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Rural
Restructuring
Group**

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE



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Fran Shaver, Concordia University, Editor

Richard Rounds, ARRG Series Editor

Rural Development Institute, Brandon University



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INTRODUCTION TO ARRG AND CRRF

In 1987, few Canadians were talking "rural". "Globalization" was rapidly becoming a buzzword to explain perplexing economic problems emerging for agriculture, forestry, mining and fishing. Problems continued to plague the efforts to diversify Canada's rural economy over many years. The consolidation of rural trade centres in predominantly agricultural economies had become a question of survival for many agro-rural communities. Benefits of technological change were being questioned.

A small meeting was held in Regina in October 1987, prompted by the concern that rural people, their businesses and communities required greater consideration in public policy, research and education. The topics were restructuring, globalization and technological change. Out of the papers and debates by the dozen or so people involved, a decision was taken to form the Agricultural and Rural Restructuring Group (ARRG). This network of academics, civil servants and rural practitioners dedicated itself to building new knowledge and applying the diverse educations and experience of its members to rural problem-solving.

The process adopted by the group centred around research, joint-venture education through conferences and workshops held in rural places, and the improvement of policy awareness about rural issues. Since then, five sets of national workshops and conferences have been held. Liaison has been established with similar interests in Europe and the United States. It has become apparent that in many countries a global change in the rural and policy mind-set is beginning to come about in the search for solutions and initiatives.

The main efforts of ARRG have been in organizing annual rural policy conferences which have provided forums for rural policy-makers and practitioners to meet and debate issues of mutual interest. Each national workshop has been preceded by a "think-tank" workshop where invited researchers have met to prepare the agenda and presentations for the conference. These conferences and workshops are reviewed in the Preface and the list of published ARRG papers and proceedings is found at the end of this document.

In 1992, the Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation (CRRF) was formed. Its mandate is to garner resources and to facilitate creative responses to the effects of structural shifts in rural Canada. The purpose of the Foundation is to foster education and research among private enterprise, communities, governments and universities.

PREFACE

For most of its history, research on women in agriculture has been subsumed under studies of the family farm, or hidden in monographs dealing with life in the rural community. Canadian activists and scholars — decrying the lack of a substantial body of literature in the social sciences on farm women — began to redress the balance in the early 1970s. This process was accelerated in the early 1980s, but contemporary studies are still difficult to access through regular channels: policy makers and researchers alike have failed to incorporate women's work and the issues of importance to them into mainstream investigations on Canadian agriculture. The studies that are available are located primarily in unpublished conference papers and research reports, and in university libraries as academic theses.

In addition to their ghettoization, contemporary studies are limited in their focus. Many geographical regions in Canada are under-represented (most of the studies have been conducted in Ontario and Quebec). The few nationally based studies available have a traditional economic focus rather than a feminist focus. Finally, important issues such as the impact of social and structural change, the recognition and resolution of equity issues, and the role of women in sectoral decision-making are inadequately covered.

The Farm Women's Bureau undertook to alleviate this problem by inviting me to update a bibliography and review of the literature that had its beginning in a special issue of *Resources for Feminist Research*.¹ The mandate was twofold: prepare a bibliography of Canadian literature written about farm women since 1980 and provide a comprehensive review of that body of work. The 210 entries cited in the bibliography are organized around several themes including: women's contribution to agriculture, the impact of social and structural change, the recognition and resolution of equity issues, farm women and the law, quality of life issues, the role of women in sectoral decision-making, and farm women's movements.²

The three articles in this collection are representative of entries listed under the last two of the seven themes identified. The first, by Lynne L. NEIMAN, focuses on the role of women in sectoral decision-making organizations. The organizations in question include commodity and marketing boards at both the national and provincial levels, federations of agriculture, retail and other co-operatives, as well as farmers' unions and associations. There are 450 such organizations serving or representing Canadian farm families³ and yet barely 6 percent of the 210 references in the bibliography fall in this category. Unfortunately, all demonstrate that women are under-represented, both as members and leaders.

In an attempt to understand why women are so poorly represented, Neiman studies differences in the amount and level of women's participation in six types of farm organizations. Three explanations are proposed. The first, grounded in socialization theory, proposes that women are not expected to be in authoritative roles because these roles are considered deviant. The second suggests that differential access to resources explains differing political interests and styles. The third is linked to mobilization theory and maintains that membership in voluntary associations creates opportunities for new relationships that draw individuals into public affairs, provides a training ground for personal skills and attributes, and promotes a sense of satisfaction with participation in political activity. Women who are not involved in community associations are unlikely to be active in sectoral decision-making groups. Neiman's analysis is based on a survey of 450 farm women across Canada. Although she does not provide a fully controlled test of the comparable strength of each of the three theories, the data tend to support the mobilization theory: "the most significant set of positive relationships occurred between involvement in community associations and participation in agricultural groups".

The other two articles in this collection focus on farm women's movements. This is an area of expanding interest to both scholars and farm women (13 percent of the 210 items compiled for the bibliography fall into this category). There has been a growth in the number of farm women's groups in the last decade and a

parallel interest in recording the activities and development of these organizations. Most of the groups that have been studied are located in Ontario and Quebec but it is clear that networks are being built all across the country and that more studies will follow. Overall, the findings from these studies reinforce the significance of mobilization theory: all indicate that farm women's organization provide a training ground and as more groups emerge more women are trained.

