

***Farmers
Working
For
Farmers***

**A brief history of the
Ontario Federation of Agriculture**

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INTRODUCTION

I am deeply indebted to the many individuals who were prepared to share ideas, offer advice, suggest sources of information or who fanned my enthusiasm for this project.

In preparing this history, I have borrowed liberally from some of the early writers of the agrarian reform movement since little original documentation of that period was readily available. I am also thankful for the variety of little gems of information covering later periods of history which I was also able to unearth.

The farm movement in Canada has a rich and varied history. Unfortunately, as a recent writer noted: "For their pains, they have been rewarded with a neglect by historians that is strange in a country so obsessed with its origins." (1)

Hopefully, this small effort will make a modest contribution toward rectifying some of that neglect.

PREFACE

Anniversaries are opportunities to celebrate by reflecting on our past and to look at our futures. So it is on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

It has been an impressive fifty years of service to the farmers and citizens of Ontario – indeed Canada. Although the Ontario Federation of Agriculture was founded 50 years ago, its roots go back much before that to men and women who were concerned about the well being of the agricultural industry and, specifically, the plight of the agricultural producer.

Those men and women were a very special band of people with a keen sense of purpose and a real vision for their industry and their way of life.

Among them were individuals who were to become household names across this province. Many of these same men and women became active in a variety of political and social causes. Indeed, one of them was to become the first woman elected to Parliament in Canada.

In reading through minutes, speeches and clippings going back to the early part of this century, one cannot help but marvel at the courage, conviction and perseverance of these hardy souls and to be thankful for the commitment which has brought the Ontario Federation of Agriculture to this key point in its own history.

OFA's 50th anniversary is a time to reflect and a time to rededicate ourselves to those historic ideals.

It is a time to pull together. The need for a strong and united farm organization has probably never been more critical than it is at present.

It may be appropriate to quote a short poem which was used as the theme for the silver jubilee of the United Farmers of Ontario in 1939. Although somewhat dated, the message remains as important as ever.

Pulling Together

by Patience Strong

*Pulling together they break the rough soil;
Moving in unity – sharing the toil...
Rhythm of muscle, of harness and chain;
Pulling together and taking the strain.
Oh, the great work men could do on this earth!
Oh, the achievements of grandeur and worth –
We could accomplish if we, like the team –
Would each do our bit in perfecting the scheme
If all made an effort and nobody shirked –
Their jobs and their duties – and everyone worked –
and did their own tasks with a glad willing heart
Pulling together instead of apart. (2)*

Happy Birthday OFA. May you serve for many years to come!

Harry Zwerver, June 1986

Chapter I

From Neglect to Democracy

Dissent, Frustration and Co-operation

BEGINNINGS

The history of the farm organization movement in Ontario can be roughly divided into four time periods. The first of these consists of events prior to the founding of the United Farmers' Organization in 1913. This is followed by the almost frenetic farm movement and agrarian reform activities from 1914 to the early 1930s. The third period spans from the mid 1930s and the actual founding of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture into the mid 1960s; while the last period covers the more recent reorganization of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture in 1969 to the present.

It has often been suggested that the origins of the farmers' movement in Canada could be found in the problems experienced by farmers in Western Canada in the marketing of grain and the purchasing of machinery. (3)

However, many years before the development of the prairie grain growers' associations, farmers' groups in Ontario were actively engaged in discussing the problems and developments of the agriculture industry.

The problems and challenges of the first settlers in Upper Canada demanded exceeding resourcefulness and unusual dedication in order to carve out of the wilderness a new way of life. Although independent and tending to be self-reliant, "...they found that what they could not do on their own could be done through co-operation with their neighbors. Their early co-operation took the form of 'bees' for raising their buildings and harvesting their crops." (4)

They soon began to recognize the importance of considering the broader needs of their industry, being concerned with production as well as the marketing of their products.

The first of these co-operative organizations in Eastern Canada, in the latter part of the Eighteenth Century, came to be known as "Agricultural Societies", modelled after similar groups in Great Britain and the United States. Their primary focus was the sharing of technical agricultural information in order to improve production. Exhibitions of products were held and this eventually led to the custom of having annual County Fairs. In fact, the first of these Agriculture Societies in Ontario was organized, with the assistance of Governor Simcoe in 1791. (5) The level of activity and involvement by farmers in these endeavours varied tremendously from area to area.

A subsequent movement in both Upper and Lower Canada was the establishment of "Farmers' Clubs." These were fairly informal gatherings of ten to twenty farmers meeting to discuss agricultural issues within a broadly-based socio-political context. One of the most effective of these clubs in Ontario was the Markham Farmers' Club which had lengthy monthly meetings to discuss topics of current interest. In some cases these clubs also practised co-operative buying. (6)

Meanwhile, it had not taken many years for Upper Canada to be "transformed from a frontier settlement into a thriving agrarian economy – Farming was a commercial activity and farmers' fortunes were substantially influenced by the economic events of the day." (7) Farmers felt the need to become more actively involved in those events.

The Order of The Grange

In 1867, the Order of the Grange was established in the United States to address the social and economic concerns of the farmers. It was a 'secret order' confined to agriculturalists, modelled after the Freemasons and Oddfellows. It was unique in the recognition of women in its membership and organization.

The Grange entered Ontario in 1874 and within two years had declared its independence from the parent organization in the United States. Its rise was mercurial. By 1879, it consisted of 766 locals with a membership of approximately 31,000.

Its basic philosophical position was spelled out in the Grange manual:

“Since God created the earth, agriculture has existed; there is no occupation that preceded it; no organization can rank with the tillers of the soil. Before literature existed, before governments were known, agriculture was the first calling of man.”
(8)

The Grange sponsored large picnics on the first of July which became the platform for economic - political debates. The motto of the order was:

“In essentials, Unity; in unessentials, Liberty; in all things, Charity.”

Although very committed to staying out of party politics, The Grange actively criticized existing political conditions and advocated important agricultural policies. Due to its ‘secret’ nature and some of its business activities, its influence waned and its numbers dwindled dramatically over the next fifteen years.

The Patrons of Industry

The Patrons of Industry was another ‘secret order’ which came to Ontario from Michigan in 1889 and declared its independence in 1891. It was a political - economic association in the United States, and launched the Populist party during the period 1890 - 96.

In many ways, the Grange and the Patrons of Industry were similar, with the exception that while the Grange had studiously avoided politics, the Patrons encouraged political activity. Many farmers felt that they were being poorly represented by politicians and wanted to establish their own political party. Within a year of its independence, the Patrons took part in the federal election. In the 1894 provincial election, the Patrons elected 17 members to the Ontario Legislature.

The Patrons, recognizing the need for a printed voice, established “*The Canada Farmers’ Sun*” in 1891, with the help of George Wrigley, a former editor of labour newspapers in Western Ontario. Unfortunately, by 1896, it found itself in severe financial straights and was saved by Dr. Goldwin Smith a strong supporter and friend of Canadian farmers.

One of the ironies of these two strong and quickly fading organizations was the fact that, although they both voiced real problems faced by farmers, they totally ignored each other.

They both, separately, entered into co-operative ventures to reduce the influence of middlemen, including the establishment of fire insurance, a trust company, implement company, a salt company, the purchase of binder twine, etc., but neither was able to capture control of the market.

According to Russell Ham, writing about this period in the agrarian reform movement in Ontario:

“Both were inefficient in maintaining support, including their most obvious failing – duplication. (In fact, neither publicly recognized the other in their documentation!)”

(9)

The Farmers' Association

From 1895 to 1901, farmers' movements in Ontario were in a state of decline. When Goldwin Smith took over the deficit-wracked *Farmers' Sun*, he changed its name to the "*Weekly Sun*", and in an effort to put some life back into the farm movement in Ontario he invited readers, in the spring of 1902, to "express their views as to what type of movement would be most suitable to meet the needs of the hour." (10)

In the autumn of 1902, as the result of this effort, 150 farmers gathered in Toronto and formed the Farmers' Association of Ontario, with C.A. Mallory as its first president and W.L. Smith as secretary.

The Farmers' Association, although ready to influence the political policy process, resolved to stay away from partisan politics. It very quickly began to address transportation policy concerns, hydro-electric rates, mineral taxes, and government ownership of public utilities, and was instrumental in influencing key provincial and federal government policies affecting agriculture.

