grant Robertson

Northern Ontario finally has an organized local for 2008! A small organizational meeting was held at our farm in December, and we were able to elect an executive. Our executive is all located within an hour's drive of our farm in Lavigne, so we would like to establish some informal dialogue with members from other areas of the North so that we can be up to speed on any issues that develop in those communities, and better represent all of our members in the north. We hope to service those members by having small kitchen table-type meetings in those areas. So if you would like to volunteer to formally or informally help out NFU-O North, or if you would like to host a kitchen table meeting, please email or give me a call!

We also discussed a buying club for our members for some general farm inputs like baler twine. If you are interested in participating in the buying club to save your farm a few dollars, please give me a call.

NFU-O North recently represented its members at the "Growing Forward Consultations" held in Sudbury early in February. Hah! Consultations does not seem to be the right word because we were left with the impression that the previous round of consultations on APF II fell on deaf ears...so once again we re-iterated the need for a focus on the profitability of farmers.

For 2008, NFU-O North would like to work at getting itself established and more widely-known in our community. We look forward to meeting the northern NFU members, finding out what the issues are, and what our actions should be. We look forward to connecting with you.

Dave Lewington, President, NFU-O North
Phone: 705-594-1834
dalew@phonenet.ca

CHICKEN UPDATE

Chicken Farmers of Ontario (CFO) currently has its new regulation for small flocks posted on its website www.cfo.on.ca. There is a question and answer document, as well as the actual regulation. Regulation 2150-2008 appears to contradict the question and answer document in many ways, one of which is the need for application to be an exempt grower. Currently, CFO is saying that you do not need to apply ahead of time, that you simply fill out form 300 when you purchase your chicks. Another discrepancy is on advertising - the actual regulation does not mention anything about advertising, yet the question and answer document says that no advertising is allowed beyond the farm gate. I have brought these questions and others to the attention of CFO staff but it has been extremely difficult to get responses. Staff turnover appears to be a problem for CFO of late.

It has been mentioned in Ontario Farmer that non-white rock meat birds may move to a licensing system instead of requiring quota. As of yet, NFU has received no indication from CFO that this is under consideration. However, the Ontario Broiler Hatching Egg and Chick Commission recently sent a letter to all Ontario Broker Dealers (for chicks, i.e. your local feed store you purchase chicks from) stating that after discussion with CFO they would like to clarify that only chicks sold for meat should be reported on form 1B. Considering that the NFU has worked for the past 5 years trying to lobby CFO for a better system for small flocks it is disappointing that we have not been kept more up to date on these discussions around small flock exemptions, or been consulted on a regular basis. Perhaps we can hope for better communication in the near future.

Dave Lewington, Chair of NFU Poultry Committee

One of NFU Renfrew County's mandates is to connect with non-agricultural community groups in order to share their insight on farm issues and how these same issues affect the non-farming public. Much synergy and support has occurred over the years and these community groups have become a strong voice of support to all levels of government. Following is an excerpt from a letter that NFU Renfrew President, Dave McKay, received from a member of the **Social Justice Network**.

Please convey my gratitude to the members to the Renfrew County National Farmers Union for their kind Christmas wishes. You all do such inspiring work and I am happy whenever I can support your endeavors. Thank you so very much! Since I began my work in research and writing on social and economic in justice, I have learned so much about the debt we owe to the people I consider Canada's unsung heroes - our Canadian Farmers! I give a donation each year to the National Farmers Union Foundation to help further their work. I am praying for Percy Schmeiser who, as you probably know, is in court again with Monsanto today! It was so encouraging that he and Louise won the Alternate Nobel Prize. They received this honour in the Swiss Parliament on December 7. Percy also addressed the European Parliament in December.

I think with all the scares, people are getting about unsafe food, they are becoming more conscious of the importance of buying locally. It is long past time for this important issue to come to the front burner.

—Sr. Catherine Fairbairn, Social Justice Network

Another project within the community presently undertaken by Renfrew NFU is the distribution of the Food Sovereignty mail-in cards. Recently, a farmer-member spoke in a local school classroom for Career Day. Following his positive presentation, a knowledgeable teacher approached him for more information about the Farm Crisis. The end result was that 30 teachers signed and sent cards to the Minister of Agriculture urging him to focus policy and effort on a Food Sovereign Canada. NFU Renfrew urges other Locals to make community connections, and encourages them to circulate the Food Sovereignty mail-in cards. For more information about the Food Sovereignty mail in cards or any other details about the project contact Laurretta Rice at 613-649-8211 or Joan Brady at the NFU membership office at 519-237-3163.