Both contemporary and historical perspectives are presented in the context of this theme (farm women's movements). Fiona MACKENZIE's paper falls into the former. She describes the actions of a network of farmers in Eastern Ontario — Women for the Survival of Agriculture (WSA). This group emerged in the latter half of the 1970s "in the context of a deepening agricultural crisis among family farms in Canada and politicization of gendered dimensions of power in Canadian society". Drawing selectively on various WSA publications and data collected as part of a larger research project in which in-depth interviews were conducted with members of twenty-two families, Mackenzie demonstrates that WSA has been active in deconstructing the image of women as 'farm wives' — one which assumes women's free labour on the farm — and reconstructing an alternative image of farm women as equal business partners. In addition she claims that WSA sought to ensure the stability of the family farm as a viable economic unit within Canadian reality by mobilizing around parity, CUSTA and GATT, farm debt, and 'pure milk'. Mackenzie concludes that WSA's effectiveness has depended on this strategic manipulation of two contradictory ideologies: one that challenges male control of land, labour and its products, and another that fights for the survival for the family farm even though in the past it served as the site of a gender based hierarchy.

The struggle of women farmers is far from complete. They also seem to have created a split between 'old' and 'new' farm women. 'Old' farm wives are "fundamentally housewives who happen to be married to farmers, whereas modern wives are active, egalitarian participants in financial and agricultural decisions". In her paper, Louise I. CARBERT takes an historical perspective to argue that "the prevailing distinction between old and new farm women is inadequate, chiefly because it does not account for the central place of the Women's Institutes (WI) in the history of rural Canada." She contrasts WI, founded in 1897 during the first wave of feminist and agrarian reform, to a series of organizations that have sprung up across anglophone North America since 1975. These organizations include Women for the Survival of Agriculture, Concerned Farm Women, the Ontario Farm Women's Network, and the Canadian Farm Women's Network. She concludes that the old-new distinction must be reassessed. It is "largely a political, and sometimes partisan, invention because government departments of agriculture have funded and directed farm women's organizations in Canada since 1897. Official divisions among rival organizations and leaders may not correspond to divisions in the grass roots membership. [...] The WI remains a viable option because it shares programmatic, organizational, and ideological continuities with the newer, often crisis-oriented, farm women's movements."

The Agricultural and Rural Restructuring Group (ARRG) and the Foundation established to support its objectives (The Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation (CRRF)) were constituted with a national mandate to bring resources and creative thinking to bear on the restructuring of a rural Canada. Both ARRG and CRRF aim to promote and support the broad cross-sectoral rural affiliations and strategic alliances — now essential when addressing rural problems — by reducing the time between information gathering, knowledge sharing, and the development of action strategies. The ARRG Working Paper Series is one of several programs we have designed to accelerate this process. We are pleased, therefore, to publish this collection of papers on women in agriculture. Our objective is two-fold: to facilitate access to this important knowledge base and to encourage others to recognize and incorporate women's work and the issues of importance to them into the mainstream research on Canadian agriculture.

Frances M. Shaver
Founding Member and Guest Editor

NOTES

1. E.A. CEBOTAREV and Frances M. SHAVER (eds) Women in Agriculture and Rural Society. A Special Issue of Resources for Feminist Research (XI(1) March, 1982).
2. The bibliography is available from the Farm Women's Bureau, Agriculture Canada, Sir John Carling Bldg. Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C5. The review (an unpublished research report) contains a more detailed critique of the material compiled for the bibliography. Information on the methodology and search procedures is provided along with a brief overview of the material collected. The predominating themes are discussed and the scope and origin of the work within each is analyzed. Critical theoretical issues are highlighted as well. The objectives of the review were to identify the gaps and weak points, and to recommend areas for development and expansion. An abridged version of the review is published in SHAVER (1996) "Research on Women in Canadian Agriculture." Women and Environments XX (xx):pp-pp. (in progress).
3. Page 201 in SMITH, Pamela (1987) "Women in agricultural education and farm organizations." Pp. 177-191 in CACSW Growing Strong: Women in Agriculture. Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

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AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL RESTRUCTURING GROUP

PARTICIPATION BY FARM WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

Lynne L. Nieman
Extension Practitioner
Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to report on relationships between participation in the decision making processes of agricultural organizations by farm women and the characteristics of these women. In an attempt to explain differences in the level and amount of activity in six types of farm organizations, three perspectives are used: socialization, access to resources, and mobilization. Data collected from 405 farm women across Canada suggest that there is little relationship between demographic and socialization factors; there is moderate association with indicators of access to resources, but participation in community level organizations by farm women is strongly and positively related to involvement in agricultural groups.

Farm women have always played a vital role in agriculture and rural life. Despite women's prominent role in the social structure of the farm family and the rural community, and their continuing role in contributing labour to agricultural production, very few women are found as representatives of the farming community as decision makers in farm organizations.

Women hold few of the key positions in the decision making structures of Canadian farm organizations. With the exception of certain high profile female leaders of farm organizations, women are significantly underrepresented. In 1987, Smith found that in over half of the 58 farm organizations surveyed, no woman held elected positions in the organization's governing body. Women held under a third of the leadership positions in another third of the organizations, while "only 12 percent of the organizations had women in at least 30 percent of their senior policy positions" (Smith, 1987). White found that in Ontario, in 1989-90, of a total of 237 executive positions available on marketing boards and commissions, 10 positions, or four percent, were filled by women. Eighteen out of a total of 94 executive positions of commodity associations were women. Saskatchewan Wheat Pool found in 1990 that women's involvement in its organization amounted to three percent of the total number of delegates (four in all), and two percent of the total number of committee members (133 in all). There had never been a woman on the board of directors (SWP, 1990).

