



National Farmers Union
Union Nationale des Fermiers



quarterly union farmer

Spring 2018 / Volume 24 Issue 1



NFU Youth Retreat 2018, March 4th to 8th, Wakefield, Quebec

Back Row (left to right): Murray Jowett (Region 5 Youth Advisor Elect), Josh Bateman (Region 7 Youth Advisor), Graham Bradley (Region 8 Youth Advisor), Stuart Oke (Youth President), Aric McBay (Region 3 Staff), Phil Gervais (Region 1 Coordinator), Paul Wartman (Region 3), Cherry Halcovitch (Region 3). Middle Row (left to right): Corrina Whybourne (Region 3), Aaron Armstrong (Region 3 Youth Advisor Elect), Gabriel Leblanc (Union Paysenne), Marta Reczek (Youth Vice President). Front Row (left to right): Dean Harder (Region 5 Board Member), Ayla Fenton (Region 3 Board Member), Shannon Jones (Women's Vice President), Claire Davies (Region 3).

Strong Communities. Sound Policies. Sustainable Farms.

Des communautés solidaires et des politiques sensées pour une agriculture durable.

Message from the Editorial Advisory Committee

After a nine year campaign, the NFU and our allies in the Save Our Prison Farms campaign received good news with the release of this year's federal budget on February 28. The national government will invest \$4.3 million over five years, beginning in 2018, to support re-opening the prison farms at the Joyceville and Collins Bay institutions in Kingston, Ontario. Over the last nine years several articles about the Save Our Prison Farms campaign have been printed in the *Union Farmer Quarterly*, so we would be remiss in not noting and celebrating this victory.

Two of the key organizers of the nine-year long Save Our Prison Farms campaign were NFU members - Local 316 President, Dianne Dowling and Jeff Peters. Both Dianne and Jeff, along with NFU Region 3 Board Member Tony Straathof and other key campaign allies were named to a Prison Farm Advisory Council by the federal government last May. The advisory panel was asked to investigate the feasibility of reopening the prison farms in Kingston. Their work culminated at the end of February with the funding commitment from the federal government.

However, as more details have become available, the victory has been somewhat bittersweet as it appears the prison farms will

become the home of goats, not cows. When the prison farms were closed in 2010, some of the cows from the farms were purchased by prison farm supporters. Since then, these cows and their offspring have been cared for by the Pen Farm Herd co-operative which always planned to hand the herd back to the Collins Bay and Joyceville institutions when the prison farms were re-established. In an interview with the Kingston Whig-Standard Jeff Peters said, "We're moving forward and we still think there's an opportunity to reconsider this. We're very pleased that the farms are being opened up, we just think that the cows were such a symbolic part of the farm and that the cows were important in the rehab of the inmates."

Whatever livestock end up making their home at the federal institutions, the re-opening of the prison farms means that federal inmates will once again contribute food to the prison system, gain good employment skills, and have the opportunity to work with animals, as part of their rehabilitation program.

Thank you to the many NFU members and prison farms supporters who have kept the value of and the need for the prison farms in the public's and the government's mind for the last nine years.

—Ann Slater,
on behalf of the Editorial Advisory Committee

union farmer quarterly

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We believe a strong rural community in Canada is an essential part of our national culture. In the National Farmers Union, we work collectively to strengthen the farm community by: building ties between farmers in all parts of Canada, with farmers in other countries and with non-farm people; ensuring all people have access to an adequate, nutritious and safely-produced food supply; promoting equity for women and young people in the farming community; promoting social support systems that permit people in farming communities a good quality of life; promoting the development and maintenance of a Canadian infrastructure to serve Canadian goals in food production and trade; and helping governments to form fair and constructive policies related to food production and food trade.

A Message from the National President



— by Coral Sproule, National President

I am thankful for the many opportunities I had this past winter to work with farmers and eaters in the NFU and beyond towards a better food system through food sovereignty. Our members are leaders in their fields and it was a pleasure to learn about some of the very important work and specific challenges faced in our varied experiences.

At the Region 3 AGM in March, I was greatly inspired by the keynote speakers - Joan Kuyek and Sarah Harmer. They both spoke of their roles as allies to our farm organization and rural communities and their feeling that we are all parts of a movement for the betterment of our communities. Part of the efforts in Region 3 to establish a local food advocacy network has been to engage the support of non-farmer eaters and other community activists in achieving a more just food system. NFU Region 3 council celebrated this by highlighting these two female activists' work on issues ranging from resource extraction and the effects on our rural communities to the struggle to save the prison farm system. We have relied on one another as agitators to a system that has not favoured the importance of agriculture and food as essential and active parts of our communities.

I am so grateful to have attended the AGMs and been hosted by Ontario locals 362, 310 and 330. Topics ranged from agroecological principals to soil health management, and valuable brainstorming occurred on how to better achieve objectives of the NFU in our communities. I was able to Skype into Region 5's AGM on March 3rd and was delighted to have some discussions with members there and listen in on speakers on a variety of issues. Several board members including myself were able to attend the youth retreat in Wakefield, Quebec where we were inspired by the passion of these young farmers.

The theme of the NFU New Brunswick (Region 1, District 2) AGM was *Changing Agricultural Policies to Reflect the Changing Face of Farming/Le Changement de Politiques Agricoles Pour Refleter le Visage Changeant de L'Agriculture*. We heard from a diverse panel of female farmers. Lao Bin, a new Canadian and vegetable farmer in New Brunswick, expressed her desire to be taken seriously as a farmer. She and her family have put everything they have into their dream of farming in their community, and they are thankful for the support they have but wish there was more commitment from government to fund training and support for new farmers. Some other key points by the panel were:

- Regulations around limiting corporate purchase of crown lands;
- The importance of groups, infrastructure development supports, coalitions, partnerships, and collective work and action to new farmer success; and
- Access to and improvement of childcare, education, and other social supports such as mental health care access and awareness in rural communities.

Access to communications and materials in both official languages was also identified as a barrier. We look forward to working with the NFU-NB board to overcome this particular barrier to participation for francophone farmers across the country. I visited several farms in the province and had the opportunity to discuss the unique challenges of blueberry farmers in northern New Brunswick where livelihoods are threatened by the consolidation of land ownership and processing. One major corporation, Nova Scotia based Oxford Foods, recently purchased nearly 16,000 Acres of Crown Land where they are harvesting berries and driving down prices for local growers. There seems to be a lack of government support for smaller producers who are being squeezed out by the corporate concentration of this crop. The NFU can play a crucial role in working with its members in New Brunswick to improve these and other conditions for small and medium scale family farms in the province.

As things begin to ramp up in our barns, greenhouses, and fields, we look forward to continuing to forge a path towards a better future for farmers. ■

Message from the National Women's President



— by Katie Ward, Women's President

Last week, I had the privilege of participating in the second annual *Thought For Food* conference

organized by the University of Ottawa's Interdisciplinary Food Studies Lab, as their keynote speaker. The focus of this year's conference was the new federal National Food Policy. I was asked to speak about the recent federal budget and the government's announcement that they would once again be analyzing their budget through a gender-based lens.

Readers of the *Union Farmer Quarterly* will no doubt be familiar with the details of the farm income crisis and the farmer age demographic crisis in Canada, but it was eye-opening to see a startled reaction from some in a room full of academics, when faced with the cold hard truth that in the twenty years between 1991 and 2011 the number of farmers under the age of 35 dropped by almost 70% and furthermore that 75% of farmers are set to retire in the next 10 years of which only 8% have a succession plan. To my mind, this is further evidence of the need to bring together theoretical academics and scientists with farmers that bring the practical realities to the table.