In spite of its strong and able performance in many public issues, and its ability to influence public opinion, the Farmers' Association of Ontario did not attract great number of followers and its life span was short. (11)

In the meantime, the Grange had continued to carry on, although dwindling and operating in a more or less parallel fashion to the Farmers' Association. By 1907, it was decided to amalgamate the two organizations in order to establish a revitalized farm voice. Unfortunately, it was decided to adopt the Charter of the Grange, and only slightly modified its name to the "Dominion Grange and Farmers' Association."

It was ultimately unable to hurdle its past. This new organization, under the leadership of E.C. Drury, did, however, establish closer ties with the western grain growers and in February, 1909, Drury wrote to western farm organizations suggesting the establishment of a national body. The Canadian County of Agriculture was launched in November, 1909, the first Canada-wide farmers' organization providing eastern and western farmers with a forum to discuss mutual concerns.

This was a period of political promises and severe frustration for the farmers of Canada. According to S. Veeraraghavan, reflecting on the economics of farming during this period:

"High tariffs on manufactured imports, particularly agricultural implements, meant a persistent transfer of income from the rural and farming regions to the urban manufacturing centres." (12)

The policy of John A. MacDonald that there should be "adequate protection for all industry" appealed to the farmer in the same way that it did to his urban cousins.

Unfortunately, it soon became evident that agriculture was not included in “all industry”. Farmers’ disappointment with the government and their support for Sir Wilfred Laurier’s re-election on his notion of “reciprocity” with the United States led to highly organized lobbying activity in Ottawa, including a deputation of 800 farmers who presented their case for tariff reductions to the Government and the House of Commons. A series of meetings was held over a two-day period, without much success. This intensive lobbying was dubbed “*The Siege of Ottawa*” by some of the writers of the day. (13)

Lack of an effective government response led to an increasing sense of frustration with a two-party system which consistently appeared to nullify farmers’ political influence. (14)

This frustration would, ultimately, be responsible for a new chapter in the farm movement in Ontario and, indeed, across Canada.

II

A Remarkable Vision

The United Farmers Movement in Ontario Takes Root

The election of 1911 was fought on the issue of reciprocity with the United States. The Laurier government had a majority of 47 prior to the election and, according to W.C. Good, writing in his autobiography, “had a majority of 45 against it” after the votes were counted. (15) These results constituted a serious blow to the aspirations of Canadian agriculture.

J.J. Morrison, a farmer from Arthur, came back after an extensive trip to Western Canada during which he experienced the successful organizing of the Grain Growers Association. He was determined to see a new and far-reaching farm organization established in Ontario. He was the right man for the job – enthusiastic, a good organizer and highly dedicated.

Thus, it was that early on a Saturday afternoon in October of 1913, four farmers walked into the offices of the *Weekly Sun* in Toronto. Not finding the editor in his office, they went to a downtown hotel and held a meeting to discuss their concerns. These were four special people who would shape the future of farm organizations in Ontario.

H.H. Hannam, in his booklet, *Pulling Together*, recalls “That this modest meeting would have such far-reaching results, they little realized: for out of it was to arise the United Farmers’ Movement of Ontario.” (16)

The four men who met that afternoon were J.J. Morris, W.C. Good, Master of the Grange and Farmers' Association, E.C. Drury and Col. T.Z. Frazer, another key farm figure. These farmers ".....had no capital, no moneyed friends, no government pull. As far as you could see they had nothing to start with; but they had *courage and vision*." (17)

They felt that this was the time to put co-operative and farmers' organization principles together into an effective movement.

At the last meeting of the Dominion Grange and Farmers' Association held on December 20th, 1913, W.C. Wood, as Master of the Grange, spoke of the serious social, political and economic problems facing the farmers of Ontario. He painted a grim picture of broken political promises, a rural depopulation crisis and a lack of effective action.

However, he looked ahead and challenged the delegates; "We are, I think, on the eve of a great forward movement. The giant of special privilege, who has enslaved and degraded this nation for so long, is beginning to tremble in his castle. It is our duty to press forward in the fight for justice and right dealing, with the certain assurance that faithfulness on our part will meet with its reward." (18)

Later in the convention, a planning committee was established on March 19 and 20 of the following year, an organizational meeting was held in the Labour Temple in Toronto.

Some 300 delegates met to organize the United Farmers of Ontario as a membership association and the United Farmers Co-operative Company Limited as a co-operative business enterprise. (Although the actual incorporation of the UFCC was achieved on February 7th, 1914 by W.C. Good and four of his farmer neighbours.)

Herb Hannam, moved by their resolve, wrote that these were men and women of vision who "....believed that ordinary citizens through organization and co-operation could build economic enterprises and man them themselves; and they believed that what they could do in this way would be of more value to them than what could be done in any other way." (19)

The two organizations were to be sister organizations, with the UFO "...to raise rural people to a high plane of citizenship; to give them knowledge of the life of the nation and a voice in national affairs", while the UFCC was "to make possible better business for the members and thus better living conditions." (20)

Underlying these efforts were the Rochdale Co-operative Principles brought over from Great Britain, which had, at their fundamental core, the fact that a co-operative way of life offered the greatest possibilities for the well-being of the family and society.

The beginning of the First World War made the farmers of Ontario very apprehensive. No one quite knew what was in store for Canada and what impact the war would have on Ontario agriculture. Farmers continued to have a real sense that they were not being listened to.

The elections of 1917 seemed to mark a turn-around. Due to the need for increased production, farmers' sons were exempted from conscription and some individuals sympathetic to the farm movement were elected and appointed to the Cabinet.

Suddenly, in the spring of 1918, on the "eve of seeding", this exemption was cancelled by Order-In-Council. As W.C. Good recalls, "Angry exasperation developed quickly and on May 14, 1918, a delegation of some three thousand farmers and about the same number from Quebec went to Ottawa to interview the government." (21)

Their reception by the Prime Minister was not very supportive. They ended up sending a letter to the Speaker asking that they be allowed to speak before the bar of the House. They were refused. A large number marched to the doors of the House and found their way barred.

These events led to a great deal of support of both organizations by the farmers of Ontario. As. J. Schulz recalls, "The stringing rebuff which they had received at the hands of the government, and the abusive attack immediately launched upon the UFP by the press, welded the organized farmers of Ontario into a compact group. Things began to move. Their treatment in Ottawa made them disgusted with the kind of representation they had, and immediate political action was advocated." (22)

Within a year, their membership consisted of 60,000 farmers organized into 1,465 clubs and the desire for political action had begun to take fire.

The Convention of 1918 was almost cancelled due to the disastrous influenza epidemic which was sweeping the province. However, it was held, with a reduced turnout, and became a central point for the UFO.

UFO candidates had won by-elections in Ontario earlier in the year and over at UFCC a new manager by the name of T.P. Loblaw was hired. Although having little previous connection with the farm or co-operative movement, he pushed for the development of local branches which would constitute units of the UFCC similar to the farmers' clubs which were the units of the UFO across the province.

The very rapid development of the branch stores, combined with low post-war prices, led to heavy financial losses. UFCC narrowly avoided bankruptcy and Mr. Loblaw resigned in 1921 to start up his own retail network.

Nineteen-eighteen also marked the beginnings of the new farmer operated newspaper, *The Farmers' Sun*, and the founding of the United Farm Women of Ontario, as part of the UFO, its first club being the Ashgrove UFWO. Within three years, there were 175 clubs with a membership of over 6,000.

When the writs for the provincial election to be held on October 20, 1919, were issued, a small committee of individuals including E.C. Drury and W.C. Good drafted a document which embodied the UFO's position on the main issues thought to be within provincial

jurisdiction.

As W.C. Good tell is, it began with the statement: "We, the United Farmers of Ontario, deem it our duty to ourselves and the Province, to seek independent representation in the Legislation, with the following objects."

"Then follows a list of objectives covering public expenditures and party patronage; promotion of voluntary co-operation; general education; highways for the general public; promotion of forestry and reforestation and public development of hydro-electric power; democratic handling of the liquor problem; and finally the extension of the initiative and referendum and electoral reform by using the transferable vote" (23)

As Good recalls, the results were quite unexpected and led to an embarrassing situation. Sixty-four UFO candidates were nominated and forty-four were elected. Only two of the elected members had ever sat in a parliament before.

The Lieutenant-Governor invited the UFO group to form the government. They had difficulty even deciding who their leader should be. E.C. Drury was approached, and after much pressure, finally consented, and then had to find a seat in the legislature.