When the policy making involvement of farm women is compared to women's participation in partisan politics, the picture looks much the same. Tasks tend to be differentiated on the basis of gender. "Women... have generally been assigned the housekeeping and menial tasks within the party organization while men have assumed the strategic and leadership roles" (Vickers, 1988). These authors claim the sexual division of labour has prevented women from developing the recognition, skills and contacts necessary to gain elected office.

The low participation rates should not be taken as an indication of non-interest or conflicting circumstances on the part of the women, however. Structural constraints such as rules, regulations and requirements of the

organization do exist. Smith's study (1987) found that 56 percent of all the organizations she surveyed had some requirements for membership, such as a production minimum or a licence or quota to produce. However, 90 percent of these organizations believed that the membership requirements did not pose barriers to the participation of women.

Women want to become involved in order to learn about farm policy and to have influence on the development of those policies. The numbers state the fact that a "potentially valuable human resource" (SWP, 1990) is not being utilized by organizations representing the agricultural community. According to a Saskatchewan study by the Legal Education Action Fund (LEAF):

This lack of representation has serious implications for the quality of life of farm women and their communities. It means that farm women presently lack input into, and the power to affect the legal, economic and social decisions that affect the quality of their own lives. Farming communities are also failing to use the knowledge, abilities, skills and energies of fifty percent of their population (Davis, 1989).

HYPOTHESES

Three theoretical perspectives were used to attempt to describe the distinction in the amount and levels of women's participation in decision making in farm organizations. These perspectives suggest differing gender-based social and economic characteristics. The first, the socialization theory, proposes that women are not expected to be in authoritative roles because these roles are considered deviant for them (Bokemeier and Tait, 1980). Stereotypes of political roles are supported by social learning experiences and reinforced patterns. One of the predominant stereotypes is the "anachronistic notion which asserts that women should be confined to die Kinder, die Kuche, und die Kirche" ["the children, the kitchen, and the church"] (Orum, et al, 1974). The socialization perspective suggests that political habits are formed while persons are still in childhood, with children of each sex modelling and being reinforced for behaving like the adults of that sex. Children, therefore, develop a picture of the adult world based both on real observed patterns and of symbolic patterns of activity (Orum, et al, 1974).

The resource theory suggests that access to certain resources in one's environment can explain differing political interests and styles of women. Women are not expected to be in authoritative roles because they do not have access to scarce resources, like influential communication networks and control of funds (Bokemeier and Tait, 1980). While the activity of men is centred in the public sphere outside of the home in their occupations and careers, the activity of women has traditionally focused on the domestic or private sphere, thus preventing women access to an environment in which personal, political and financial resources can be obtained.

The mobilization theory suggests that other organizational activity leads to political activity. Advocates of this theory maintain that membership in voluntary associations creates opportunities for new relationships that draw individuals into public affairs, provides a training ground for personal skills and attributes, and promotes a sense of satisfaction with participation in political activity (Rogers, et al, 1975).

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The population desired for the study was a national cross-section of farm women, actively involved in their farming operation, and representing all types of farming enterprises and a wide spectrum of social and economic situations. The data for this study were collected by means of an original questionnaire sent to the membership of farm women's networks affiliated with the Canadian Farm Women's Network, and from memberships of other provincial farm women's groups in those provinces not belonging to the national

network. A random sample for each province was taken from the mailing lists provided by the co-ordinator of each provincial group. A French version of the questionnaire was distributed to Quebec respondents. The mailing list from New Brunswick was received too late to be included in the study. The number of questionnaires sent totalled 778.

The questionnaire consisted of ten pages and was divided into seven sections. Respondents were asked to provide personal information such as age, education, the location they were raised, and activities and their type engaged in during youth. Information about the farming operation, its enterprise, its management and operation, annual gross income, and incidence of off-farm employment comprised the second section. Respondents were asked to report their involvement in farm and household tasks and decision making; and finally, organizational activity was requested, with the farm women reporting their involvement in farm organizations, community organizations and non-agricultural policy-making groups.

Two main levels of analysis were carried out using the SPSSx statistical analysis package. Descriptive analysis provided frequency counts, percentages and means. The second level applied a cross-tabulation analysis to determine associations between the dependent variables and selected independent variables, expressed as values of the Chi-square test of independence, and contingency co-efficients.

FINDINGS

From a single mailing of the 778 questionnaires, 405 completed usable questionnaires were returned and received, resulting in a response rate of 52 percent. These farm women represented a wide range of geographic locations, agricultural enterprises, and income levels. Table 1 presents the percentages of demographic characteristics of respondent's age, level of education, and age of children.

The farm women were well-distributed across age groups. Three respondents, or 0.7 percent, were under the age of 25. Twenty-one percent were between 25 and 34 years of age; and 37 percent were aged 35 to 44 years. Respondents aged 45 to 54 comprised 25 percent, while those between the ages of 55 and 64 years made up 13 percent. An additional three percent of respondents were over the age of 65. The youngest respondent was 23 years of age, with the oldest being 77 years.

The largest number of farm women in this sample attained a college or technical school diploma or certificate, comprising 40 percent of all respondents. Three and one-half percent of these farm women had completed only primary school, 17 percent had partial high school. Those with a completed high school diploma made up 25 percent of respondents, while 13 percent had attained a bachelor's degree. Seven respondents, or 1.7 percent, had completed a graduate degree.