I was able to point to years of NFU work to counter federal agricultural policy that was sadly very effective in encouraging consolidation and concentration of agribusiness and incentivizing fewer and bigger farms with fewer farmers tending the land as a result. It was gratifying to see an entire presentation from an academic at the University of Waterloo about financialization and corporate consolidation, and their relationship with land prices, farm equipment, agricultural inputs, food processing and even the food retail sector.

All that being said, Minister MacAulay's mandate calls for a National Food Policy to “put more healthy, high-quality food, produced by Canadian ranchers and farmers, on the tables of families across the

country.” But we are facing an uphill battle to include the principles of food sovereignty in the finished product. Certainly, the recent federal budget does nothing to reflect food sovereignty and there is little in there on which the agricultural community can hang our collective hats. The most promising aspect involves a new loan program from Farm Credit Canada (FCC) for women entrepreneurs in agriculture (not necessarily farmers) in 2018-2019 – although there are so few details available that at the time of this writing there is no “announcement” about the new program on the FCC website.

There may also be some positive effects for farm families with the new Employment Insurance Parental Sharing benefit to encourage both parents to participate in childcare at early stages of development. I admit to being cynically unsurprised that the budget calls for funding bureaucrats to study universal pharmacare over the next two years when a Parliamentary Committee has already spent years studying universal pharmacare and made proposals for its implementation. Money for improved rural broadband internet would be welcomed by farmers of all genders, I imagine, especially those who are using technology to assist with research and marketing of their farm products. However, the budget also included \$100 million that was earmarked for agriculture in 2017 that went unspent – what opportunities did we miss?

And last but not least, there is the \$572.5 million over five years that has been allotted to big data research and researcher access with a focus on 'precision agriculture'. In the context of the *Thought For Food* conference, I spoke of the potential for companies to claim intellectual property rights over the data produced by farmers on their own farms, and how smart technology in machinery is causing difficulties for farmers in their ability to repair their own equipment. However, as we are learning about the Cambridge Analytica/Facebook data mining scandal, we need to be mindful of protecting not just our privacy and our personal data, but also our democracy itself. ■

National Farmers Union Youth Retreat 2018



— by *Marta Reczek, Youth Vice President*

This year's Youth Retreat was held in Sainte-Cécile-de-Masham, Quebec from March 4th to 8th. It was a beautiful winter setting at a place called The Barn. Sixteen people attended, including most Youth Advisors, a few Board members, and youth members from Region 3. We had a solid three days filled with in-depth conversations and workshops on many key topics such as building campaigns, membership development, and how we can overcome the biggest barriers for young farmers today.

The first day included interactive workshops on identifying power structures in society, how to define and implement agroecology, and how power dynamics might operate within organizations. Later on, we moved into a workshop on narrative building. The goal of this workshop was to introduce everyone to the skills behind crafting your own personal story in order to better understand yourself, and how to use it as an outreach mechanism to share important messages.

On day two, we continued to develop our personal narratives with some coaching help. We then had a session on Membership Development Training by Dean Harder and Joshua Bateman. They shared many useful ideas, especially on how to interact with the public at events where you are representing the NFU. In the afternoon, we each shared our visions for what kinds of regional events we want to plan this year, and what resources and support we require. This was an important element of the retreat because we need to identify how to best equip each other to achieve the regional and national goals we have for our farming communities and the NFU. To end the day, Katie Perfitt from 350.org give a presentation on how her organization

has created campaigns, developed powerful videos, and maintained strong volunteer teams for mobilizing around the climate change issues they are tackling. That evening, we hosted a Young Farmer Mixer and had some local farmers join us for dinner and socializing.

On the last day, Aric McBay led a workshop on how to build effective farm movements. We learned about the history of movement building in the NFU, and how to use past failures and successes to direct a better future. We came up with ideas for possible campaigns and specific tactics we could use to accomplish them. This work of campaign building is crucial, and the youth will continue to develop these initial ideas into something more concrete over the year. We also had an informal peer-to-peer session on the topic of Self-care and Farming, where people shared their struggles and what tools they have to cope. This felt much needed and positive to have support from each other, and we plan to keep the conversation going. Before the day ended, it was wonderful to hear a few of us share the stories we had been working on. We will continue to fine-tune our story-telling so that this skill can be used in our campaign and membership development work.

We are extremely grateful for the funding we received from the National Farmers Foundation and for the farms that donated an abundance of food, which sustained us during the retreat. It was an intensive, but also motivational Youth Retreat. Everyone there was highly engaged in the discussions and very respectful of each other. It was such a warm and welcoming atmosphere. One of the major goals of this retreat was capacity-building for youth within the NFU, and it looks like we made progress on that. Not only do we have many actionable next steps and goals, we have the relationships and connections with each other that make the NFU that much more resilient and full of momentum to keep building stronger movements.

—*In Solidarity, Marta Reczek*

Regional Reports



Region One:

District 1 (Province of PEI)

— by Reg Phelan, Board Member

The NFU on PEI met with the PEI Legislative Standing Committee on Communities, Land and Environment. We brought them up to date on what is happening to a large amount of Island farmlands. The committee passed a motion to ask Cavendish Farms, Vanco Farms, and an Asian investment group to appear before a Legislative committee to discuss their land holdings. In early March of this year, 67 people attended a symposium on the Lands Protections Act. There was a great response to work on ways to further develop the political will needed to protect Island land. There was a call for a coalition to work with the NFU on this issue.

A number of membership canvasses have taken place and more are planned. Our annual district convention was held on April 3rd, at Milton Community Hall. We looked at a recent study about organic matter in Island soils. ■

Region One:

District 2 (Provinces of NB & NS)

— by Phil Gervais, Coordinator



Contributing time to multiple organizations and getting more and more involved in New Brunswick farming and food initiatives has made me realize that there are SO many opportunities in the Maritimes for people who wish to farm.

I keep asking myself: how do we keep mobilizing farmers when farming is dying? There is, now more than ever, a need for new farmers, a need for regenerative agriculture, and a need for a sense of community. The flip side is that there is no monetary value for building communities or for the goods and services provided to the birds and the bees. If it is

not the almost insurmountable amount of debt, low profit margins, and hard sweat equity that will attract new farmers to the table, then what will? For some, a meaningful lifestyle is enough, but a fundamental systemic change needs to occur if we want to have a sustainable amount of people taking on farming as a career in the near future.

Above and beyond creating new farmers, one of the greatest challenges for farming, especially in the Maritimes, is the capacity of farmers to work together. There is a profound need for cooperation and farmers cannot continue to be as spread out as they currently are. Individual efforts no longer make the cut in the survival against the pressures from industry. That means that for large commodity crop farmers there is a need to form geographically restricted producer co-ops. That means diversified farmers need to form intentional communities so they can stay diversified while being individually specialized. I believe the key is finding other farmers that are already doing something similar, teaming up with them, and doing it better together. Farmers have lost so much autonomy and power over the last 50 years.