Finally, a government was formed with the cabinet including two members representing organized labour. The government, by many accounts, behaved quite credibly. However, the continuing differences of opinion regarding the role of the farmers' movement in politics continued to create uncertainty with the UFO. By 1922, these differences were obvious across the country. In the fall of 1921, prior to the federal elections, the various provincial farmers' interests were reflected in the National Progressive Party, pledged to the farmers' platform.

In Ontario, E.C. Drury continued to champion a "broadening out" policy for the UFO in the political arena. The 1921 federal election saw 65 farmers and labour representatives go to the Federal House, among them Agnes MacPhail from South-East Grey, the first woman member in a Canadian Parliament.

In the June 1923 provincial elections, the UFO dropped to 17 members and by 1926, all UFO labelled representatives had disappeared, although there were 17 Progressives in the legislature.

This appeared to be the end of the farmers' movement's active involvement in the elected provincial sphere, although the impact of farmers and farm issues continued to be heard and represented. The succeeding few years saw diminishing direct political involvement and thus a decrease in the farmers' interest in a general farm movement.

The Farmers' Sun publication slowly decreased in circulation and in 1926, the UFO moved into the Bank of Upper Canada Building in downtown Toronto.

While this evolution was taking place, farmers were placing increasing emphasis on their

specific commodity or special interest groups. This period saw the development of many sectoral and commodity association, some of them being highly localized while others were provincial in scope and affiliated with national association.

Fragmentation of farmers' interests and a lack of an effective provincial or federal political voice found Ontario farmers face to face with an economic depression and social upheaval.

III

A Common Purpose:

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is Born

The Canadian Council of Agriculture, which had been formed in 1909 to link up several provincial farmers' organizations, had waned in its role as a national unifying body for agricultural concerns by the 1920's. In response to evolving economic and political realities, it was revitalized and, in 1935, it took the name "The Canadian Chamber of Agriculture" and subsequently changed this to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture in 1941. This revitalization came about, to a great extent, because of the extensive work and interests of western groups, especially, the prairie grain pools.

The Canadian Chamber of Agriculture was conceived as an effort to pull together Eastern and Western agricultural interests, as well as a forum for the representation of commodity-specific interests along with those of a more general nature.

Among its stated objectives were the following:

- (a) to co-ordinate the efforts of the Agricultural Producer Organizations, throughout the Dominion, for the purpose of promoting their common interests through collective action;
- (b) to promote and advance the social and economic conditions of, and to render such services to those engaged in agricultural pursuits as conditions may justify.

It was in this environment that a meeting of representatives of farm organizations from across Ontario was held in the Royal York Hotel in Toronto on January 27, 1936, to establish a branch of the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture.

The meeting was chaired by H.H. Hannam, the secretary of the UFO, and H.B. Cowan of the Canadian Dairy Farmers' Federation was appointed secretary.

They explained the purpose of the meeting and why it was desirable to have an Ontario branch of the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture so that there would be a forum to relate to farm organizations from other provinces regarding farm policies and issues of an interprovincial, national or international nature.

A constitution was drafted by a subcommittee later in the day and brought back for approval. It recommended a simple form of organization. The name of the organization was to be the Ontario Agricultural Conference; its purpose was to “co-ordinate the activities of the Ontario agricultural organizations in matters of common interest within the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture. The membership was to consist of provincial organizations composed of producers of agricultural products.” (24)

The organizations present included the United Farmers of Ontario, United Farmers’ Co-operative Ltd., Ontario Agricultural Council, the Ontario Grape Scheme, Ontario Manufactured Milk Producers’ Association, Ontario Cream Patrons’ Association, First Co-operative Packers, and the Canadian Dairy Farmers’ Federation.

A seven-member executive committee was proposed with power to elect their own officers. It was to be the duty of the executive committee to complete the organization of the Conference, to communicate with the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture and to draft a full constitution and bylaws to be submitted to a membership conference at the earliest opportunity.

It was also decided to list all farm organizations in Ontario eligible for membership with suggested membership fees based on their membership, type of business and known financial situation.

The list of approved potential members is a fascinating reflection of the state of agricultural organization in Ontario at that time; and it is included here to provide us with a snap-shot of the past.

Organization	Suggested Fee
United Farmers’ Co-operative Company Limited	\$115.00
Ontario Whole Milk Producers League	75.00
Ontario Cheese Patrons Association	75.00
Ontario Fruit Growers Association	60.00
Ontario Vegetable Growers Association	60.00
Ontario Market Growers Council	60.00
Ontario Honey Producers Co-operative Ltd.	60.00
Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Association	60.00
Ontario Manufactured Milk Producers Association	50.00
Ontario Agricultural Council	35.00
Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Scheme	60.00
First Co-operative Packers	35.00
United Farmers of Ontario	35.00
Eastern Canada Potato Marketing Board	25.00

Ontario Dry Bean Scheme	35.00
Ontario Burley Tobacco Marketing Board	30.00
Ontario Grape Scheme	20.00
Ontario Cream Patrons Association	20.00
Ontario Onion Growers Association	20.00
Ontario Sugar Beet Growers Association	20.00

Total \$950.00

At a subsequent meeting of the Executive Committee, H.H. Hannam was elected Chairman; V.S. Milburn as Vice-Chairman; and Erle Kitchen was elected Secretary-Treasurer. Herb Hannam was also appointed as the Ontario Director to the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture.

The new executive got to work quickly. At its inaugural meeting and a special meeting called for September 10 of that year, the Ontario Agricultural Conference dealt with critical milk marketing policy issues. A crucial issue for farmers that year was a challenge before the Supreme Court of Canada questioning the validity of the Natural Products Marketing Act and the provincial legislation in support of the Act.

At a special meeting of all farm organizations which had schemes operating under the Natural Products Marketing Act, the Conference spelled out its unequivocal support for farmers to organize for orderly marketing within adequate legislative parameters.

That meeting's policy conclusions have a very familiar ring to them in light of more recent debates and challenges. They were as follows:

- (1) It is absolutely necessary to have marketing legislation.
- (2) Such legislation must have compulsory clauses to successfully operate.
- (3) Each province must enact legislation to control trade within provinces and the Dominion to enact legislation for interprovincial and external trade.
- (4) Provincial legislation must be almost identical with federal legislation.

A committee of three was set up to seek advice of counsel, make recommendations regarding marketing legislation and report back after consultation with representatives from other provinces.

It is obvious, from the proceedings of a series of meetings held to discuss marketing concerns, that there was very strong pressure in Ottawa against the Natural Products Marketing Act, in spite of the fact that some thirty-three other countries had passed similar legislation and the Act was certainly providing some semblance of order in what had been a very chaotic agricultural marketing situation.

The minutes of a subsequent meeting held on February 25, 1937, reflect the continuing concerns of marketing as well as the crisis in farm credit. It was reported by Professor Leitch, on behalf of the legislation committee, that a recent decision of the Privy Council practically wiped out all federal agricultural regulative or restrictive legislation, leaving to the

provinces the necessity of making legislation which could be co-ordinated through the Dominion.

At an earlier Conference meeting, R.J. Scott gave an address on the Farmers Creditors' Arrangement Act, "pointing out that in a limited company the liability seldom ties the whole family as do farm debts, and that there is a Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act....In 1932, twenty per cent of the farm taxes were not paid; if this continued, it might become an epidemic... He suggested, (a) that the Act should not be condemned until something better is put in its place; (b) no new debts after May 1, 1936, came under the Act. He also pointed out that the western provinces go further in this Act on behalf of the debts." (25)

Mr. Hannam, followed this by showing a chart which pointed out the problems that a producer was up against in attempting to pay for his 1928-29 debts with 1932-34-36 revenues.

Although there is no record of the debates which followed, it was decided to discuss these concerns with other provinces and that a cost-of-production survey of Ontario producers should be done.

The role of the Conference evolved very rapidly and its activities, on behalf of Ontario farmers, broadened at every meeting. That spring, the Board decided to add a second vice-chairman position and Mr. Cecil Delworth was named to fill this slot.

By the March 8, 1937, board meeting, the Conference had changed its name to the Ontario Chamber of Agriculture to reflect its association with the national body and there were several changes in the membership roster. The budget for the year rose to \$1,030, and a decision had been made that 80 per cent of this was to be sent on to the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture and 20 per cent was to be used in Ontario.

During the year, and subsequently, the common themes were marketing, income, farm credit, need for crop insurance, farm input prices and farm transportation issues, the fact that national business policies were dominated by big business, and that producers had to speak with a united voice if they were to influence provincial and federal government policies.