Over 95 percent of the women stated they had children. Twenty-nine percent of the farm women reported two children, 27 percent stated having three children, and 18 percent had four children. Two women each reported having eight and nine children, and one reported a family of ten children. A further analysis looked at the ages of the youngest and oldest children in the family. Twenty-eight percent of the women reported the age of the youngest child in the family was six years or less. An almost equal amount, 29 percent, of the respondents were found to have adult children in their families, reporting the age of the youngest child at over 18. Only eight percent of the women had very young families, with the age of their oldest child at six years or under. Almost half the women, 45 percent, reported the age of their eldest child at over 18 years. Over three-quarters of the women, 77 percent, reported at least one child still living at home. Although almost 30 percent of respondents stated the age of their youngest child was over 18, only 18 percent reported no children remaining at home, suggesting a large number of adult children still living at home.

One of the factors investigated as having influenced socialized behaviour was participation in youth activities. Respondents were asked to report their involvement in a list of inclusive organized activities during

youth, the type of activity, and the predominant sex of the group with whom the activity was conducted. Table 2 presents a percentage description of participation in youth activities and the type of activity, as well as presence of a role model.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Age				
Category	Percent		N	
Under 25	0.7		3	
25-34	21.2		86	
35-44	36.8		149	
45-54	24.9		101	
55-64	13.3		54	
65 and over	3.0		12	
Education				
	Percent		N	
Primary school	3.5		19	
Some high school	16.8		68	
Complete high school	24.4		99	
College	40.2		163	
Bachelor's degree	13.1		53	
Graduate degree	1.7		7	
Family age				
	Percent	N	Percent	N
Six and under	28.4	115	8.1	33
7 - 12	22.7	92	18.3	74
13 - 18	15.3	62	16.3	66
Over 18	28.9	117	44.9	182

Fully 83.5 percent of the respondents reported participation in some program or activity during their youth. Fifty percent of the women participated in school-related activities, 51 percent in a youth group, 57 percent were involved in church-related activities, and 46 percent in sports. The largest majority of women, 71 percent took part in mixed group activities, involving both boys and girls, 30 percent reported their activities involved girls only, while only 1.5 percent participated in activities that involved mostly boys.

The presence and influence of a role model was an additional socialization factor the study considered. Just over half the respondents, 55 percent, stated that a role model had encouraged their organizational involvement.

A set of questions relating to the women's access to resources attempted to determine the degree to which farm women were dependent on the farm enterprise and/or on a male partner for financial resources. Percentages illustrating levels of income and off-farm employment are presented in Table 3. By far the largest majority of the farm women surveyed were engaged in farm operations with a low to moderate income. A quarter of respondents stated their total annual gross combined farm and family income was less than \$50,000; another quarter had income between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 27 percent stated their income was between \$100,000 and \$200,000. Nine percent of the women reported earnings at the \$200,000 to \$300,000 level, five

percent had income between \$300,000 to \$500,000, and just over two percent reported gross income that exceeded \$500,000. Sixty-two percent of the farm women stated their name appeared on the land title or lease or rental contract. Forty-one percent of the respondents stated the farm business paid them a salary or wage. Seventy-three percent of the women reported having their own bank account.

Table 2. Socialization characteristics

Youth activity		
Category	Percent	N
Participated	83.5	338
Did not participate	16.0	65
School	49.9	202
Youth group	50.9	206
Church	57.3	232
Sports	46.2	187
Other	9.4	38
Mixed group	71.1	288
Mostly girls	29.9	121
Mostly boys	1.5	6
Presence of role model		
	Percent	N
Yes	55.3	224
No	34.3	139

Over a third of the women, 36.5 percent, reported having salaried off-farm employment. Of those employed, 63.5 percent held part-time jobs (defined as not more than 20 hours per week), and 35 percent were employed in full-time jobs. Thirty-six and one-half percent of the employed women described their occupation as 'professional', suggesting a large proportion of farm women working as teachers and nurses.

Studies document a high level of involvement by farm women in voluntary community groups and organizations (Kohl, 1976; Rosenfeld, 1985). The amount of activity reported by the farm women respondents in this study is illustrated in Table 4. The table presents activity in community organizations and compares that with involvement in agricultural organizations. Respondents were asked to report their current involvement and the extent of that involvement in six types of community groups: church, school, youth, sports, general community, and other. Level of activity was self-reported on a five-point scale, from none at all to extremely active, and was inclusive, so each respondent could indicate activity in any or all organizations. Almost equal numbers of farm women reported being currently active in at least one type of community organization at moderate and extreme levels. Half of the women indicated involvement in some group at a moderate level, while 45 percent reported activity in at least one group at an extreme level. Of those who were not currently active, a further 38.5 percent claimed they had been active to some degree during the last five years. Those women who reported activity at a higher level were more likely to indicate activity in several other types of groups at the same time, than those who reported activity at a lower level of activity.

