



United Apart: NFU-O Convention and AGM goes virtual

In February, the NFU-O held its first-ever virtual annual general meeting and convention. So this year, instead of crowding into a banquet hall or community centre, the membership gathered on a Zoom line, over the course of two days, from the comfort of their own home. This year's theme was "Land, Labour, Laws: From Policy to Practise," and we were pleased to welcome Jane Rabinowicz, executive director of SeedChange, as our keynote speaker.

Jane's presentation focused on the work of SeedChange, contextualizing a global movement of farmers fighting for justice, health and sustainability, as well as work with Farmers for Climate Solutions, of which SeedChange and the National Farmers Union are founding members. Her presentation sparked a dynamic discussion about seed sovereignty, corporate greenwashing, and centering producer voices in conversations about how to mitigate the effects of climate change.

The NFU-O partnered up with the Ontario Farmland Trust to deliver the first of three panel discussions, "Land-Linking 2021," on Thursday afternoon. This webinar was the culmination of our winter 2021 Land-linking and Farmland Conservation series, so we first heard reports of the key takeaways from our workshops with land-seeking students, youth, and with BIPOC farmers. We were then excited to welcome several land-holders and who shared about their search for successors and land partners.

In the summer of 2020, the NFU-O, in partnership with Gravel Watch, engaged a McMaster University student to map aggregate extraction on prime farmland. Our second panel discussion explored how we can use the current data to engage planners and local groups about the risks aggregate extraction poses to food



sustainability and healthy communities. We heard from a number of panelists who enriched our understanding of how aggregate extraction affects each of their regions uniquely and who inspired an enthusiastic exchange between attendees about how collective action can be used to protect natural land features that support wildlife and defend against the effects of climate change, like soil erosion.

In our final panel discussion we heard from the NFU-O Farm Labour Project team about the trends they were seeing in the data they collected from farm owners and farm workers over the past year. Attendees got a glimpse of the employment landscape on sustainable farms across Ontario and explored best management practices, policy initiatives, and community connections meant to attract, develop, and retain the farm

leaders of tomorrow. The full report being produced from the over 700 responses we received from farm operators and labourers across the province will be released in the spring of 2021.

Members also heard reports from Council on provincial and national work, elected leadership, and voted on resolutions.

We couldn't meet in person but not even a global pandemic could keep NFU-O farmers from as far north as Pass Lake to as far south as Pelee Island, from joining (virtually) together to commemorate and commiserate on this historic year. We look forward to brighter days where we can gather together under one roof again, but until then we're excited about the opportunities virtual meetings offer to bring to more NFU-O members together at this time where it's important to stay apart.

Coming Events

Local 340 Waterloo/Wellington — Local 340 will be holding meetings on the first Tuesday of every month via Zoom. Anyone interested in attending should reach out to Local President Caitlin Hall (hallcaitlin@gmail.com)

A subscription to The Rural Voice is one of the benefits of being an NFU-O member