There appeared to be a considerable degree of interaction between the provincial government and the Chamber of Agriculture, with various members and ministers speaking at the regular Board meetings. One of the issues presented by the government to the Board was the proposed appointment of a Royal Commission to study Ontario transportation including farm transport "for gain or not for gain."

One of the major problems for farmers concerned the fact that "farmer-owned trucks hauling farm owned goods should have reduction in the present cost of license fees for a small nominal rate, including only a small nominal fee on farm-owned trailers." (26)

The Annual Meeting held on January 18, 1937, saw a major expansion of the Chamber's

membership base when the four major breeder associations were welcomed in. The Ontario Cattle, Horse, Sheep and Swine Breeders Associations added another substantial producer base to the Chamber of Agriculture.

That year also saw an increasing awareness of the need for an adequate financial base to support the various producer organizations in their own ever-expanding activities.

At the May 17, 1938, meeting of OCA, a resolution from the Milk Producers' Association was received. It asked "the Ontario Chamber of Agriculture, and through it, the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture, to request the Federal and Provincial governments to enact such legislation as will empower any properly constituted organization of primary producers to levy tolls on their members for the purpose of financing their respective organizations." (27)

A notation of interest in the minutes of that meeting reflects another continuing concern for producers. It states that "the parliamentary committee the previous year reported that the increase in implement prices in 1936 was not justified but that a further increase again took place early in 1938." (28)

The interests of Ontario farmers in the evolution of international policy issues saw Messers. Mayberry and Cowan represent OCA at the first-ever conference of British Empire farmers in March of 1938, held in Sydney, Australia. Sir Reginal Dorman-Smith of the British Farmers' Union, who subsequently became the Minister of Agriculture of Great Britain in 1939, spoke at a meeting of OCA following the Conference explaining that the conference was an endeavour to "evolve a comprehensive Empire agricultural policy, which will be capable, as far as it is possible, of satisfying the needs of various agricultural populaces." (29)

His presentation and challenge to the Board echoed many of the words of the early farmers' movement pioneers in Ontario. He finished his address by quoting a poem, the authorship of which is not recorded, but which in those pre-war days reflected the deep sense of determination which was flowing out of an earlier sense of despair for the general economy and the place of the farmer in its eventual turn-around. And, for the British, the frustration of losing so many sons and daughters of the land to emigration, to find their opportunities many miles from home.

*"My father's father ploughed this land;
His father's father fought and planned
To get increases on the yield
Of his forefathers, from this field.
The good earth needs my care, and so
To distant lands I shall not go.
The sea-gulls wheel upon my track
And settle swiftly at my back.
They know that ploughing will go on
When all is said and all is done.
And this is what I want –*

*My son's son too
To plough this field and give rebirth
To fruitfulness upon this earth."* (30)

The OCA's own financial needs became a matter of some concern later in 1938, due to the increasing level of activity by the Chamber and the very paltry budget available to support its services. At the September Board meeting, it was decided that member organizations were to be asked to increase their contributions for the year by 60 per cent of their previous year's contributions. The reactions of the membership are not recorded! However, this was a turning point in establishing a stronger financial base for OCA's activities.

The proceeding of the February, 1939, Annual Meeting leave one with a real sense of being caught in a time warp. The comments of H.H. Hannam, as president, continue to be echoed today, almost verbatim. One wonders if the agricultural situation and its attendant problems has basically changed in the intervening almost 50 years.

He started off his address to the delegates by stating that "Canada is the last of great farming countries to admit that there is an agricultural problem, and the last to do anything about it." (31)

He also quotes Albert C. Wakeham writing in an earlier edition of Saturday Night: "We have had times of good business, good employment and good profits, but we have not had good commodity prices at any time in recent years. This factor, which is the most important of all, means continuing hard times for primary producers the world over...The problem of basic commodity prices, to give the producer an adequate living, is one which the leading nations have failed to solve." (32)

Nineteen thirty-nine saw the start of the structural changes, which provided for the inclusion of more direct membership interests within OCA, allowing it to work toward becoming a true federation of producers and their organizations.

At an Executive meeting held on March 9, it was moved by Mr. Milburn and seconded by Mr. Delworth, "that the Ontario Chamber of Agriculture invite in representatives of County Chambers to decide on affiliation of County Chambers in Ontario and other matters of interest." (33)

In May, it was decided to amend the Constitution to admit county Chambers of Agriculture and that a minimum membership fee per County Chamber be \$50. (The Ontario Brotherhood of Threshermen was also admitted at that meeting, with a \$40 membership fee.) From the time that the constitution was amended in June, County Chambers began to apply for membership.

It is reported that the Peterborough County Chamber of Agriculture was the first formal County Chamber to be organized in the province of Ontario. According to a history of the Peterborough County Federation of Agriculture, a group of 100 farmers met on Saturday,

February 18, 1939, in response to an invitation from the Agriculture Committee of County Council in order to organize a County Chamber of Agriculture.

The Chairman, Reeve James Gifford, outlined the proposal and stated the Agriculture Committee felt that something had to be done “to improve the agriculture situation.”

A resolution was passed unanimously that “A County Chamber of Agriculture be set up to unite all farmers into a common organization so that this organization can represent the farmers to governments and general public as the need arises.” (34)

James Gifford subsequently became the President of the County Chamber and the next year became the Provincial President.

The clouds of war were beginning to roll in and 1939 saw discussion topics such as “The Need for Parity Prices for Agricultural Products” and “The Place of the County Chambers.” It was decided that the theme of the next Convention to be held at the Royal Connaught Hotel in Hamilton be “A Policy for Agriculture under War Time Economy.”

The meeting of OCA held on March 7, 1940, invited the Women’s Institutes of Ontario and the United Farm Women of Ontario into membership. It was also recommended, for approval at the Annual Meeting, that the name of the Ontario Chamber of Agriculture be changed to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture “if and when the name of the Canadian Chamber is changed to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.” (35)

However, on the day before the Annual Meeting, to be held on April 1st that year, the Executive Committee passed a resolution: “Therefore, be it resolved that we herewith change the name of this association to that of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and further recommend that all County Chambers assume the name of County Federations of Agriculture.” (36)

The Annual Meeting agreed with this recommendation and also recommended that the same change be made by the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture. Formal approval of this change took place at the Executive Committee meeting held on May 31, 1940.

The 1940 Annual Meeting made reference to the presence of several outstanding Canadian political and agricultural figures. Agnes MacPhail, Canada’s first woman Member of Parliament, was at the convention as a delegate, as was Leonard Harman, representing the United Farmers’ Co-operative Company Limited.

It was a year of change for the Federation. H.H. Hannam declined to stand for president that year and James Gifford was declared President. Thus, the leadership and vision of H.H. Hannam took on a different slant. It was decided to amend the constitution and add the position of Honorary President as a voting member of the Executive Committee, and Mr. Hannam was made Honorary President in order for OFA to continue to benefit from his wisdom and perspective.

Nineteen-forty also saw a major crisis in the milk industry in Ontario. Due to a critical financial situation of the Ontario Cream Patrons' Association, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture held a joint meeting of the Ontario Concentrated Milk Producers' Association, Ontario Cheese Producers' Association, Ontario Whole Milk Producers' League and the Ontario Cream Patrons' Association to examine options for a different and more effective organization. As. R.J. Scott of the Cream Patrons said, "We must build an effective organization and do an effective job or fold up." This meeting led to the establishment of the Dairy Committee of OFA.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture, in spite of its rapidly increasing level of activity was, up to this point, still a completely volunteer organization, with no staff and no permanent home. For many years, it had shared space with a number of its member organizations.

The Executive meeting of March 22, 1941, was the impetus for a substantial organizational change as well as a change in operational style. While discussing the issue of commodity prices, it was agreed "that the Secretary be invited to write to the Rt. Hon. McKenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada, asking him if it is the policy of his government to maintain in Canada cheap food at the expense of the farmer?"

Following this, the Executive Committee went on to discuss the fact that it was time to establish both a provincial office and a national office with some type of permanent staff function to assist in the work of the Federation.

V.S. Milburn was subsequently appointed secretary of OFA at a salary of \$200 per month, plus travelling expenses, while carrying on Canadian Dairy Farmers Federation work. The \$100 paid Milburn by CDFC would now be paid to OFA and he would work out of OFA office space.