Having only been involved in the movement for a short amount of time I recognize that I might not see what others see, but I do bring a fresh lens, and what I see is not pretty. We need to step up our game NOW and collaborate. We need to step out of the box, offer to the public what the industry cannot offer and take back the margins that belong to farmers and their communities. If you have been watching, the industry is consolidating and clearly getting filthy rich while farmers are barely scraping by. Farmers need to re-focus, re-allocate their value, and think clearly about how we want to feed our communities differently so we can re-distribute wealth in our local economies. We need to be one step ahead in offering our communities ecologically regenerative, collaborative food systems. It will make farming more lucrative for farmers, attract more people to farming as a career, and create the relationships needed to form communities that will be able to resist global industry pressure. ■

NFU-O/Region Three:



Province of Ontario

— by *Emery Huszka, Coordinator*

An election period is a time when our words hold power over those who wish to govern us; a time when a party can no longer control the discussion through funding promises; and a time when those who want our vote might actually be willing to listen! The Ontario election is scheduled for June 7, and we as food producers must avail ourselves of our right to actively participate. The National Farmers Union has never been shy to ask questions that matter.

The NFU-O sent our top ten questions for 2018 to the four main political parties' agriculture critics. It is our intention to publish their answers on www.nfuontario.ca by mid-April. While ten questions hardly constitutes a thorough vetting, we felt that these incorporate the core issues of economic, environmental, and social sustainability and strong rural communities. We are asking each member to build on these core questions to challenge local candidates on the issues that matter most to us as food producers. The questions cover the issues of food sovereignty, net farm income, access to land and the next generation, environmental stewardship, consumers' rights to know about food sources, rural community infrastructure, an even playing field in a world of trade, indigenous rights in the Ontario food system, farmland protection, and their party's vision for food production in Ontario in 50 years.

As a non-partisan organization, it is important to empower each individual to vote and support the candidate(s) that represent our community's interests. Do not underestimate the impact of our cumulative participation. During the last Ontario election, only 52% of people voted, yet the difference between the majority government and official opposition was 37.65% to 35.45% with the third party close at 22.74% and fourth party at 4.84%. Also, 31,399 people simply spoiled their vote. There are no forgone conclusions in 2018. Every

debate counts; every one-on-one discussion counts; every public challenge counts; and EVERY VOTE COUNTS!

The Ontario Legislature which has been composed of 107 seats will now be growing to 124. These are not rural ridings but are comprised of our non-farming urban, food-eating neighbours. We will need to make time to talk food with as many people as possible or risk our rural voices being left behind.

As food producers, we must recognize that the rules are created by those we allow to govern. As people affected by the laws, we must take this opportunity to critique, scrutinize, and hold politicians accountable for the rules that have been shaping the world of agriculture. Become involved in the debates. Take time to work with other NFU members. Write letters to the editor in your local paper. Ask respectful, but sharp, questions on social media. Challenge all of our fellow eaters to consider their votes from the position of food sovereignty.

The candidates are interviewing for a job that we, the voters, will decide upon. There are no better interviewers than the National Farmers Union! ■

CONGRATULATIONS!

AYLA FENTON, Region 3 board member, has been chosen by the Youth Engagement Showcase for receipt of a \$500 donation to be directed to a charity of her choice.

The Youth Engagement Showcase features stories of youth taking charge and tackling important issues, highlights the impact youth can have in their communities and demonstrates how different types of rural communities can successfully involve youth in addressing local challenges. Youth from across Ontario are eligible and identified via nominations.

Ayla's profile will be included on the Rural Ontario Institute website under 2018 Youth Engagement Stories. You can also see a profile of Ayla by going to the NFU website – www.nfu.ca.

Ayla has asked that the donation be directed to the NFU Youth.



Region Five:

Province of Manitoba

—by Ian Robson, Coordinator

NFU in Manitoba (Region 5) held its Annual Convention at Portage La Prairie on March 3, 2018 with the theme *Farmers in the Crosshairs: Institutions at Risk*. Several speakers, including NFU President Coral Sproule, joined the convention either in person or by Skype. Ian Robson and Dean Harder were elected to the NFU Board. Elected to NFU Youth Advisory was Murray Jowett. The seats on the Women's Advisory and the International Program Committee are vacant.

Lynne Fernandez, policy researcher with the Manitoba branch of the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, spoke about the Manitoba economy. The Manitoba government has been hiring out financial planning to private firms like KPMG and then has been slow to release the details of these reports. Some of the recommendations of the reports, however, get implemented in the name of deficit cutting. This year the province drastically cut the road construction budget which cannot be good for rural Manitoba. But Manitoba has had a steady economy for many years due to its diverse economy. In this low interest rate era it is good to spend money to repair roads and build needed services to help our businesses survive. This is even more true given that climate change will challenge our roads and bridges with floods.

NFU Director of Research and Policy, Cathy Holtslander, spoke to us by Skype about the new draft document *Seed Synergy*. There are many problems with the document, which all arise from the presence of UPOV '91 and Plant Breeders Rights being implemented. In the 1970's, Canada was said to spend \$100M per year on crop breeding and research but Canadian government spending on crop breeding and research is now around \$20M per year. This is far too low and does not keep the research focus on quality and natural pest resistance but helps private companies make huge profits from farmers through higher seed costs.

Lonny McKague, Canadian Grain Commission (CGC) Commissioner, spoke in regard to elevator bonding, classes of grains, and selling grain on specifications versus selling based on CGC Grading. Due to larger crops and reduced CGC services there is currently a large pool of money at CGC which should be used to help farmers.

NFU Seed Committee Chair, Terry Boehm, also spoke by Skype. He said bonding should continue at the CGC. A farmer self-insurance system to cover defaults on grain cheque payments may encourage poor management of grain traders if the farmers' insurance covers their mistakes.

Terry discussed a number of catch words that are used to confuse people on policy these days: innovation, modernization, common seed, stakeholders, consensus, government-enabled and partnership. It was pointed out that since new seed varieties could be as good as previous, rather than better than, there could be disasters from new innovative seed related to their end use for example, and our crop insurance does not cover the crop once it is delivered to market if the product turns out to be not market acceptable.

The Manitoba Government has been consulting with Manitoba citizens on climate change. The National Farmers Union did have a contract to provide the government with a report/plan on how to reduce GHG emissions from farms, but the incoming government first delayed and then cancelled that contract. Despite this delay, the NFU has restarted work on developing its plan for Manitoba farmers—and laying the groundwork for similar emission reduction plans across Canada. The Manitoba government appears to be floundering regarding what steps to take to reduce GHG emissions and is only taking small steps on adaptation. Some in Manitoba think that government should do nothing. The National Farmers Union feels that farmers can better manage our soil, capture carbon, and thus make themselves more profitable, but we need better policies and support programs to move the sector in this direction. ■

Region Seven:



Province of Alberta

— by Doug Scott, Coordinator

Happy spring from Alberta. I would like to welcome all our new Region 7 members. Hard to believe that at one time there were over 30 functioning locals in the province. There is no question that the current geographic boundaries of locals are in serious need of redrawing. At the present time Region 7 functions as one large geographic local.

Thanks to Mandy, Glenn, Josh, Toby and Larry we have had an active winter with a focus on being more visible and increasing membership. We rented a table at the Alberta Organic Conference in Red Deer in February. In addition to having fun, we attended

some really good sessions and signed up a few new members. We attended the federal government round table on seed legislation held in Edmonton and the Alberta Wheat and Barley Commission AGM at Farm Tech. The NFU filed an affidavit in support of Action Surface Rights' Alliance being an intervener speaking for farmers in the Redwater Appeal case. This is the case that has allowed bankrupt oil and gas companies to be absolved of the costs of cleaning up orphaned and abandoned wells. We support a polluter pay model.

We are planning our Annual Convention and AGM, and in recognition of our new members from Region 8, we will be travelling to the mighty Peace. The tentative date and place is June 23 in La Glace. We expect a rather late night as the sun does not set until 11 p.m.