Table 3. Resource access characteristics

Income		
Category	Percent	N
Under \$50,000	24.5	103
50,000 - 100,000	25.9	105
100,000 - 200,000	27.4	111
200,000 - 300,000	8.9	36
300,000 - 500,000	5.2	21
Over \$500,000	2.2	9
Off-farm employment		
	Percent	N
Yes	36.5	148
Part-time	63.5	
Full-time	35.1	
No	61.0	247

Table 4. Mobilization of characteristics

Participation in agricultural organizations (percent)					
Level	5	4	3	2	1*
Commodity	6.9	7.2	10.4	6.7	41.5
Marketing Bd.	1.2	2.5	6.2	7.7	49.9
Co-operative	2.7	4.9	9.4	9.1	44.0
Farm supply	1.2	3.0	7.9	6.9	44.7
Lobby group	11.1	8.1	10.1	9.1	31.6
General orgn	16.0	14.3	15.6	10.1	22.2
Community organization activity (percent)					
Level	5	4	3	2	1*
Church	21.0	18.5	10.4	15.3	23.5
School	13.8	16.5	13.6	14.1	24.2
Youth	9.9	12.1	16.5	14.8	25.4
Sports	6.9	12.6	15.3	18.5	26.7
General	16.8	18.3	15.6	13.1	17.5
Other	7.9	4.9	1.7	1.2	0.2

* Levels of Activity: 5 = extremely active; 4 = moderately active; 3 = somewhat active; 2 = slightly active; 1 = not at all active

A second level of analysis reported measures of association based on the Chi-square statistic. The contingency co-efficient was used where modification to the Chi-square value was necessary to compensate for sample size and resulting unacceptably high degrees of freedom. Significant Chi-square values resulted for a number of independent variables being tested against the dependent variable—participation in farm organizations. Of the demographic characteristics of age, education, and family size, only education is significantly related to participation in commodity groups. Table 5 presents the findings of significant associations between the dependent variable and variables representing demographic and socialization factors.

Table 5. Relationships between organizational participation and demographic and socialization variables
N=405; $p \leq 0.05$

Education				
Organizations	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Commodity group	49.55	0.014	0.330	404
School participation				
	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Lobby groups	14.35	0.014	0.185	284
General Orgn	11.56	0.041	0.167	317
Role model				
	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Farm supply	24.21	0.007	0.238	258
Lobby group	28.29	0.002	0.256	284

The variable of age was not significantly associated in any of the cases of farm women's participation, therefore age cannot be said to be a factor relating to involvement in agricultural organizations. Nor did family size result in significant association with organizational participation. A link between family size and participation might have been anticipated, since family size might be expected to impede a woman's ability to participate in associations and groups. The test of education against participation resulted in only one significant value, that being participation in commodity groups. This limited extent of association indicates that level of formal education does not play an important role in women's involvement in farm groups.

The variables used to define socialization factors included participation in youth groups, the types of these groups, and the presence of a role model that may have encouraged organizational involvement (Table 5).

School-related groups were the only type of youth groups that resulted in significant associations with organizational participation in farm groups. The presence of a role model resulted in significant associations in two instances, participation in farm supply groups and lobby groups. This may indicate that the presence of a role model is an important factor in encouraging women's activity in policy making groups.

Possession or acquisition of resources, in particular financial resources, is considered an important factor in allowing participation in organizational activity. Those variables that represented resource access included farm income, off-farm employment, farm salary, and an individual bank account. Significant associations with resource access factors and agricultural group participation are illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Associations between organizational participation and resource access variables(N=405; p≤0.05)

Income				
Category	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Less than \$50,000				
Lobby group	13.98	0.016	0.183	284
\$50,000 to 100,000				
Marketing board	41.83	0.000	0.306	273
Co-operative	20.50	0.025	0.220	284
Farm supply	33.61	0.000	0.227	258
\$300,000 to 500,000				
General orgn	13.44	0.020	0.179	317
Over \$500,000				
Commodity group	14.68	0.012	0.187	294
Marketing board	23.92	0.000	0.236	273
Lobby group	11.24	0.047	0.164	284
Off-farm employment				
	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Commodity group	20.27	0.027	0.218	294
Marketing board	19.45	0.035	0.214	273
Co-operative	23.29	0.010	0.233	284
Lobby group	21.53	0.018	0.225	284
Own bank account				
	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Commodity group	24.89	0.006	0.241	294
Marketing board	22.38	0.013	0.229	273
Co-operative	23.21	0.010	0.233	284
Farm supply	20.31	0.027	0.219	258
Lobby group	20.77	0.023	0.221	284
General orgn	21.84	0.016	0.226	317

Levels of income that proved most important to organizational participation were \$50,000 to \$100,000, and more than \$500,000. Each of these income categories resulted in significant associations with participation in three agricultural organizations. One significant association resulted between participation in an agricultural groups with each of the under \$50,000 level, and the \$300,000 to \$500,000 income category. When the presence of off-farm income was tested against organizational participation, four of the six types of organizations produced a significant association with this factor. No significant values resulted when the relationship between participation in any of the six farm groups was tested against a salary from farm sources. When the presence of the farm woman's personal bank account was compared to participation in farm groups, significant associations resulted with all six types of organizations.

The mobilization aspect of the study attempted to determine the existence of associations between involvement in community groups with involvement in agricultural organizations. The high participation rates of women, particularly farm women, in community groups and activities has already been documented (Kohl, 1976; Rosenfeld, 1985). Table 7 illustrates the significant associations found to exist with involvement in local community groups. Involvement in school, youth groups, and general community organizations each produced significant associations with five of the six types of agricultural organizations. General farm

organizations were the only agricultural groups that did not result in significant associations with any type of community group. Each type of agricultural organization related positively to involvement in four types of community associations, although the type of community group was not consistent.