It was also decided that Executive members should be paid \$4 per day for out-of-pocket expenses and railway fare or car mileage of five cents per mile, whichever was cheapest, with the secretary to travel on the same basis.

There was a further recommendation from OFA to CFA that H.H. Hannam be appointed as the full-time staff person in setting up a national office.

Once OFA got up a head of steam, there was to be no stopping them. This same meeting also agreed that there was a need to prepare a brief to Premier Hepburn and the Cabinet to present the state of agriculture in Ontario.

The early '40s saw the start of an exciting era in grassroots communication. Farm Radio Forum was being developed in Ontario and a committee composed of Messrs. Betzner, Scott, and Milburn was struck to work with the national Farm Radio Forum group and the Canadian Broadcasting Commission.

The Farm Radio Forum was described as the "greatest experiment in adult education" in Canada. It was a joint project between the Canadian Broadcasting Commission, the

Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the Canadian Association for Adult Education. It provided a means of presenting topics vital to agriculture by radio, and discussion of this material took place in forum groups of approximately 15 people all across the province. Some of them would drive as many as 100 miles to attend a discussion group.

Farm Radio Forum became a major movement in the rural community. In 1950, 714 Forums were involved in discussing any one broadcast. In fact, in one series alone, 27,855 people were reported in attendance at Forums.

Many individuals who became well known to the rural communication in a variety of ways were active in the movement, including Clare Burt, Rae Hergott and Knowlton Nash, who was, at that time, Information Officer for the International Federation of Agricultural Producers, based in Washington, D.C.

Unfortunately, the movement subsequently faded with the advancement of alternative communication technology and the shifting interests of producers.

It was in February of 1942 that a recommendation was presented to and approved by the Federation to establish Young People's Committees in each county and that representatives from each of these committees would be invited to attend the Annual Meeting. However, the discussion did not stop there. Before the meeting was finished, it was recommended that the bylaws of OFA be changed and that one representative of the Young People's groups, as well as a representative of the women's organizations, be appointed to the Executive Committee of OFA.

Many individual Young People's groups and clubs as well as several county associations had previously existed, dating back to the period 1914-17. In fact, there had been an effort in 1917 to establish a provincial association with district conferences.

With the formal organizational involvement within OFA, the various Young People's Groups needed a common focus. On April 4, 1944, the Ontario Junior Farmers' Association was formed and by the 1946 OFA convention, the Executive of the Ontario Junior Farmers' Association took over responsibility as the Junior Directors of the Federation. It was recommended, as part of this shift, that every county Junior Farmers' Association have a formal affiliation with their local County Federation of Agriculture.

Thus, the Federation threw its support behind the Association and six members of the Association took their seats as Directors of the Federation. This important association has continued to this day.

Development and support of the County Federations has become a major thrust for the Federation and a detailed development plan had been drawn up in 1940. It was decided to canvass all farmers in each school section, through the use of township committees or units, and memberships would be sold at the rate of \$1.00 per year on a five-year basis. This fee would include a subscription to a publication to be put out under the auspices of the Federation. (38)

There was some apprehension about this move. In fact, the Executive Committee, at their September 13, 1940, meeting, anticipated some potential future conflict and reflected this in their meeting minutes as follows: "It being understood that although this is an individual membership, that the farm groups in the counties will continue to hold membership in the Federation of Agriculture supporting it both physically and financially. It being understood that the Provincial Commodity Groups will continue to support, both physically and financially, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture." (39)

The expansion of the Federation's membership base brought into focus one of the developing issues within the organization, that being the struggle between the role of the Federation and Commodity groups in the farm policy area. H.H. Hannam continually defended the nature of this "true federation" of county, township and commodity organizations, while emphasizing his notion that each commodity group should be represented in the County Federation and that separate commodity groups should not be developed to any greater extent than they already were.

It was ultimately decided that this membership recruitment plan would be presented to the county organizations and tested out to determine its feasibility. Other potential sources of funding, apart from direct membership fees from individuals and organizations, were also being extensively debated, especially the establishing of a levy on all producers due to the "necessity of some assured and adequate form of financing." (40)

Four distinct proposals were discussed:

1. "A levy through marketing schemes on a commodity basis. (A detailed proposal for this was drawn up by the United Farmers' Co-operative Company.)
2. A special act of the Provincial Legislature, levying on all commodities.
3. A special act levying on assessment in rural municipalities.
4. Amendment to the Municipal Act permitting rural municipalities to tax improved acres." (41)

It was decided at the following annual meeting, held on March 5th, after a discussion spearheaded by Miss Agnes McPhail, Messers. Robinson, Good and Hannam, that a distinct provincial office should be set up that year and that the additional funds required would come through the Counties, as each saw fit, as well as sending a proposal to the Ontario Government to provide for an assessment of "...one cent per acre on all improved land or on the method of an assessment of one-fifth of a mill on total farm assessment in each County, with the proviso that any rural taxpayer may, in any year, secure exemption from payment by a written notice forwarded to the Clerk of his municipality." (42)

The meeting endorsed the notion of the one-fifth of a mill rate.

Several other matters of interest occurred during this annual meeting, including a presentation by H.H. Hannam in his new capacity as President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, a post he had already assumed.

As OFA continued to expand its mandate, a need to do organizational field work was beginning to be acutely felt in the early 1940s, and by January, 1943, Ralph Staples of Cavan was approached, interviewed and accepted the appointment as fieldman on a temporary basis, being paid \$5.00 a day.

Organizational and financial matters continued to dominate annual meeting agendas for the next couple of years, even after the government's approval of the mill rate proposal. Recommendations regarding the hiring of a permanent provincial fieldman and fieldmen for counties or groups of counties; the establishment of a Publicity Department for the Federation; a conference with commodity groups, adding commodity representation to the Executive Committee; and the need for increased leadership by the Ontario Agricultural College in the area of adult education and farm organization were all topics of interest leading up to the 1943 Annual Meeting.

In another important move, it was finally recognized that there were substantial number of French speaking members, especially in Prescott and Russell Counties and that literature distributed should be in French as well as in English.

A final chapter in the history of the United Farmers of Ontario was written in the fall of 1943 when Leonard Harman, Secretary of the United Farmers of Ontario, presented a resolution passed by the UFO to the Executive Committee of the OFA, in which they proposed to withdraw from the farm organization membership field. Of the 80 UFP Clubs, 55 were affiliated with the Co-operative on a business basis and none was carrying out any organizational activities.

It was proposed that the Women's and Young People's Clubs would work through the Federations in the Counties from here on in. A small joint committee was established to work out the details of the proposal. Thus, the remnants of the organization that had brought farm issues and farm policies to the forefront of the average citizen's consciousness, carried its residual roles into the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and disappeared into the annals of history.

Effective communication with members was as great a concern in those years as it is today. Individual contact, county meetings, the use of Farm Radio Forum and the Federation's own newspaper were all key vehicles for involvement.

In 1944, Leonard Harman, in his capacity as Editor of the *Rural Co-operator*, brought a proposal to the Federation suggesting that the *Rural Co-operator* should be operated as a separate department with its own staff. Subsequently, Andrew Hebb of Newmarket was hired to be the new Editor and Manager of the paper.

The *Rural Co-operator* had been published since 1936. First as an organ of the UFO, and then later by OFA. It was a direct descendant of the earlier papers of the farm movement, beginning with the *Canada Farmers' Sun*, the *Weekly Sun* and the *Farmers' Sun*. The latter, as the result of a brief alliance between the UFO and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, being taken over by the CCF was renamed the *New*

Commonwealth.

The UFO subsequently decided to establish a newspaper, the *Rural Co-operator*, published twice a month on a subscription basis.

Another milestone in OFA's life took place when, on February 8, 1944, the Ontario government, through an Order in Council, designated the Ontario Federation of Agriculture as an Association within the meaning of the Agricultural Associations Act, followed in April of 1946 by the passage of Bill 143, an *Act to Amend the Municipal Act*, which provided for the establishment of an assessment and levy at the township level, of all farmers, "as the annual membership fees of such persons in the Federation of Agriculture."

From its inception, OFA reflecting its members' concerns, had been acutely aware of the need for insurance protection for farmers. Although there were a range of Farm Mutuals providing fire and home insurance, it was determined that there was a need to establish an insurance company that could meet the unique insurance needs of farmers, starting with automobile coverage.