This spring we hope to see the passage of Bill 6, which is the Farm and Ranch safety legislation. Also of note, we have a new opposition leader by the name of Jason Kenney - an old Stephen Harper right hand man.

Wishing you all a safe and healthy spring. ■

NATIONAL FARMERS FOUNDATION

The **National Farmers Foundation (NFF)** is pleased to welcome Yuill Herbert as our newest board member and our new board secretary. Yuill makes his home on Waldegrave Farm in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia with his partner, former NFU Youth President Cammie Harbottle, and their family.

The NFF thanks the NFU membership for its continued support. Your donations allow the NFF to provide funding to activities like the NFU Youth Retreat described in this edition. We all benefit from the education, activism, and momentum created by these gatherings as the next generation of farm leadership builds its capacity and networks.

**If you wish to donate using your credit card,
please find the National Farmers Foundation on
www.CanadaHelps.org**

We also accept cheques made out to the "**National Farmers Foundation**" and mailed to the NFU office, 2717 Wentz Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7K 4B6

In this edition of the Union Farmer Quarterly, we are introducing three NFU members who are new to the National Board, as of the 2017 National Convention in November. All three people profiled this time are young farmers, enthusiastic not only about their own endeavours but about the NFU!

SHANNON JONES

Women's President



My partner Bryan and I make our living from organic vegetables and cut-flowers in River Hebert, NS. We sell directly to our customers, mostly in Dieppe/Moncton, NB.

I did not grow up on a farm. I learned by apprenticing, volunteering, and working on farms, here in Canada and in the U.S., Central and South America, and India.

I am a member of the NFU because of our shared values. I have loved attending the national convention (holy moly...I met David Suzuki one year!) and the youth retreat (a great “gateway” to the NFU!).

My personal hopes and dreams for the NFU include:

- The Direct Marketing committee to be monthly “farmer-to-farmer” calls on topics like selling at a farmers’ market, managing a CSA, restaurant relationships, etc. Policy ideas may come out of these meetings too. I hope these meetings will feel like a member benefit. If you are interested in this idea, please let me know.
- Realizing we have A LOT of work to do on diversity and inclusion, it was so great that NFU members in the early days recognized the value of women and youth but we cannot just keep riding on that past forward-thinking. There are SO

MANY voices not present (or present enough). We need to cultivate and encourage diversity, not just sit back and say, “Let them come.” How are we encouraging and building up farmers from different ethnic backgrounds? Or gender identification? Or sexual orientation? What about New Canadians? French-speaking farmers? And our country’s farm-workers, both domestic and migrant?

- How to make the work of the NFU’s Indigenous Solidarity Working Group into something that every member of the NFU learns from.

Thank you for all the amazing work each of you do on your farms and in your communities! ■

STUART OKE

Youth President

My name is Stuart Oke, I am the new Youth President and I have been an NFU member for several years. I am originally from Kingston, Ontario where I first got involved with the NFU through my work with Local 316 as a membership coordinator.



My farming career started when I was eighteen years old although at the time I certainly did not think that ten years later I would be running my own farm with my soon-to-be wife.

After I graduated high school, I spent a very broke year abroad travelling Europe and luckily I spent most of a season working on a farm in Ireland. Within months of returning home I was off to a farm apprenticeship which would, a season later, become the turning point in my life as I looked forward at a future full of farming. For the next 7 years I bounced

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(*Stuart Oke, from page 10*)

around Ontario, from Kingston to Thunder Bay working on a new farm every season. Farming 3 seasons a year and working dead end jobs in the winter. Looking back, I feel so lucky for that time of my life. I learned from and worked for some truly inspirational farmers, all of them NFU members, who have since become mentors and friends to call for advice and to visit when possible. Several years into my farming career, I found myself farming near my home town of Kingston, looking for a piece of land and thinking of perhaps starting my own farm. A long story short, I did not find land but I did find the love

of my life when we both happened to be hired on the same farm. In 2017, we both founded Rooted Oak Farm (La Ferme Chene Du Sol) a CSA and Market Farm located outside St-Andre-Avellin, Quebec and operated on rented land.

I find myself more tired than ever these days but also happier. I am grateful for my partner Nikki, the farm we share and all the farmers who taught, encouraged and advised us both along the way. I am excited to be the new NFU Youth President and grateful for the opportunity to be able to give back to the farming community that has given me so much. ■

MARTA RECZEK

Youth Vice President



Marta is from Kingston, Ontario where she began her journey with farming several years ago. As she was finishing up her post-secondary education, a class on Sustainable Food Systems sparked her interest in farming as a

career. After graduation, she worked in the non-profit sector. In 2014, she decided to work on an organic vegetable farm and continued to farm for two more years. Working outdoors to grow beautiful food for her community made it feel like the most meaningful work she had ever done.

In 2015, Marta attended her first NFU convention in London, Ontario, and then a Youth Retreat shortly after in Thorsby, Alberta. The people she has met through the NFU have ignited her passion for a better food system more than ever. To have the knowledge and support from those who have been farming for generations, those who have just begun, or those who are dreaming of their own business is surely invaluable.

Marta recently moved to British Columbia and will be starting a new season of working at a small-

scale, organic vegetable farm. The vision she holds of her own future farm is a business that operates within a co-operative model and also includes educational programming for children. Taking on the role of NFU Youth Vice President this year, Marta is feeling eager to carry forward the work of the NFU youth. ■

ATTENTION MEMBERS

DISTRIBUTION OF THE UNION FARMER QUARTERLY/NEWSLETTER IS CHANGING

The NFU Executive has decided to make email the primary method of distribution for both the *Union Farmer Quarterly* (UFQ) and *Union Farmer Newsletter*, starting with the Spring 2018 edition. The decision was made to provide only the digital version to all members **except those who specifically indicate they wish to continue getting the print version.**

To provide your email address OR to request printed version of the Newsletter and/or the UFQ:

- email nfu@nfu.ca,
- phone (306) 652-9465,
- fax (306) 664-6226 or
- send a letter to National Farmers Union
2717 Wentz Ave., Saskatoon, SK S7K 4B6

Restoring Resilience, Regenerating the Farm

The opening speaker on the *Restoring Resilience, Regenerating the Farm* panel during the NFU's 48th Annual Convention in Ottawa last November was **Sarah Rotz**. She is a postdoctoral Fellow in the Geography Department at the University of Guelph, where she studies the political ecology of food systems. Her PhD research examined industrial and alternative food systems. Her presentation *Land, Stewardship and Agro-Ecological Health* focused on the intersection of social-ecological health and resilience in the Ontario agricultural production system, and the role of social and agro-ecological diversification in agriculture. Rotz prefaced her presentation by acknowledging that the convention was taking place on unceded Anishinaabe land, the implications this has for her work on food and land sovereignty, and she invited participants to be mindful of the ways in which settler colonialism has and continues to impact indigenous food systems.

Core problems identified in her study include access to agricultural land and knowledge, these being tools and resources that are theoretically available, especially in the case of marginalized populations, new and young farmers. To provide context for the issues, she spoke of the relationship between Canada's aging farm population and the necessity of funding retirement through the sale of farms, which is connected to farmland values rising. For example, in the case of corn producers in Ontario, land values have increased 12% per year since 2008. Prohibitive costs associated with the industrialization of agri-food production were cited, and here Rotz referred to research conducted by the NFU which revealed that farmers carry \$23.00 of debt for every dollar earned in Canada, resulting in pressure on farmers to expand and consolidate their land base, which, contrary to helping the agricultural sector, has contributed to the demise of 81,000 farms in Canada.