Table 7. Relationships between organizational participation and community organization involvement
N=405; $p \leq 0.05$

Church involvement				
Organization	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Commodity group	39.80	0.031	0.299	294
Co-operative	37.70	0.050	0.292	284
Farm supply	40.12	0.028	0.300	258
School involvement				
	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Commodity group	64.14	0.000	0.370	294
Marketing board	53.65	0.000	0.342	273
Co-operative	53.16	0.001	0.341	284
Farm supply	58.93	0.000	0.356	258
Lobby group	56.91	0.000	0.351	284
Youth group involvement				
	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Commodity group	55.78	0.000	0.347	294
Marketing board	52.74	0.001	0.339	273
Co-operative	61.99	0.000	0.364	284
Farm supply	40.02	0.029	0.300	258
Lobby group	55.62	0.000	0.348	284
Sports group involvement				
	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Marketing board	56.48	0.000	0.350	273
Lobby group	45.50	0.007	0.318	284
General community groups				
	Chi-Sq	Signif	C	Cases
Commodity groups	55.34	0.000	0.347	294
Marketing board	41.12	0.022	0.304	273
Co-operative	52.08	0.001	0.338	284
Farm supply	53.36	0.001	0.341	258
Lobby group	38.83	0.038	0.296	284

DISCUSSION

The population from which this study sample was taken consisted of the membership of provincial farm women's networks and farm women's groups across the country. It was anticipated that through their membership in farm women's organizations, they would be inclined to be involved in other types of agricultural organizations as well.

The majority of women in this sample were between the ages of 35 to 54 years, considered the major child-raising years. Age of the farm women was not significantly linked to participation in agricultural organizations. This may support the farm women's claim that family responsibilities and lack of child care services hinder their involvement in decision making groups. The link between education and participation resulted in only one significant association. This may suggest that rather than formal education, experience and non-formal training are more influential in promoting organizational participation.

Popular misconceptions would have us believe that life in rural or farm settings reduces opportunities for involvement in youth activities. In fact, the women in this study were highly involved in a wide range of activities during their formative years. Participation in an organized school-related youth activity was positively associated to organizational participation in two instances. Skills and knowledge gained in extra-curricular activities connected with school may lay the groundwork for the acquisition of leadership and organizational skills deemed useful later in life. Just over half the women reported the presence of a role model who influenced their organizational participation. The coaching and mentoring functions provided by this person can be important in building the skills and confidence necessary to take leadership positions in largely male-dominated settings. The limited number of significant associations for factors representing the socialization hypothesis as related to organizational participation lends weak support for this hypothesis.

Nearly 80 percent of the respondents reported moderate to low incomes, that is, a combined gross farm and family income of less than \$200,000. Participation in three farm groups was significantly associated with each income level of between \$50,000 to \$100,000, and the more than \$500,00 level. Although farm families with limited resources may find it difficult to fully participate in policy making activities, they also may feel they have the most to gain in improving their situation. Those with high levels of income are perceived to be the most likely to participate since policy decisions most profoundly affect their enterprises. Off-farm employment was significantly associated with participation in four types of farm groups. A farm woman's personal bank account also was significantly associated with participation. With an increase in financial resources, the additional income may make it possible to hire replacement labour for family and household responsibilities, allowing the farm woman time to devote to organizational activities.

With selected levels of income, off-farm employment and a personal bank account all significantly associated with activity in decision making farm groups, there is moderate evidence to support the resource access hypothesis.

The respondents' involvement in community groups suggests that a majority of the farm women are active in these groups and likely contribute a high number of volunteer hours. The greatest number of significant associations with participation in agricultural organizations occurred with involvement in community groups. Membership and active involvement in community associations can result in the formation of important contacts and, both information and support networks, and provide a training ground where individuals learn procedures, duties, and responsibilities of those in elected positions. With the acquisition of personal skills and abilities, and responsibility for successful projects, a farm woman can gain valuable credibility and confidence which may lead her to seek further involvement at a higher level in industry groups. The number of positive associations between farm women's participation in agricultural organizations with voluntary involvement in community organizations lends support to the theory of mobilization, that local voluntary activity contributes to higher level involvement.

CONCLUSIONS

Participation by farm women in agricultural organizations is associated with selected socialization and financial characteristics, and to involvement in organizations at a community level. Of the socialization factors represented by involvement in organized activities during youth, the type of youth activity, or the presence of a role model, involvement in school-related activity and having a role model were weakly

associated with participation in farm organizations. Income at certain levels was more strongly associated with organizational participation, as was off-farm employment and having a personal bank account. However, the most significant set of positive associations occurred between involvement in community associations and participation in agricultural groups.

Selected indicators were chosen to represent the three hypotheses being tested. The chosen factors provide neither a complete nor representative list of possible indicators that could have been selected. To have chosen factors which tested all facets of each of the theories undertaken was beyond the scope of this study. Further research is recommended which selects alternative factors that test each of the theories more fully.

Further investigation into women's involvement in predominantly male-oriented environments is called for. Alternative methodologies which attempt to identify and understand the factors that influence farm women's participation in activities outside the home need to be undertaken.

Agricultural organizations wishing to gain new perspectives and new members may achieve their purposes by taking advantage of the contributions of farm women already active in community groups. Participation in activities and projects within the domain of rural community organizations allows farm and rural women to acquire and develop valuable knowledge, skills, and talents that can be utilized by organizations beyond the community's boundaries. Leaders of agricultural organizations could first recognize that farm women have valuable assets to contribute, then actively recruit them. Those organizations looking to renew and revitalize themselves may do well to solicit the expertise of farm women.