The Federation started Co-operators Insurance Association of Guelph (CIAG) as a service to farmers in 1949. It started out as a wholly-owned subsidiary of OFA. As a brief outline of the CIAG story indicates, things moved ahead rapidly. "The company grew very quickly and in 1951-52, the Department of Insurance demanded greater reserves. At that time, OFA took in the United Co-operatives of Ontario (as the United Farmers' Co-operative Company later came to be called) as a partner in CIAG. The company continued to grow and reserves were needed again in 1955. At that time, the Ontario Credit Union League was taken in as a third party and CIAG was operated as a limited company controlled by the three organizations.

Subsequent years, of course, has seen CIAG become the cornerstone of a national insurance company, providing a wide range of insurance programs, *The Co-operators*, still owned by farm organizations and co-operatives across Canada.

In 1945, OFA set out to undertake a major study of the state of farming and farm organization activity. Extensive questionnaires were filled in and filed with the OFA by the agricultural representatives in each county and gave the Federations a very current and accurate picture of the needs, activities and interests of the farmers in every part of the province. Unfortunately, a summary of the findings has been difficult to find. However, reference to the survey was frequently made in organizational strategy and policy discussions which followed. Thus, the survey had served a useful purpose.

A well-thought out policy evolution appeared to take place over the next decade, building on the historic concerns of the Federation and reflecting increasing involvement in the areas of education, health, social well-being and the perceived increasing deterioration of the farmer's economic position relative to other sectors of the economy.

Government education policy was an area where OFA made many eloquent pleas for

equity for farmers and the rural community, whether it was the need for adequate funding for extension education, the increasing role to be played by the Ontario Agricultural College or the costs associated with rural young people attaining a high school education. The latter was a serious concern due to inadequate local school facilities and the substantial distances to be travelled to attend high school and the reluctance of local school boards to provide funds to do so, since there was no transportation available for these young people.

An eloquent and lengthy motion presented to a Directors' meeting sums up the issue very well: "Therefore be it resolved that steps be taken immediately to bring before our provincial government the necessity of making adequate provision for the proper High School education of eligible rural pupils, by enacting laws whereby it would be obligatory for rural school Boards to provide for High School education at a High School, of rural children eligible for and requiring same, either by transportation or otherwise; and whereby 100 per cent of the total costs would be made available as grants to such School Boards." (43)

After many years of active lobbying, they were ultimately successful in their quest for equity for rural high school students.

For the years prior to the mid 1950s, OFA was operated as an unincorporated body. For several years, and at the urging of H.M. Arbuckle, General Secretary, it was suggested that OFA had matured to the point where incorporation was an appropriate next step in the Federation's development.

The November 1955 Annual Meeting approved the decision to incorporate. Incorporation was granted and a charter for the incorporated Federation was issued on August 23rd, 1956. As a matter of interest, one of the members of the Federation Executive to sign the application for incorporation was Clarence Adam Milligan, who went on to become President of OFA, a Member of Parliament, and who is still a member of the Federation Board of Directors.

The revised bylaws of the incorporated Federation included provisions whereby each County Federation would have four delegates each, at least one of whom was to be a woman, and another who had to be a Junior Farmer under 30 years of age. A formalizing of the Federation's evolving philosophy over the years.

The revised objectives of the Federation also bear noting at this point, since the present orientation of the Federation clearly have their roots in these statements.

"The objects of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture shall be:

1. (a) To co-ordinate the efforts of the different branches of Agriculture throughout Ontario for the purpose of promoting their common interests through collective action, and to act as the Ontario unit of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture;
- (b) To render such services to those engaged in agricultural pursuits as conditions may justify;

- (c) To assist in formulating and promoting provincial, national and international agricultural policies to meet changing national and international economic conditions.
2. To collaborate and/or negotiate with other organized groups of producers within or without Ontario, for the furtherance of objects set out in Article 2, Section 1.
3. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture shall not be nor become a party political organization, nor shall any committee thereof discuss any matter from a party political point of view.” (44)

These three statements reflect a noble pursuit, pursued with diligence, commitment and energy for many decades. The results of these activities were often difficult to measure from year to year, but the need was great, as governments tended to become increasingly urban-oriented and either uncaring or nonchalant about the state of agriculture and the producers of our country. One Premier of Ontario even went as far as to say that his basic assumption was that farmers would be increasingly worse off economically over the following ten years! It was in this environment that OFA carried out its work from the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s.

In its efforts to focus its organizational energy, one of the issues confronting OFA membership recruitment was the development of the National Farmers' Union in Ontario. Although the union had been strong in the west, its base of support in Ontario was spotty. On the other hand, having two provincial farm organizations was just one more stumbling block in dealing with farm policy concerns and in communicating farmers' concerns to government.

There were occasions and around certain issues where the two organizations worked together effectively. On the other hand, there were basic philosophical and historic perspectives which tended to divide rather than unite the two.

However, by 1964, an Amalgamation Committee had been established to consider a possible amalgamation between OFA and the NFU in Ontario.

In 1966, the Federation conducted a survey of more than 3,00 farmers, seeking out facts and farmers' attitudes toward government policies and programs, marketing boards, co-operatives, and farm organizations. The “3,000 Survey” as it was to become known, was designed to be the basis for future policy and program development.

The returns were very interesting and, since some of the questions provided for assumptions projected into the 1980s, it might be revealing, at some point, to analyze this material to ascertain whether there have been any noticeable attitudinal changes over a 20-year period among farmers and farm families.

A major combined effort between Ontario farm groups and those in Quebec took place in Ottawa on May 24th, 1967. The historic vehemence was reminiscent of the 1918 march on parliament. Between 15,000 and 20,000 farmers came together on Parliament Hill in

Ottawa.

Representatives of OFA, the NFU, and the Union Catholique des Cultivateurs met up with Quebec marchers coming across the bridge and marched in alternate Ontario-Quebec groups.

The issues which brought farmers to Parliament Hill were the same as ever; land use, cheap food policy, no overall planning, the crisis in the dairy industry, and the need for more effective marketing programs. More than that, however, it was the continuing non-responsiveness of government which led to this massive show of frustration. As Dorothy Houston, a member of the OFA Executive from Earleton said to the government of the time: "We are sick and tired of telling our members you will do something you have promised, only to have you play political football with our needs." (46)

On the whole, the marchers were well organized, the message well presented, and the groups relatively orderly. The press did report some hooliganism, damage, and the storming of the Parliament Building by a group of protesters, but this ostensibly, was a small group that had nothing to do with the Federation.

During this same period, specifically from 1959 until 1970, there were also a variety of formalized contacts between farm organizations, including OFA and NFU, and the Ontario Federation of Labour. In later years, this also included the Ontario Teachers' Federation in an annual Farmer-Labour Conference.

Although many common points of concern were identified, the differences in attempting to find solutions ultimately brought this relationship to an end.

THE GENERAL FARM ORGANIZATION (GFO) CAMPAIGN

The successful Ottawa march led to a "groundswell of concern for creation of a single organization" (46) at the 1967 Convention. The theme of the 1968 OFA Convention was "Single Farm Organization in '69", and the issue was discussed in many of the sessions.

As a result of direction to the Board, by early 1969, a 16-person committee of representatives of OFA, NFU, marketing boards and co-operatives was established to draw up a basic plan for a single farm organization. The task was not to be as easy as some had believed it to be.

This first of several committees handed down a report outlining the purposes, structure, and finances of a new organization. A subsequent committee, composed of three members from the Federation and three from the Union were assigned the task of doing the final organizational design work.

It was to be a very difficult task. A desire for flexibility and responsiveness are not easy features to reflect in an organizational structure. President Charles Munro summed up his perspective on the struggle in his report to the 1968 Convention when he said: "It is certain

that, whatever formula is selected, the needs of farmers will change as the years pass. To this extent, we cannot sit down and create the organization that will provide all the answers for all time.

“Neither will we create a voice that can speak for every last farmer. There will always be a few whose views are too extreme to fit into an organization acceptable to the majority of Ontario farmers. This is probably inevitable.

“Whatever organization we come up with, the crucial ingredients will be money and people. The money must be there, and it must be possible to bring it in without devoting all the organization’s resources to collecting it, for without available money it is impossible to hire experts and mount programmes.” (47)

The role and power of commodity organizations in the new movement would be critical, and President Munro reiterated the important role OFA had played that year in establishing a voluntary check-off for the Ontario Beef Improvement Association and the passage of enabling legislation to establish a marketing commissions for apples. He hopes that these examples of OFA commitment would continue to encourage commodity groups to aggressively support the Federation in its endeavours.