Rotz explained that, according to Statistics Canada 2006, between 1986 and 2006 total land rented for agricultural use increased by 20%, while total land owned fell by 15% and close to urban centers in Ontario, 50% of the total land is under

rental. Rotz pointed out that farm rental is now the second largest form of land tenure in Canada and stated that "In the context of this increasingly competitive food production environment, underpinned by these drivers to expand, we're also seeing these shifts towards more flexible or shorter-term rental agreements. This is what I found especially telling and concerning". Rotz went on to show, through soil sample analysis, how short-term rentals that are typified by shorter, less varied rotations and an absence of livestock integration impact soil health. She emphasized that some respondents indicated they feel forced into this mode of management, and the intention is not to blame individual farmers but rather focus on how political and economic systems influence farm practices and create barriers to producer's ability to enhance the environmental health of their farms. Rotz also identified how these systems and the pressure on farmers creates misunderstanding and dissention between farmers based on the mode of production. She used examples of negative perceptions of organic practices. She shared her hope that bridging cultural and political gaps through dialogues can be a pathway to diversifying land relations, farming systems and agricultural relationships.

Anna Korzensky traveled from Hungary to be a part of the NFU convention and to share her model of Extrafamilial Farm Succession, which she described as a prescriptive strategy to facilitate generational renewal of farming. Korzensky's research explores mechanisms for farm succession outside of the family as a possible contribution to the generational renewal of small scale farming and agrarian culture. In addition to her sociology studies at the University of Vienna, she has been active with the Nyeleni Europe Movement for Food Sovereignty and is a member of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization team in Rome that facilitates relationships between the FAO and civil society organizations.

Korzensky's work illustrates an interconnected, multigenerational model of farm succession that is being implemented with success in Austria. Through her research, Korzensky identified that there are

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aging farmers in Austria who hope to find successors willing and able to eventually take over their farms, provide an income for retirees and assist them in staying on the farm to age in place. Korzensky spoke of the intersection of these goals with the goals of young and new farmers who are searching for access to land, mentorship and the promise of an agrarian lifestyle for themselves and their families. Korzensky shared her hope that the model might provide a feasible process to realize the goals of both parties and how it could, in turn, support the tenets of protecting and preserving family farms that are the “backbone” of the agricultural system and account for 90% of farms worldwide. She drew comparisons between Canada and Austria, where farming populations are aging, and the global fact that we continue to see a decrease in farm numbers accompanied by an increase in farm size through consolidation.

Korzensky provided an overview of the process that includes a pre-succession period, a succession period and finally a disengagement period for retirees and a primary management/innovation period for successors. The pre-succession includes the recognition that there is not a relative willing or able to farm and that the successors may come from a farming background but do not have access to land, or may be new to farming. The succession period starts with an initial phone call between older and younger farmers, followed by an “interview” at the farm, then a probation period with teaching, mentoring and relationship building. When asked about the financial process of transferring farms, Korzensky explained that the succession contract which follows the probationary period includes a clause requiring successors to pay an agreed upon sum that represents a rent-to-own arrangement. The process eventually moves into joint operation of the farm, and later on a transfer to the successor of day-to-day management. The succession partnership also includes the agreement that successors will assist and support aging farmers in staying in their homes on the farm for as long as possible. This provides an opportunity to enhance and maintain farming communities, not only because the farm continues to be viable as a social and economic entity, but because the aging farmers can offer the successors an introduction into the community, making it a smoother, more

personal transition. Overall, Korzensky outlined how the model can contribute to:

- creating the conditions of the transfer of farms
- building multigenerational, non-family agrarian partnerships:
 - ensuring home and protection for the elderly
 - facilitating access to land and other farming assets without considerable start-up capital
 - promoting intergenerational exchanges: inflow and outflow of knowledge, endogenous innovation, co-creation
 - linking traditional, locally specific knowledge with new experiences
- acting against the decrease of the number of farms, and facilitating the continuity of food production, thus improving food security and food sovereignty.

Meghan Entz grew up in Manitoba. Her family was involved in agriculture, which inspired her to focus her studies on the issues facing food producers in Canada and around the world. Since graduating, Meghan has worked as a consultant with the Canadian Foodgrain’s Bank, and as a Research Assistant under Dr. Annette Desmarais, Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty. She was involved in an analysis of students’ food insecurity at the University of Manitoba and studied the NFU’s involvement in protesting the closure of the Federal Prison Farms. Recently, she has been working on a project about the challenges and motivations of young farmers in Manitoba, Ontario and abroad. She is a Master’s student at the Balsillie School of International Affairs.

Entz presented on the findings of the international qualitative research study *Becoming a Young Farmer: Young people’s pathways into agriculture in four countries*. Entz reported on the Canadian segment of the study conducted in Manitoba. Other countries studied were China, Indonesia and India. Questions examined how young people come into farming, what motivates them and what constrains them. The researchers were interested in “countering this internationally held

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*We Remember ...***ANDREAS PFENNING**

On February 26, 2018, the National Farmers Union lost one of its young members. Andreas Pfenning was 24 years old when he passed away suddenly and unexpectedly as a result of a hunting accident. Andreas was a member in Region 3 and President of Local 340 Waterloo-Wellington.

Andreas was passionate about many things: farming, hunting, cooking, brewing beer, his environment, and the natural world around him. He worked in the family farm business growing quality organic produce, learning and becoming educated on various issues that are important to our family farms, especially those affecting migrant workers. His involvement with the NFU was a natural fit.

Andreas took on leadership roles within the NFU and was just beginning to make his own contributions as a young farmer in our community. Many may recall

meeting him at the recent convention held in Ottawa last November. Andreas possessed many strengths that our organization will miss – his youthfulness, passion, and conviction. Andreas had a lot of potential and was in the prime of his life.

Andreas is deeply missed by his parents Ekk and Jenn, his two brothers Markus and Tristan, and by his girlfriend Tylin. The National Farmers Union mourns with his family in his sudden passing.

The NFU is greatly appreciative of the support from and involvement of the family over the years and especially during this difficult and most recent time. The Pfenning family generously requested that memorial donations be directed to the NFU. These monies are greatly appreciated and will support the ongoing work of the NFU.



(Restoring Resilience, from page 13)

idea that young people are no longer able to or willing to farm". She reiterated that globally we are losing farms and farmers. Between 1986 and 2016, Canada lost 1/3 of all farmers and 70% of young farmers. The province of Manitoba alone reports a 46% loss of young farmers, but also has the 2nd lowest average age of farmers nationally. Entz reported that the study included 48 producers and of those, 38 came from a farming background and the majority were involved in conventional grain, livestock and mixed farming.

Farmers named being able to raise families in a rural setting, living a quiet life, the opportunity for variety and pride in work, social responsibility and family supports as motivating factors. Identified challenges were access to land, access to credit, financial constraints, policy and government regulations and programs such as political parties

being out of touch with farmer interests and carbon tax, which she pointed out was unique in that the study took place prior to the creation of the "Made in Manitoba" carbon tax, which has exemptions for producers. Supply management regulations were also identified by small producers, but were not identified by farmers operating under formal supply management. Risk and weather, social and physical isolation, succession planning and public perceptions of agriculture were also identified. Within these categories, a recurring theme was access to and availability of suitable labour, as well as tax structuring related to farmland and school taxes in Manitoba, and the negative effects of land prices and consolidation on farmer relationships in small communities. However, Entz concluded by sharing that many young respondents feel that farming as a lifestyle is still very much a viable option for themselves and their families. ■

Cultivating Communities

Three Experiences from the NFU

The closing panel at the 2017 NFU National Convention was titled *Cultivating Communities* and featured three speakers.