NFU/CBAN/EFAO Education Project

As described in the September 2007 newsletter, the education project to create new resources for farmers and consumers on genetic engineering has made considerable progress. The Factsheet for farmers, entitled "**Farm Update Genetically Modified Crops in Ontario**", was completed in time for the Guelph Organic Conference in late January. The well-written 4-page document includes definitions and descriptions of the technology, the affects of GM crops on farmers, and a discussion of the regulatory process. This Factsheet is now available from the member services office.

The next stage is the development of a Factsheet for urban consumers about farming. It will offer updated information about genetic engineering similar to the Farm Update, but targeted to the specific audience. It will be made available at public events such as Fairs, the Plowing Match, and Farmers Markets. As these resources are being developed, there is an opportunity for NFU members to offer critique and input to the draft documents. If you feel that you would like to participate in this process, contact Joan Brady.

The final stage of the process is: **Events in Rural Ontario**, to offer a forum for discussion and information-sharing on genetic engineering and related issues; and **Events in Urban Ontario**, to offer city folk a chance to hear about genetic engineering and challenges in farming directly from local farmers.

*NFU Local 301 invites
you to join them at...*

TOTAL HEALTH 08 SLOW: BEYOND ORGANIC

Sponsored by the Consumer Health Organization of Canada, the Total Health Show is in its 31st year. This year's event will be held on April 18-20 at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. The show attracts an average of 20,000 attendees each year, including many health professionals, and in general a sophisticated and educated audience.

This year's focus is devoted to the SLOW MOVEMENT, a cultural shift towards slowing down the pace of life. It advocates replacing the Fast Food culture with Slow Food, enjoying regional produce and traditional foods, often grown organically. Such a lifestyle preserves agricultural biodiversity, provides the pleasure of eating with a global conscience and returns people to a simpler and calmer way of life.

Organizers have invited groups that represent farm and environmental issues and that provide opportunities for public engagement to exhibit at the show for a reduced fee. Local 301 from the counties of Haldimand/Norfolk/SE Oxford recognized the value of meaningful contact with the public and attended Total Health 07. Attendees flocked to the booth to learn more about the issues and signed petitions in support of our efforts against the CFIA's 'seed modernization initiative' as well as a petition that asked the government to examine the farm income crisis and its root cause of corporate concentration.

Consumers were excited to be able to speak with a bona fide farmer and many were well educated on the issues and challenges we as primary producers often face. Others were astounded at the lack of farmer power in the market place and the consistent effort required to challenge government and industry on their self-focused mandates. Often, the leading question was "Where do I find a farmer", with the purpose of connecting with a local source for their food.

The reaction of booth volunteers was unanimous: they felt that they had made many worthwhile connections, some of which resulted in associate membership, and all of which helped eaters understand where their food should come from.

Local 301 has once again committed to sponsoring a booth for the event. Volunteers are needed to share exhibit duties. Any NFU members or associate members in Toronto and neighboring areas are encouraged to participate. It will be a chance to interact with a very interested audience. For more information about the show check out www.consumerhealth.org. For more information about attending on behalf of the NFU, contact Joan Brady at the membership office - 519-237-3163.

SEE THE NFU AT THESE UPCOMING FARM SHOWS AND EVENTS

Seedy Sunday—March 2, 2008, 10am-3pm, Marguerite Centre, Pembroke

East Central Farm Show—March 5 & 6 2008, at the new Exhibition Building, Lindsay Fairgrounds

Western Fair Farm Show—March 5 to 7, 2008, Western Fair Grounds, London

Ottawa Valley Farm Show—March 11 to 13, 2008, Landsdowne Park, Ottawa

Sustainable Living Synopsis—March 29, 2008, Loyalist College, Belleville

Chesley AgriFair—April 8 & 9, 2008, Chesley Arena, Chesley

The Total Health ShoW—Slow:Beyond Organic—April 18 to 20, 2008, Metro Toronto Convention Centre, 225 Front St. W., Toronto