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Lynne Nieman is an extension practitioner with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL RESTRUCTURING GROUP

FARM WOMEN/FARM WIVES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICS OF WOMEN FOR THE SURVIVAL OF AGRICULTURE, WINCHESTER, ONTARIO

Fiona MacKenzie
Department of Geography
Carleton University

INTRODUCTION

Women for the Survival of Agriculture (WSA) emerged as a network of farmers in Eastern Ontario¹ in the latter half of the 1970s in the context of a deepening agricultural crisis among family farms in Canada and politicization of gendered dimensions of power in Canada. My objective in this paper is to analyze the significance of the actions of this group of farmers during the last decade and a half as the demands of members of the network have evolved into a discourse of feminist and agricultural politics. I will argue during the course of the paper first, that WSA has engaged in a discourse of resistance which, from the levels of household and community to provincial and federal arenas, has aimed to change an image of 'farm wife' or 'helper', which assumes women's 'free labour' on the farm, to an image of a farm woman as an equal partner. Second, it has sought to ensure that the family farm remains an economic unit within Canadian reality.

Legitimizing their action, WSA members draw on powerful, and at times contradictory, ideologies. A strongly nationalist current runs through their vision of a Canada self-sufficient in basic foodstuffs; 'national security' and 'sovereignty' become emotive instruments in a discourse aimed at disabling the penetration of (US) corporate interests into rural Canada under the Canada-US Trade Agreement (CUSTA). For the majority of farmers in Eastern Ontario, and indeed members of the WSA, the specific fear concerns the elimination of supply management under the Ontario Milk Marketing Board (OMMB) and the recent GATT ruling on import quotas of yogurt and ice cream, prompted by a charge of unfair trading from the US. WSA

1 This paper is adapted from a paper entitled, "The worse it got, the more we laughed": a discourse of resistance among farmers of Eastern Ontario', published in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (1992) Vol. 10 pages 691-713. For ideas and conversations, my debt is to women and men farmers in Eastern Ontario. I am responsible for the interpretation which appears in this paper, but would like to acknowledge their generous participation in the research project. I would also like to acknowledge a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada which provided funding to two colleagues (Suzanne Mackenzie and Iain Wallace) and myself for a broader research project on rural restructuring in two communities, Crysler (Ontario) and Low (Québec), of which this is part. Data for this paper are drawn from interviews collected primarily by myself between 1988 and 1991. I would like to thank research assistants Barbara Shaw, Debbie McGuire, Diane Fournier and Susan Greenfield for their conducting of interviews for the larger study on which I draw in part, and Irene Bujara who compiled the legal data and provided a synopsis of pertinent cases. Membership of WSA is currently around 200 women and between three and five men. WSA Winchester, as the organization is now called to distinguish itself from its offspring organizations, grew in a more stable agricultural environment than that, for example, of Concerned Farm Women of Grey-Bruce counties, a beef producing area in Western Ontario. For the most part, farms in Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry produce milk whose production levels and revenues are guaranteed through a quota system through the Ontario Milk Marketing Board.

members frequently cloak their demands in the language of custodianship of cultural values of the family and of the family farm, in the face of a threat to a rural heritage disappearing under corporate control. But, although evoking a 'tradition' of family farming may be an effective strategy to counter the threat of corporate control, it is pursued by protagonists whose explicit objective is the reorganization of the family farm to reflect a partnership, not an hierarchy which has in the past characterized family farm structure (Rankin, 1987).²

In this paper, I draw selectively on data collected as part of a larger research project in which in depth interviews were conducted with members of twenty two families in the counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry³ between 1988 and 1991. In part 2, I examine how WSA has been active in 'deconstructing an image of women as 'farm wives' and constructing an alternative image of farm women as business partners. In part 3, discussion turns to WSA's mobilization around parity, CUSTA and GATT, farm debt and 'pure milk' in order to illustrate how engagement in this explicitly economic discourse has been integral to constructing a feminist discourse of resistance.

Deconstructing difference: farm wife/farmer

Women for the Survival of Agriculture was founded by Diane Harkin⁴, a woman farmer in Stormont-Dundas County, Eastern Ontario, in 1975. Inherent in the philosophy which led her to exert energy in abundance over a ten year period was a deep commitment to women farmers and to the ethic of the family farm and its economic survival. As a preliminary step in understanding the "reverse" discourse or discourse of resistance which grew within WSA over a fifteen year period, I will focus first on the development of an explicitly feminist discourse within the organization over this period. I will proceed from an examination of the discourse surrounding the concept of 'farm wife' to focus on how WSA has constructed an alternative image of women and their relationship to labour and to land.

An anecdote told by a member in the WSA Newsletter (September/October 1985, page 3) may serve as a (somewhat humorous) entry point for discussion:

I went to the Co-op to buy some grain for our two Guernseys, and asked the young man at the counter for two bags of 16% non-urea dairy ration. He checked on his list and told me, 'That's the flaked stuff you know'. I said I thought that was fine, and he said, 'Well, yeah I guess if that's what he asked for, the 16% non-urea, then that must be it. he must know what he wants'.