Our first speaker was **Barbara Schaefer**. Barbara spent eighteen years working on environmental protection policy, program development, and education through the University of Toronto, the Green Party, organic organizations, and government before becoming a farmer in Eastern Ontario. She now raises a rare breed of over 300 large, black pigs. In 2016, after ten years of pig farming, what had begun as a difficult occupation had been refined “down to a fine art,” according to Barbara. But when three abattoirs shut their doors in the span of one year, Barbara realized that with no local slaughterhouse she would be forced to abandon her business. Unwilling to quit, Barbara launched the ambitious project of starting Farmersville Community Abattoir.

Over the past twelve years, Eastern Ontario has lost 40% of its slaughterhouses. Ageing owners and facilities; the physical demands of operation; increasing regulations and legislation; and the fact that when it comes time to retire and sell, very rarely does someone in the family want to buy the business, all have contributed to the steady decline.

Barbara wanted to start Farmersville Community Abattoir with a not-for-profit model instead of owning it herself because she did not want to be in the position of trying to sell the facility when she retired. Plus, running it as a not-for-profit ensured that it was community owned and remained available for local farmers long after Barbara retired. As a community abattoir, the plant has a volunteer board of directors and a voting membership. A one time \$1000 membership fee allows you to vote at General Convention and receive priority scheduling during the busy butchering season.

To house the project, a local abattoir that had been closed for four years was purchased. After being vacant that long, there was damage to the building that needed addressing, and much of the equipment was outdated and unusable. However,



Panelists: (left to right) Barbara Schaefer, Gary Kenny, and Arzeena Hamir.

some machinery was still in good shape, and the facility looked like the best bet for getting started. But it was expensive. Despite having had a commercial meat plant operator come in and estimate the costs, the financial burden was much greater than expected.

Getting funding was difficult. None of the major banks were willing to fund a not-for-profit corporation, and FCC, which might have supported the project, was owed a lot of money by the previous owner of the facility and was unwilling to lend. The Community Development Fund could not help out on the tight time-frame Barbara was running on, but they did point her towards the Business Development Bank of Canada, which funded the abattoir for renovations and several months operating costs. The Greenbelt Fund provided \$30,000 in 50/50 matching funds. Despite this, the project required a one year loan from a private investor who charged a lot of interest. On October 18th, 2016 the abattoir had a test-kill. It was successful.

Now, Farmersville Community Abattoir is running smoothly. They have five full-time employees, one part-time employee, and many people who volunteer throughout the year, especially on kill-days. The abattoir is a full-service slaughterhouse with vacuum packaging, weighing, and labelling. Everything that a large commercial slaughterhouse can do for you, the community abattoir can do too. And thanks to the not-for-profit model, it will be owned by the community in perpetuity, allowing farmers to plan their operations much better knowing that they have a stable slaughterhouse.

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The second speaker on our panel was **Arzeena Hamir**. Arzeena is a farmer and agronomist in the Comox Valley, BC. She has a bachelor's degree in crop science from the University of Guelph and a master's degree in sustainable agriculture from the University of London (England). Arzeena has worked abroad as a volunteer and researcher, run her own seed company, and worked as the coordinator of the Richmond Food Security Society. In 2015 she was a founding member of an organic growers cooperative called Merville Organics, which operates a 120 share CSA (community shared agriculture), sells at three different farmers markets, and supplies fifteen restaurants.

In opening her talk, titled From Competition to Cooperation, Arzeena asked how many people in the audience had sold produce at farmers' markets, and then how many people had experienced seeing a new person come to the farmers market selling the exact same thing as you and trying to be friendly and welcoming, all the while knowing that this was going to cut into your business. Several hands went up, perhaps nervously. Arzeena said she was glad to know she was not alone.

After her family moved to the farm, Arzeena soon realized that people like to buy from abundance. If a vendor at the farmers' market looks successful, people are more likely to support them. Arzeena knew that she could not grow enough by herself to overfill a table with produce, so she joined forces with another local farmer. This farmer had been running a small CSA for about two years, but her farm had a lot of problems with slugs and quack grass and she was having trouble growing enough food for her members. Arzeena started selling her vegetables to help bolster the CSA, and eventually the two teamed up and started Merville Organics.

Arzeena talked briefly about the difficulties of starting a cooperative in the area. After talking to numerous people in the valley she found out that there was a history of co-ops imploding due to personality differences, so people were wary of the concept. Eventually she found a third person (herself and the CSA farmer being the first two) who was interested in trying a co-op, and in 2015, Merville Organics was incorporated.

In the Merville Organics co-op, one of the key elements in a 12'x16' walk-in cooler that Arzeena's family leases to the cooperative. The cooler, along with a wash-station, acts as a hub for five farms in the area who share costs, and it means that each individual farm does not have to invest in their own freezer.

... there is a common misconception that farmers ought to be stoic figures alone in their fields, working things out for themselves and slogging along.

When Arzeena and her husband started out, they felt that as farmers they had to do everything themselves – seeding, planting, harvesting, marketing, repairs, etc. Arzeena pointed out that there is a common misconception that farmers ought to be stoic figures alone in their fields, working things out for themselves and slogging along. But this is never how farming has worked. Running a farm has always been a community endeavour. Neighbours are paramount, from providing help during crunch time to raising a barn or putting up a greenhouse. Arzeena was emphatic that we need to put aside the idea that to be a farmer you need to be a jack-of-all-trades who knows how to do everything. It is not true, nor is it good for our mental health. We always rely on our neighbours and communities. Operating cooperatives is one way of strengthening that community commitment, preventing farmers doing the same thing from having to compete against each other, and making life easier for all involved. As Arzeena put it, cooperatives “put the fun back in farming.”

Our third and final speaker was **Gary Kenny**. Gary is the president of NFU Grey County Local 344, an organic farmer, writer, editor, and conservationist. He has a background in educational publishing and has worked with Canadian churches on various human rights portfolios for 27 years. He spoke about his experience as a farmer on the

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(Cultivating Communities, from page 16)

traditional lands of the Three Fires Confederacy, and on the Kiinoo Mudwin (We Learn Together) course that his local has been convening over the past two years.

Gary and his wife moved to a farm near Neustadt, Ontario in 2006. The farm, called Rivercroft Farm, is located close to two first nations communities: Saugeen and Nawash. Aware of the NFU's commitment to meaningful solidarity, Gary and his wife knew they wanted to do something with the farm to honour Indigenous people. One of the first things they did was acknowledge that the land that they were farming on was the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy, but they knew that acknowledging that fact was not enough. Without some sort of action to give it meaning and substance, a territory acknowledgement easily becomes a token gesture.

Kiinoo Mudwin is designed to educate members of the community, and beyond, on the historical, cultural, and contemporary issues that Indigenous people face. The course is taught by Glenn Trivett, an Ojibwe historian, teacher, medicine man, and Midiwin pipe carrier. The course operates on the belief that education is a necessary prerequisite before we can truly be in meaningful solidarity with Indigenous people.