The snow keeps piling up outside, but my planning for the growing season is already in full gear. The annual Guelph Organic Conference held in January acts as the kick-off to my gardening season, and this year the conference, of which the NFU-O is a sponsor, was inspiring as always. In addition to chatting with a number of interesting people at the NFU display, I also had the opportunity to present at a workshop entitled the "New Farmer's Forum: Starting Up a Sustainable, Profitable Farm Business". There was a great turn-out to this workshop with standing room only. The great attendance reinforced my belief that we need to involve more of these young people in decision-making about agricultural policy that will one day be affecting them.

In addition to the typical seed orders and greenhouse warm-up that have gotten underway since the conference, this year I am also participating in a business planning course geared towards new farmers. Farmers Growing Farmers is a pilot program that aims to connect new farmers with more experienced farmers as well as with others involved in the food system and in the fields of business and financial planning. Upon completion of the 10 week course, I will have a

completed business plan, and will be eligible for start-up grants through the program as well as access to various farmer mentors in my fields of interest. Farmers Growing Farmers is being held at Everdale Environmental Learning Centre in Hillsburgh, ON, and an overview of the program is available on the web at <http://everdale.org/growingfarmers/>.

A program such as this one that acknowledges the important role that experienced farmers play in encouraging and assisting new farmers and compensates them for their work as educators is an important development. It is one that may pave the way for a variety of inter-generational collaborations that ensure the survival of the small family farm.

If you would like more information about Farmers Growing Farmers or other exciting developments for young farmers in Ontario, please get in touch. We are hoping that this information will also be available through our website, once it has been reconfigured.

In Union, Caitlin Hall

519-820-1891

hallcaitlin@gmail.com

Farmers Growing Farmers is a pilot program that aims to connect new farmers with more experienced farmers.

Elgin County Local Organized

On February 11, five Elgin county NFU members stepped forward to sit on the inaugural executive and begin the process of building the area Local. There are almost 50 members in Elgin County and an organized Local will allow them to work in the county and have a voice at regional and national levels. John Weninger who farms south of Alymer, Chris Dancey of Malahide, Remi Vandeslyke and Tom Benner, both of Straffordville, and youth member Melissa Benner who presently lives in the GTA all committed to the organizing efforts. Although executive positions have not been determined, the group will meet in March to plan the next steps.

Monday night's meeting was well attended by folks interested in both the speaker on marketing opportunities for farmers and in seeing another NFU Local organized. Joe Dama attended on behalf of Regional Council and encouraged the group to start the process. Recognizing the many commitments of the volunteer executive, he stated that making connections with members would soon allow the group to focus on the necessary issues and involve the membership in the efforts of the Elgin County NFU.

Recently I attended a board meeting of the Farm Line on behalf of NFU and was pleased to learn that provincial funding has been allocated to this essential not-for-profit rural organization. The Farm Line is a crisis line which provides support for Ontario farmers and rural families in need of help. Trained volunteers provide peer support and referrals on agricultural issues ranging from financial to legal to personal, family and mental health. The funding will be used to enhance existing telephone support services and to provide volunteer staff with additional training and resources. Some of the monies will be targeted to develop organizational and strategic plans for strengthening the Farm Line. The NFU has been a supporter of the Farm Line since its inception and continues to provide financial support as well as representation on the board. The Farm Line can be reached by phone at 1-888-451-2903 or on line at www.thefarmline.ca.

April 5th is the date of the NFU Region 3 (Ontario) Convention/AGM, and I thought that this would be a good time to have a lunch-time women's meeting. It can be difficult to get together face-to-face since we are so spread out. Convention provides an opportunity for us to meet to discuss and prioritize issues that we would

like to work on in the upcoming year. I would also like to further discuss the idea of collecting and publishing the life stories of farm women, past and present. I always find these stories so inspiring. When I am over-burdened with work, I think of the past struggles of farm women and of the difficulty young people have getting into farming today and then I appreciate my farm, my work and my community even more. When I wrote about the Elders project in the last newsletter I had offers of help to get this project going.

