



## Come together, right now, over Zoom: NFU-O AGM and Convention recapped

In the first days of March, the NFU-O held its second virtual Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Convention. While the days of gathering in-person for convention are dearly missed, we were excited that the two-day online format allowed for more delegates, members, and visitors from across the province to participate. This year's theme was "Deeply Rooted," and we were pleased to welcome Dr. Priscilla Settee, David Suzuki Fellow and Professor at the University of Saskatchewan, to deliver the keynote address.

Though the focus of Dr. Settee's presentation was her research documenting the impact of western development on Indigenous traditional economies and food producing capabilities, as she spoke she transported us beyond Canadian borders. As we gathered around our computer screens, Dr. Settee's discussion took us from the trapping communities in northern Saskatchewan to the regeneration of coral reefs off the coast of Kenya, from the plights of land rights defenders in South America to the success of the farmer protests in India. Such a global perspective is necessary because, as Dr. Settee reminded us "the problems that beset some of us beset all of us. We are all connected."

Dr. Settee's presentation skillfully interrogated the political and economic systems that fail to create solid safety networks and social supports for our most vulnerable populations, while finding hope in grassroots movements that act as powerful feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial forces for change.

Paraphrasing Marshall McLuhan, Dr. Settee concluded her presentation by recalling that "...on this earth ship, we are all crew, none are passengers".

The NFU-O partnered, once again, with the Ontario Farmland Trust to

deliver the first of three panel discussions, "Land-Linking 2022: What We've Learned," on Thursday afternoon. This webinar was the culmination of our winter 2022 Land-linking and Farmland Conservation series. We heard first from Sunil Puri, the NFU-O's Land-Linking & Young Farmer Support Specialist, who reported on the landscape of land-linking in Ontario and some key takeaways from our workshop series in February & November. We then welcomed Semir Abdul (a hopeful land-seeker), Marshall Buchanan (a land-holder and successful land partner who manages Moonlight Crofters Farm), and Chadwick Lewis (a new farm business operator of Urban Fresh Produce).

Building resilient and sustainable farms requires an ability to mitigate and cope with the unpredictability of climate change-induced droughts and other extreme weather events. Never has that been more evident to us, perhaps, than in the 2021 growing season when we saw intense heat and lack of rain wither crops, pastures, livestock feed, orchards, and vegetable fields and dry up water supplies across BC, the Prairies, and in western and northern Ontario. In our second panel, "Cultivating Climate Resilience in Farming" we heard from Rav Singh (Shade of Miti Farm), Laura Fash (Salt & Harrow Farm), and Ken Laing (Orchard Hill Farm), who shared both their solutions to mitigating and working with the realities of climate change on their farms and also their approaches to aligning their farm business operations with their values as concerned global citizens.

In our final panel discussion, "Learning Together: Land Sharing & Co-Farming", we were grateful to be joined by Jenn Pfenning (Pfenning Farm) and Clarence Cachagee who spoke to us about Chachagee's land-based healing initiative Crow Shield

Lodge, on the Pfenning Farm property. Clarence & Jenn spoke about the early days of their project and the fateful email that brought them together, what their partnership looks like now, alternative ways for conceptualizing land ownership, and the lessons they've learned from working within the constraints of municipal legislation.

Members also heard reports from Council on provincial and national work, debated and voted on policy resolutions, and elected new leadership to the Regional Council.

After two years on the Board, serving as a Councillor-At-Large and the NFU-O Board Treasurer, Max Hansgen of Lanark, Ontario was acclaimed as the National Farmers Union - Ontario President and NFU Region 3 Coordinator. Also acclaimed to the NFU-O Board and NFU Region 3 Council were:

- Rav Singh (Mississauga, ON) as Youth Advisor
- Claire Poulton (Bright, ON) as Women's Advisor
- Orlando Martín López Gómez, (Toronto, ON) as the first-ever BIPOC Advisor
- Jennifer Osborn (Aytton, ON) as a National Board member
- Ken Bassindale (Selkirk, ON) as a Councillor-at-large

Brendan Grant (Pass Lake, ON), and Roger Rivest (Tilbury, ON) will continue on the Board in the second year of their terms.

We want to thank all of our 114 AGM and Convention attendees for your participation, your passion, and your patience. Thank you for listening, for asking questions, and for sharing your opinions. We're counting the days until we can come together under one roof again, but until then we're so grateful for our NFU-O community that can make gathering in a virtual Zoom room feel like gathering around a kitchen table.

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