When the course was being offered elsewhere as Indigenous 101, Gary approached the facilitator with the idea of collaboration. The facilitator thought it was a great idea. In its current manifestation, the course is a collaboration between M'Wikwedong Native Cultural Resource Centre, the NFU, and KAIROS. Gary emphasized that it always makes sense to work in collaboration, and that doing so opened up all sorts of networks in and beyond Grey County that the course could be promoted to.

The course is split into three sessions. The first session involves an opening teaching circle, teaching on the circle of life and decorum of the circle, sacred medicines and the medicine wheel, smudging, the clan system, and the traditional roles of men and women. This session is very important because it profiles societies with a complex system of social and political organization; emphasizes societies that revered and cared for the earth and its creatures;

and demonstrates the sovereignty, dignity, and humanity that was denied or not understood by early Europeans.

The second session deals with the history of North America from an Indigenous perspective: the settlement of Turtle Island (pre, during, and post ice age), European exploration and early colonization, and some Acts and Proclamations that were problematic for Indigenous peoples. The third session deals with the Indian Act, residential schools (the most emotionally difficult part of the course), and modern issues faced by Indigenous people.

Gary said that he regularly receives testimonials from participants who describe the course as having left an "indelible mark" on their worldview. Participants say that they leave the course realizing that they might have grown up with misconceptions and misguided opinions, but upon learning the truth they feel empowered to make a change in their lives instead of feeling guilty and ashamed.

Gary emphasized the need for solidarity to be more than just a word. He reminded us that it is easy to pass resolutions to do with reconciliation and solidarity, but we need to challenge ourselves to do more work on the ground. He reminded us that meaningful consultation and collaboration are key. He also touched on the fact that it is important to be conscious of the words and language we use, since it can be easy to inadvertently reinforce negative colonial values and systems. In moving forward in solidarity, it is important that we are not too goal-oriented. We have to do a lot of listening. Listen, listen, listen, and be patient. Real solidarity and reconciliation will not happen overnight.

In closing, Gary challenged all of us as NFU members to ask whether Indigenous people should be more integrated into major NFU governance and policy bodies, and if so, how to make that happen. He posed to us the question: is there more we can do to bring Indigenous people in our midst – who also value food and food sovereignty – into the circle in a meaningful way? The NFU is committed to solidarity and reconciliation, but what does that really look like? ■

Fostering Conversations with New Canadians with an Interest in Farming

Every year the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN) holds a conference that rotates between Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. At the end of November 2017 it was held in Truro, NS. There are always workshops related to production, marketing, and business management skills and techniques. This year the conference highlighted the 4 Principles of Organic: Health, Ecology, Fairness, and Care.

Two NFU members who attended the 2017 conference recount their experience at one of the sessions that they feel is particularly relevant for the NFU.

Phil Gervais, Region 1 Regional Coordinator:

After our 2017 Convention in Ottawa, I attended the ACORN conference in Truro and was moved by a workshop hosted by the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia and Common Roots Urban Farm called *Fostering Farming Opportunities for New Canadians in the Maritimes*. When I entered the room I did not know what I was getting into, but realized that the larger group was going to be split into three groups sitting around three different tables. The tables were divided by language (Nepalese, Swahili and Arabic) with each table having an interpreter.

I was caught off-guard, in a really good way, because the NFU had just clearly identified the need to consciously realize who was not sitting at the table and to make sure to do so in the future and there I was, sitting in front of several people who would typically almost never be in the room.

We started by introducing ourselves and everyone at the Arabic-speaking table I was at spoke enough English to understand. I thought, we probably do not even need an interpreter but I could not have been more wrong. As the questions got deeper and more complicated, the Arabic speakers around the table turned to the interpreter to fully explain what they wanted to express.

The exercise was only 90 minutes long, and for anything truly practical to come out of such a short period of time is an unrealistic expectation. That being said, the moment everyone in that room experienced - the realization that we have farmers without farms sitting right in front of us that we are unable to clearly communicate with - was incredible, moving, and powerful.

The conversations could and should have gone on all day. Hopefully the NFU can be inspired by this initiative and help facilitate more of these conversations at a more regional level and better connect, truly connect, the farmers of Canada for the future of our food system.

Shannon Jones, Women's Vice President:

During my years as an apprentice/farmworker, I spent time in a few other countries, learning from farmers outside of Canada. Those experiences have helped shape my farm.

Meeting the new Canadians during this workshop at the ACORN conference was so impactful. It was hard to hear, however, just how little support and information was available to new Canadians who would like to start farming here.

It was clear that many more sessions like this are needed. The new Canadians spoke of their previous farms as diverse, small-scale, agroecological farms, where they grew crops to feed their families along with crops to sell.

Since arriving in Canada, none of the new Canadians have had the chance to visit any of our regional, diverse, small-scale, agroecological farms. What an opportunity we have to share knowledge back and forth with these experienced farmers from around the world!

The questions from the Swahili speakers I spoke with related to access to land and the small tools, equipment, and other inputs that are used and available around here. Some of them would be interested in jobs on rural farms and others were

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challenged by leaving their children at home to go off to a farm job hours out of the city. There were also questions about farming in such a short season (compared to their home countries), season extension, and varieties that grow well in our climate. There was not nearly enough time to actually answer these complicated questions but the session clearly identified the need to organize future farmer-to-farmer meet-ups.

My hope is that the NFU can play a role in facilitating conversations like this across Canada. Perhaps a committee or working group could be beneficial. There is definitely a place for sessions like

this at the national NFU Convention as well as the regional ones. Winter meet-ups and farm tours during the growing season would benefit both current Canadian farmers and the new Canadian aspiring farmers.

If you are interested in being part of any of these efforts, know of anyone or any other organizations that might be, or have ideas for ways to encourage and support new Canadians who want to farm, send an email to Shannon at broadforkfarm@gmail.com . ■

2018

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Voices from the Field

Terrylynn Brant: Mohawk Mother, Grandmother and Lifelong Farmer

—by Lillian Burgess on behalf of the NFU's Indigenous Solidarity Working Group (ISWG)



Terrylynn Brant is a member of the Turtle Clan of the Mohawk Nation of Grand River, Ontario. She lives on Six Nations and is a mother, grandmother and lifelong farmer. Her ancestors were farmers, and she follows the practices that they taught, planting seeds that have been handed down to her or that she has gathered from other growers.

Terrylynn and her family's diet is largely based on the traditional foods they grow including corn, squash and beans. She has a sugar bush, honey hives and mixed gardens. As well, her family hunts, harvests fish and gathers wild foods. Six Nations has a thriving natural forest, but Terrylynn notes that there are huge issues facing Indigenous communities related to the lack of land base to access their traditional foods.

Haudenosaunee farming, as Terrylynn explains, is not a business, but a relationship on a spiritual and community level, and is one aspect of a person's basic innate responsibility to walk in step with the earth, and to die and leave it better.

Haudenosaunee plant their seeds guided by the moon cycles, on which they base their growing and ceremonial calendars. Terrylynn says that the maple syrup moon is when she gathers maple sap, using ceremonies to open and close the trees. Traditionally, her people value sap not just as a food but also as a medicine, used to help prepare bodies for a spring diet.

According to Terrylynn, everything has a responsibility and a relationship to each other. The whole community is responsible for food. Everyone is welcome to help with the tasks of planting, weeding and harvesting. At the same time, it is understood that each person has special gifts, which can be recognized and nurtured. Terrylynn's gift is to be a Seedkeeper.