Support of government would also be absolutely necessary to establish a strong, well-financed united voice for the Ontario farmer, especially in providing enabling legislation for financing the new organization.

In a report by the Honourable William A. Stewart, Minister of Agriculture and Food, submitted to the Convention, he emphasized the fact that it would have to be the farmers themselves who would decide whether and what kind of organization they wanted. He went on: “When the farmers of this province have indicated the kind of organization they desire, then the government will fulfill its part of the bargain. When a single voice evolves, and it is the kind of organization that is well financed and responsible, then this government will give that organization the recognition and status necessary to bargain in good faith on farm policy matters.

“I am hopeful that when these studies have been completed and the guidelines established, we will be able to enter the future with one strong, well-financed, adequately staffed farm organization which will become in fact a permanent and continuing task force servicing the agricultural industry provincially and nationally.” (48)

The Convention, already confronted with a deficit, approved a 21 per cent increase in sectional membership fees in order to go into the GFO campaign with an adequate financial base, to allow for more executive involvement, doubling the field staff complement and, in order to add additional specialists and support staff in the office.

The commitment, conviction and delegate support at Convention provided the thrust to move into the next hectic and ultimately disappointing year.

The Six-Man Committee on the One Farm Organization: Roy Coulter, Campbellville, Chairman; Phil Durand, Zurich; Jim Jacklin, Elmwood; Walter Miller, Tara; Peter Myers, Fletcher; and Charles Munro, Embro, had been meeting since being called together by Mr. Everett Biggs, Chairman of the Special Committee on Farm Income, on Friday, May 31, 1968.

In the final report of the Committee presented to the Convention, they recommended that the Minister “conduct a producer vote by February, 1969, requiring a 51 per cent majority of those voting to favour establishment of **The One Farm Organization** and a compulsory producer check-off on all farm products, produced and sold in Ontario to finance **The One Farm Organization**.

They went on to recommend a procedure and timetable for election of Directors for a provincial council and the hiring of appropriate staff for a head office and district units.

The structure proposed would see locals established in counties or districts based upon 1,000 commercial farms per local, and that the provincial council would consist of representatives of these locals as well as commodities, marketing boards, and other affiliated organizations, along with an elected Executive of 13 members.

They also proposed a levy structure based on a basic fee of \$20 levies through a sales levy formula.

This report led to the establishment of a Provincial Campaign Committee chaired by Malcolm Davidson of Brucefield. Other members of the committee were Delmer Bennett, Forester Falls; Ken McKinnon, Port Elgin, and Ken McLeod of the Owen Sound area.

Their assignment was to work out an overall strategy and timetable for the vote campaign, produce and distribute campaign information, assist county and district committees, allocate staff and provide speakers and assist in the raising and allocation of available funds.

The establishing of an effective publicity campaign and the neutralizing of attempts to “mislead or confuse farmers” became key factors in the operation of the campaign. Theirs was an attempt to have common sense prevail over fear and innuendo. As Malcolm Davidson said in his instructions to the County committees: “We are now entering a hard campaign where people are going to have to stand up and be counted. They must be well informed and ready to argue for the need for a GFO and for the right and responsibility of each farmer to vote for the sort of organization that he thinks is best. Our best weapon will be a clear explanation of the alternatives given at every available opportunity.” (50)

A critical feature of the campaign was to ensure individual farmer contact by canvassers and the adherence to a very tight timetable and well-briefed, articulate speakers, with good publicity material and information kits.

The provincial government passed Bill 140, *An Act to Provide for the Establishment, upon*

an Opinion Poll by Secret Ballot of the Farmers in Ontario, of a General Farm Organization, which specified that at least 60 per cent of the farmers voting had to be in favour in order for the establishment of a General Farm Organization to take place as specified.

It wasn't long after the submission of the six-man report that the opposing forces began to organize, focusing on whether separate commodity organizations would exist within the GFO or whether their functions would be transferred to a commodity department of the new organization. General consensus seemed to be that this matter should be dealt with in the voting in order to get a producer opinion.

In fact, Malcolm Davidson had approached the Ontario Farmers' Union to ask for their reaction to the idea of placing the question of marketing boards having a vote on the provincial council on the ballot.

A proposal was worked out and by Sunday, March 2nd, Davidson was ready to present the proposal to the Board of the OFU, who were missing the following morning. His request to do so was initially denied by Walter Miller, who had been a member of the Committee of Six. The OFU board then argued the matter for three hours, while certain members threatened to resign if Malcolm Davidson was allowed to make the proposal. At the same time, a restraining injunction was also served on committee members, the Ontario Bean Growers' Marketing Board and the Toronto Dominion Bank, the Committee's bankers.

This was not an auspicious beginning. Ultimately, the question was put on the ballot. The vote was scheduled, press conferences held and additional campaign brochures and posters were made available.

President Munro, in a final communication to all OFA Presidents, Secretaries, and Members of Member Bodies, on June 3rd, stated his conviction and his belief in a new organization unequivocally: "Today, I made a statement before the Agricultural Committee of the Ontario Legislature and some 500 assembled farmers, that the Federation is putting everything on the line for a successful vote on a General Farm Organization. If the vote succeeds, I have said that the Federation of Agriculture will cease to exist... I believe that the situation is now clear that the thinking members of the Ontario Farmers' Union are supporting the GFO. Those who follow the leadership of Walter Miller are on record as being opposed to the GFO in the form proposed by the Campaign Committee." (51)

He then went on to exhort all OFA members to support the GFO in the same way they had supported OFA in the past.

By voting day, there was a major move opposing the GFO, including agribusiness interests taking out advertisements, and the posting of NO posters on voting day, allegedly by agribusiness and some UFO representatives. The pockets of resistance and the reasons for voting against the GFO ranged from real or perceived philosophical differences to the vote becoming an expression against every conceivable personal or regional frustration.

Voting day turned into a major disappointment. People stayed away in droves and the

majority of those who voted were against the establishment of the proposed General Farm Organization. Only 91,653 ballots were cast, with 39,708 (43.3 per cent) voting “yes” and 50,662 (55.2 per cent) voting “no”. The remainder being spoiled ballots.

There was much second-guessing – farmers don’t care enough, poor timing, the school tax issue added to the confusion: the ballot was too complicated, very poor homework in some areas, underestimating the strength of the opposition, fear of government control, lack of understanding. However, the bottom line was that of those estimated as eligible to vote, many did not do so and those who were strongly opposed to the proposal did vote. As Gordon Hill of Varna said in a follow-up membership meeting, it was apathy that lost the vote, since half of the farmers didn’t vote. He went on to say: “Anarchy prevails when good people do nothing.” (52)

President Munro, in his special statement dated the day of the vote, reflected upon the confusion and disappointment of the many farmers who had worked so hard to see a new unified organization. He focused on the future and stated that “The Ontario Federation of Agriculture must now find out why farmers voted against the plebiscite. Those who favoured the new GFO wanted a new future. The OFA will allow them the opportunity of still gaining their objectives.” (53)

An Executive meeting followed by an OFA Members’ meeting were held the following week. The basic question confronting the Ontario Federation of Agriculture at this critical junction was: **“Where do we go from here?”**



IV

A Rededication and a New Beginning:

The Individual Members Take Over the Reins



Approximately 210 people attended the Special Members’ meeting at the Westbury Hotel in Toronto on July 3, 1969. They were OFA members, presidents, secretaries and members of OFA Member Groups, GFO campaign workers and other interested farmers.

President Munro complemented the turn-out and reminded those present that this meeting had been called “to appraise the ongoing work that must be done on behalf of the farm community in Ontario.” (54)

He also invited all those present to speak and reported that OFA was ready to form a restructured farm organization if that were the wish of the farmers of Ontario.

Malcolm Davidson, who had worked so diligently as chairman of the CGO Campaign Committee, then read a letter to the meeting in which he thanked those who had assisted in the campaign.

He also went on to analyse the results of the ballot. Some clear consensus had emerged in several areas. A very large percentage of those who voted were in favour of marketing boards having a vote on the Provincial Council of the GFO, with the proposal's assumption that there would have been 100 direct member votes compared to the approximately 25 marketing board votes on the council.

On the subject of fees, the majority voted for automatic membership if there was to be a compulsory check-off.