The NFU International Program Committee will be hosting a meeting of La Via Campesina International Women's Commission on April 22-24, 2008 at Loyola House in Guelph. There may be an opportunity to dialogue with these women either by sitting in as observers to the meeting or at a social evening with NFU members. The details and protocols are not yet determined but I will keep you posted. If this connection with international women interests you, please contact me.

Finally, I would like to discuss the possibility of planning a women's get-together. You know, camping, bonfires, food, talk and planning actions. Let me know your thoughts and together we will make it happen.

In Union, Kim Delaney

Food Freedom Day at the Food Bank—Essex County

Various farm groups in Essex County celebrated Food Freedom Day, Feb. 07, by handing out cheques to 6 area food banks. Farmers were looking for a way to communicate with the public about Food Freedom Day, the day in the year that on average Canadian Consumers have earned enough money to cover annual food expenses. Canadian consumers spend on average 10.5% of their personal disposable income on food purchases. In many parts of the world the cost of food is significantly higher.

Sixteen Hundred dollars in total was donated by Essex County's three GFOs and a number of commodity groups to be divided equally among the food banks. Essex NFU Local President Corey Versnel stated that "It was important to get the message out about Food Freedom Day and helping the food banks was a positive way to do it. The food banks were very pleased to have the resources during a time when donations are less frequent."

Further conversations with the food banks are planned to discuss the possibility of produce donations by the many area vegetable growers. An area business had donated cash with the stipulation that local food should be purchased. Food banks don't usually accept perishable donations due to the difficulty in handling and storage. Grower groups suggested that certain vegetables did lend well to the specific food bank conditions. Efforts to identify them and to suggest handling systems are currently underway.

- by *Allan Slater, Region 3 (Ontario) IPC Representative*

Remember all those promises I made about exiting things to come in this space. Via Campesina is coming to Region 3. Via Campesina is a world wide organization of small farmers. In Canada our NFU and Quebec based Union Paysanne are members of Via Campesina. All around the world Via Campesina has a reputation for supporting food sovereignty, land reform, human rights, and just treatment of indigenous people while opposing unrestricted trade deals like the NAFTA.

The International Women's Commission of Via Campesina will be meeting at Loyola House in Guelph from April 22 to 24. Then from April 25 to 30 the North American Regional meeting will be held in the Ottawa area. This is when we will really have an opportunity to meet some of these visitors. We have some funding to have two of the Mexican visitors, one man and one woman to speak at three public events immediately after that meeting. The Lanark Local has already expressed some interest in hosting an event. It is our hope that other locals south and west of there would organize two other events in days after that. The focus could be on Food Sovereignty or NAFTA and the impacts of trade or Biodiversity..., the topics are relatively open but advanced notice would allow our speakers to prepare a timely and interesting message.

This is a great opportunity for NFU to host these groups and we want to be the most gracious possible. To be blunt, we need more money to accomplish that. We need additional money for posters, advertising, snacks and coffee. Perhaps locals could think about local snacks and food along with Fair Trade coffee. Additional contributions as follows are required to meet NFU's commitment to the project.

<u>Contributions to the Budget:</u>	\$600.00 Room rentals for public events
	\$500.00 Food and lodging for international guests
	\$650.00 Translation
	TOTAL NFU contribution to public events: \$1750.00

If your local has any money that could be spared to assist it would be greatly appreciated. Please send cheques to the national office, and designate them to be used by the International Programme Committee.

Allan Slater - 519-354-2200 - baslater@quadro.net

New Tobacco Alliance Committee UPDATE

The New Tobacco Alliance Committee, a joint committee of the local Landowners and National Farmers Union #301, had an Information up-date meeting at the Community Centre in Langton on February 21, at 7:30. We reported the progress relating to possible legal action for Tobacco Farmers. This was the last open meeting and a chance for interested Farmers to ask questions about joining the Alliance. The next meetings will be for members only and will be closed to the public. If you want a detailed legal opinion on how to protect your tobacco quota value or to take legal action for damages you need to be a member of NTAC. It appears that TAAP participants should also consider joining NTAC. Our initial membership fee will pay for the legal opinion. The members will then decide on the action to pursue at a future closed meeting. Only members will be represented in any future legal action. We do not anticipate any class action at this point. For more information email us at ntac@live.ca or call 519-842-8865.