Terrylynn's purpose in life includes maintaining pure lines of her people's seeds, selecting the best ones to preserve, but always with respect to them as

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It is the Seedkeeper who monitors, and is responsible for maintaining the balance.

seeds that have their own rights. She gardens because this is a gift: a gift that “is only given to some people, those who do it for love, not work; it becomes your life. It is the Seedkeeper who monitors, and is responsible for maintaining the balance.” According to Terrylynn, only a handful of Seedkeepers remain. To ensure that seed and seed-keeping knowledge is protected, Terrylynn has taken on the task of mentoring young Seedkeepers, as well as sharing her traditional knowledge with the wider community.

Terrylynn is a core part of the Mohawk Seedkeeper Garden, an Indigenous garden project at Six Nations. Terrylynn says, “people can come just sit, or volunteer, log hours and receive their share of the harvest according to their input. They can learn how to grow and harvest food, how to prepare seeds for storage, and using the community kitchen, how to prepare food for every day or for ceremonial use.”

The Garden is in need of larger facilities, however. In the summer of 2018, the Garden’s stewards plan to build a community cooperative “Earthship”—a training centre based on food and a way of life.

She envisions others coming to the cooperative training centre: university students, scientific researchers, and Indigenous knowledge practitioners, who “can come to see and learn.” Having attended UN conferences on food security, Terrylynn notes that scientists are acknowledging that Indigenous Seedkeepers help hold the diversity of genetic material that is key to all our survival.

Terrylynn is looking for individuals who would like to volunteer in the gardens, help to establish food forests or try their hand at foraging for wild foods. This is a part-time, full-time or occasional commitment. Anyone interested in volunteering, or making a donation to help with the building of the Earthship, should contact her at terrylynnbrant@live.ca or 519-717-4077. ■

“The Mohawk Nation is a member of the Haudenosaunee or People of the Longhouse. The Haudenosaunee are a sovereign people composed of ... six Indigenous nations; often referred to as the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy” (<http://www.kahnawakelonghouse.com/>).

The Beingessner Award for Excellence in Writing

Award Criteria and Details:

- There will be two age categories – 15 to 21 years old, and 22 to 30 years old. One award in the amount of \$500 will be awarded each age category for a **NON-FICTION OPEN LETTER** 500-1000 words in length. **Applicants can only win once per age category.**
- **THIS YEAR'S THEME IS: *What will farming look like for young farmers in 30 years?***
- Deadline for entries is November 1, 2018.
- The winners will be announced at the NFU Convention in November 2018.
- All or some entries may be published by the National Farmers Union.

Send entries to the National Farmers Union:

By email: nfu@nfu.ca

or

By mail: National Farmers Union
2717 Wentz Ave., Saskatoon, SK S7K 4B6



We will confirm that we received your email submission within a week. If you do not get a confirmation email, please resend your entry or phone the office at (306) 652-9465.

UN Human Rights Initiative Supports Peasants, Family Farmers and Farm Workers

—by Karen Rothschild, on behalf of the NFU's International Program Committee

2018 is expected to be a decisive year in the progress of a new United Nations Draft Declaration on the Human Rights of Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas. By definition, this Declaration will apply to “any person who engages, or seeks to engage... in small-scale agricultural production for subsistence and/or for the market, and who relies significantly, although not necessarily exclusively, on family or household labour ... and who has a special dependency on and attachment to the lands”. It also applies to persons engaged in fishing, forestry and in “handicrafts related to agriculture or a related occupation in a rural area”, and to “hired workers, including all migrant workers, regardless of their legal status.”

The Declaration process had its origins within La Via Campesina (LVC). Following the global food crisis in 2008, the LVC and allies were able to convince the Advisory Committee of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to take up the project. The fourth and most recent draft of the Declaration will be discussed, and is expected to be adopted, at the working group meeting taking place in Geneva in April, 2018. The adopted text will then be submitted to the next full meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council. With approval, the draft Declaration will then be sent to the United Nations General Assembly for final approval and adoption.

Similar to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, this draft Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas will not be a binding document and will have no coercive force. It will, however, have the power to appeal to public opinion and thus to be a tool for political persuasion. Here in Canada, we have seen an example of how powerful these declarations can be with the Liberal party's decision to support Bill

C-262, a private member's bill introduced by NDP MP Roméo Saganash. Bill C-262 requires the Government of Canada to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Among the aspects of the draft Declaration that should be of particular interest to Canadian family farmers are the right to “save, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seed or propagating material” and to “rely on their own seeds or other locally available seeds of their choice”.

The preamble to the new Declaration incorporates new rights, such as the right to land, to other natural resources, to seeds and to biological diversity. In explaining the need for this new human rights instrument, the preamble refers to the prevalence of hunger and malnutrition in many rural areas, the effects of environmental degradation and climate change on rural communities, the increasing incidence of forced displacement of peasants, and the hazardous and exploitive conditions suffered by rural workers.

Among the aspects of the draft Declaration that should be of particular interest to Canadian family farmers are the right to “save, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seed or propagating material” and to “rely on their own seeds or other locally available seeds of their choice”. There is an obligation for states to “ensure that seed policies, plant variety protection and other intellectual property laws, certification schemes and seed marketing laws

(continued on page 23...)

(UN Human Rights Initiative, from page 22)

respect the rights of peasants and take into account their needs and realities.” The right to a decent income, livelihood and means of production includes a provision of particular interest to organic farmers: an obligation for states to “stimulate agroecological, organic and sustainable production whenever possible, and facilitate direct farmer-to-consumer sales.”

In addition, the Declaration includes an obligation for states to “prevent non-state actors that they are in a position to regulate, such as ... transnational corporations and other business

enterprises, from nullifying or impairing the enjoyment of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.” At the international level, LVC is also part of a civil society coalition supporting the creation of a legally binding United Nations Treaty for Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises with Respect to Human Rights. This treaty would be a complement to the peasants’ rights declaration, reinforcing the obligation for states to ensure that transnational corporations and other business enterprises do not violate the rights of people working and living in rural areas. ■

Karen Rothschild is a long-time member of the Union Paysanne in Quebec, a member of its international committee and a former member of its coordinating committee. She worked at the Social Justice Committee in Montreal translating and circulating urgent actions on human rights violations in rural Mexico. Union Paysanne and the NFU are both members of La Via Campesina. The Declaration on the Human Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas is still a work in progress, so a link to the final text is not yet available. Karen will attend the working group meeting in Geneva in April, 2018.

Letter of Solidarity to Brazil’s Landless Workers Movement, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)

The National Farmers Union (NFU) of Canada expresses deep sadness over the murder of Márcio Matos (Marcinho), leader of the MST in the state of Bahia, Brazil, on January 24th 2018. We denounce his murder and add our voices to yours, demanding the Government of Brazil conduct a full investigation to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to trial.

As a member of the global small-scale farmer movement, La Vía Campesina, we seek to build solidarity with farmers internationally. The NFU is therefore deeply concerned for the safety and well-being of MST leaders. The death of Márcio Matos has added to a disheartening surge of violence against peasants in Brazil in the last two years under Michel Temer’s illegitimate government. The NFU recognizes that leaders and activists in La Vía Campesina member organizations who stand in the way of agri-business and corporate profits are being targeted for violence, including murder, as part of the unjust capitalist industrial agricultural transformation of the countryside.

We condemn all forms of oppression of rural peoples and stand in solidarity with the MST and your tireless battle to reclaim land for the dispossessed and landless. The NFU commits to continuing our common struggle against neo-liberal and pro-corporatization policies as we fight together for food sovereignty.

*In Struggle and Solidarity,
Coral Sproule, President, National Farmers Union, Canada*

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