In reflecting on the votes cast, his assessment was that: "30,000 of the NO votes were scared by the cost they were told would be involved, by the government control that they were told would be involved, by the threat that if they voted YES they would be thrown off their farms, that if they voted YES all the most frightening features of the Farm Income report, which they did not understand, would be implemented in full. In fact, the prospect of any change or any more influences on their lives was unwelcome. Many of these people feel that they have another five to 10 years on the farm and they want to slow down and retire without any interference." (55)

There were many words of thanks, but also tinges of bitterness. He went on to say that he felt that of the other 20,000 who voted NO, half were Walter Miller's supporters who believed that he had told them of the "rosy future" for the OFU and "voluntary collective bargaining". The other half were "rugged individualists" who resented any organization.

The 40,000 who voted YES, he felt, were those most involved and supportive of the role of farm organizations and problem solving.

The challenge of the future, as he saw it, was that "...the record of deceit and misinformation put out by the opponents should be laid out before farmers so that the next time the credibility gap will be final. And there must be a next time." (56)

He recognized that a number of options were being put forward and summarized them as follows:

1. A marketing board association;
2. A GFO-type structure with voluntary membership and a voluntary check-off;
3. A continuation of the OFA;
4. A period when the ball would be thrown to Walter Miller and his supporters;
5. A professional farmers' organization.

It was his strong belief that it was important to look at the options available and to spend the next couple of years regrouping in order to use the existing legislation and to have another vote.

It is clear from reading the minutes and other comments from that meeting that there was a general sense of the need to move ahead quickly and that there should be a major change in the Federation, using the GFO proposals, adequately financed, and with a new name.

It was agreed by the meeting that the OFA should carry on until a new farm organization was formed and another committee was struck to bring forward concrete proposals which could lead to the founding convention of this organization in November of that year.

President Munro agreed with the need for a change and reaffirmed the desirability of having a system of direct farmer membership, along with corporate / organizational memberships, possibly right through to the CFA as well. He also indicated that OFA would certainly not object to a name change.

In the meantime, proposals to strengthen the service programmes of the OFA were also proposed including the possibility of working with CIAG on developing a term-life and casualty package on a group basis for farmers, the provision of legal services and other services to complement the existing properties and bookkeeping services.

It was obvious to everyone present that other financing options would have to be explored since obviously a compulsory check-off had not been found to be desirable by Ontario farmers.

By the July 9th Executive meeting, President Munro was ready to present his suggestions for strengthening the OFA and for a successful transition to a “revitalized farm organization.”

It was a total package of organizational, financial and staffing and membership recruitment strategies. It was aggressive, forward-looking, and built upon the messages received through the GFO plebiscite.

The message was strident and challenging. He summed up his proposal on a note of caution: “This proposal is not without risk because Federation membership to date has been traditionally inactive. Except for the dedicated few, and there is nothing to indicate that this kind of action would change our traditional members, and could lose us our present Federation support.

“This proposal is not perfect. It is a proposal and, if not acted upon immediately, should be forgotten and we can settle down for another ten years of marginal operation with marginal support from our farm people.” (57)

He was also concerned with the potential loss of municipal grants and levies as well as a

possible backlash from commodity boards who might wish to consolidate their positions, given the results of the plebiscite. Each of these factors, he felt, contributed to the need for quick and decisive action by the OFA.

The meeting adjourned with a proposal to meet again in a couple of weeks, and that in the interim, communication with membership groups would take place and that the proposal could then be presented to the special organizational committee.

It was only two days later when it was announced that the special committee had met and had decided that they would not proceed with the task given to them after all. No clear details of their rationale are spelled out, although most members of the committee continued to be active in the OFA developments which were to follow.

A great amount of activity took place over the next several months. The August, 1969, Directors' meeting directed the Executive Committee to bring forward a proposal for the complete reorganization of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and by the September 12th Board meeting, a reorganization proposal was adopted and immediately implemented.

The new OFA structure (there had been no agreement on a name change) consisted of a basic individual member unit organized on a regional basis, with the number of regions determined by the actual number of members within a county.

At the same time, organizational memberships were solicited from legitimate producer groups, co-operatives, marketing boards and related educational organizations.

The revised bylaws ensured a pre-eminent position for the Individual Service Members (ISM) in the organization, by restricting the number of organizational seats on the Board and thus to the annual convention, in a ratio of approximately three-quarters individual (regional) representatives and one-quarter organization representatives.

With the revised structure, the County Federations no longer were the key local organizational units of the Federation, the local members were. This led to some confusion and lack of role differentiation, which was not resolved until 1973, but on the whole the new structure, although somewhat cumbersome, worked relatively well.

The Executive Committee was also revised to consist only of a president, two vice-presidents and four members at large for a total of seven members.

The first Individual Service Member (ISM) was signed up the day of Board approval with a \$20.00 membership fee. Organizational fees were established by formula for commodity organizations, based upon the number of producers, value of products marketed, and where appropriate, Board fees. In the case of other types of organizations, the amounts for groupings were either negotiated or established by the Board of Directors.

The Annual Convention on November 9, 1969, ratified the reorganization plans and increased membership fees to \$25 with \$5 to be returned to the counties. By that time, 758

ISMs were already enrolled and the newly revitalized OFA was off and running.

Gordon Hill, who had been active in the GFO vote, and previously an OFU supporter, was elected President during the convention, while Charles Munro went on to become the President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. It was a new beginning with a long and treasured history!

As the emphasis within OFA shifted to recruiting and supporting individual members while, at the same time, providing a forum for broader marketing, education and farm policy issues, there was also an expressed desire to increase the emphasis on direct service.

This changing focus led to the establishment of the Ontario Farm Machinery Agency as a subsidiary company of OFA in 1970. It was initially established to bring farm tractors into Ontario from England in order to force manufacturers to provide competitive pricing in the Ontario marketplace.

From its early successes, it has evolved into a company which offers wide variety of farm implements and parts at a substantial discount to OFA members, through its bulk purchasing capabilities.

This development was followed by the establishment of an insurance department within OFA where extended health and life insurance were made available as a benefit of OFA membership at a very substantial saving to Ontario farmers. More recently, this has led to the development of other innovative farm insurance programs such as disability and income replacement programs.

At the 1971 Convention, an "Area Office Committee" structure was approved in order to more effectively utilize the field staff who were now located in the counties, physically housed in the CIAG, later Co-operators' offices.

The Area Office Committee was an attempt to decentralize accountability and to ensure an effective working relationship between local field staff and the Counties and Regions they were appointed to serve. By this time, membership had increased to almost 7,000 ISMs.

County Federations of Agriculture are no longer represented on the OFA Board, but their boundaries are recognized as the basis for regional representation based upon the number of individual members residing in the county.

Although not structurally a part of OFA, County Federations continue to be a crucial part of the workings of the OFA and often act as "locals" of OFA while maintaining total organizational independence.

Individual membership fees now constitute approximately 90 per cent of OFA's revenues and associated organizations contribute less than six per cent of the total budget of the Federation.

Emphasis on the role of the family farm saw a change in nomenclature within the past several years, whereby the ISM designation was replaced by the Family Farm Membership (FFM), more accurately reflecting the strong base of support and involvement by both spouses and often their children in the operation of the modern farm unit.

The Federation's active memberships now stand at around 25,000 FFMs and some 25 organizational members, representing a wide range of commodities, co-operatives and other types of rural interests.

OFA continues to aggressively present the case of agriculture and the farmer before government, consumers and big business.

It has become recognized as a force to be reckoned with and an organization constantly recommitting itself to its historic purpose: Farmers Working For Farmers.

Even while the economic realities of farming in Canada are, once again, being threatened and the resourcefulness and convictions of farmers are being continually challenged, OFA continues to speak out strongly and forcefully.

Its services, its credibility and its compassion for the farmers of Ontario are as critical today as they were fifty years ago when it was first founded, or even a hundred years ago when the farmers' movement had its beginnings in our province.

Many farmers are still looking for their fair share of the economic pie as commodity prices plummet and as agriculture has become an international political football.

Consumers still demand cheap food and often care little where it comes from, and certainly have no appreciation for the implications of a "cheap food policy."

At the same time, governments are increasingly reluctant to respond to a minority group, even one which makes a major commitment to our economy, our balance of trade, which employs very large numbers of people across the country and which provides Canadian consumers with a safe, adequate and very inexpensive supply of food.

There is still much to be done. It will take a strong, vital Ontario Federation of Agriculture to represent the concerns and interests of Ontario farmers as we move into our next fifty years of service.



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