I did a bit of a double take and asked him who he was referring to. 'Oh', he replied, 'I meant your husband'. I told him it wasn't my husband who was ordering the grain, it

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- 2 Rankin (1987, page 15) argues that the concept of the 'family farm' is 'inherently ambiguous, blurring the relationship between owners and non-owners of the means of production and implying a system of collective ownership which, in fact, fails to reveal the actual pattern of ownership characteristic of farming in Canada.' Further, she contends, its existence is 'predicated on the appropriation of the usually unpaid labour of both children and adult female members of the household, a system maintained through patriarchal lines of authority'. Reimer and Shaver (1987, page 13) use the term 'family labour farm' rather than 'family farm' to capture the inclusion of non-paid labour.
 - 3 For an overview of the incomes of farm families in Ontario, see Ontario, Agricultural Council of Ontario, 1986. In Eastern Ontario, 1981 census data indicate that of the 2,686 commercial farms (defined as those producing \$50,000 or more in gross revenue in 1980), 81 percent were dairy operations (op.cit.:125). In the three counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, the 2436 census farms (defined as agricultural holdings with annual sales of agricultural products of \$250,000 or more) in 1981 had dropped to 2014 by 1986, a decrease of 17.3 percent over the intercensal period. Fifty percent of the census farms in 1986 were dairy operations (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 1990. Tables 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 37).
 - 4 Where knowledge is public (i.e.: it appears in print), I use the name of the author. Where I refer to conversations which are recorded solely through the research process, no name is given to ensure confidentiality.

was me, so he smiled a bit sheepishly and said, 'Oh, well, most women come in here to get things for their husbands'. 'Oh no', I said, 'I'm getting it for my cows, not my husband. He doesn't like the stuff'.

The perception of women as 'helpers', 'farm wives', responsible for farm 'chores' rather than farm 'work' is constantly reinforced. One WSA member referring to her work on the farm in 1990 remarked: 'I am the gofer', the woman is always the gofer'. Less often, it is challenged, as in the anecdote above⁵.

In the late 1980s, WSA contested the power relations implicit in such language. The titles of documents produced for the First National Farm Women's Conference, 1980, identify the key issues which WSA sought to politicize: Equal partner or 'Just a Wife': Farm Wives and Property Law in Canada; Going, going... Land Use Policy and Agriculture in Canada; 'Old Macdonald had a Farm' but will his son or daughter? Government Policies Promoting Young Farmers; "Credit where Credit is Due": Women and Farm Credit in Canada: The socio-economic status of farm women — an overview (Lipkin, 1980e); "The invisible pitch fork" or The Portrayal of Farm Women in the Canadian Media (Lipkin, 1980f); What are you worth? A Study of the economic contribution of Eastern Ontario farm women to the Family Farm Enterprise based on research carried out by Susan Watkins in 1985, followed. It was prepared by WSA explicitly to counter the negative image of and among farm women, and to construct an alternative image of a farm woman as an equal partner in the farm enterprise. Watkins' research, based on a survey of 248 women in Eastern Ontario in 1985, aimed to probe the silences of census data, and in particular, to challenge the analytical distinctions implicit in Statistics Canada data between productive farm labour (production of exchange value) and non-productive farm labour (production of use value). As Reimer and Shaver (1987), Smith (1987), and Meredith and Grimard (1991) point out, such categorization underestimates the value of women's labour contribution to the farm, solidifying the image of the farmer as male. The stipulation (operative until the census of June 4, 1991) that only one 'operator' (defined as the person who makes day to day decisions on the farm) could be named per farm and that only one occupation could be listed for an individual were important instruments leading to the misrepresentation of farm women's work and decision-making (Smith, 1987, page 135) and the creation of a discourse that marginalized women's work on the farm.

The 1985 WSA study was intended to affirm women as farmers. The measurement of work was broken down into four components: financial contribution - on-farm work, including field and barn work, business and management work, building, property and equipment maintenance work; family and household work; and community work. The questionnaire was structured such that the self-deprecation of women could be challenged. Watkins (1985, page 13) notes that one woman claiming her husband did 100 percent of the on-farm work, nevertheless fed, watered and cared for farm animals, harvested crops, graded and prepared products for sale, kept farm finances in order, prepared and paid bills and statements, milked cows, assisted with animal births, ploughed, disc cultivated and did all the work in the house! A picture emerged of double and triple days: 30 percent of the women surveyed had an off-farm job (20 percent all year, 10 percent seasonally or part time (ibid.: 6). Forty-one percent of the farm families had one or more members employed off the farm (ibid.: 4). The relative labour responsibilities of women and men to on-farm work, the household and community work is illustrated in Table 1⁶.

5 Occasionally, the perception is challenged with ribaldry. Frustrated by her exclusion from farm decisions, one WSA member provoked substantial laughter at a WSA meeting when she remarked about the farm men disappearing into the barn: 'the balls are in the barn making the decision and the brains are in the kitchen baking apple pie'. (It may be worth noting that in the Ontario farming community, it is common for a woman to have spent a greater number of years in formal education, [Watkins, 1985, page 5]. Susan Watkins' survey indicated that whereas 43 percent of their spouses had not finished high school, the equivalent percentage for farm women was 19).

6 Watkins' 1984 (page 304) data was not broken down into farm type. In her sample, farms were distributed as follows: 66 percent of the respondents were from dairy farms, 10 percent from beef farms, 10 percent from cash crop farms, 6 percent from hog farms, 2 percent from poultry egg farms; and 2 percent were from fruit and vegetable farms. Four percent fell in the 'other' category.

Table 1. Responsibility levels of women and men on the farm (percent), Eastern Ontario

Type of Labour	Women	Men
Business management and accounting	85	15
Purchasing agent	50	50
Marketing and promotion	59	41
Cropping decisions, planning and contract negotiation for growing and selling crops	14	86
Animal care, milking, grading, packing	46	54
Maintenance and repair of machinery, getting supplies and parts	27	73
Field Work	27	73
Personnel supervision	65	35
Production records, formulating rations	64	36
Computer operation and programming	38	62
Care of buildings and property	41	59
Care of family and household	97	3
Community work	85	15

Source: Watkins, 1985, page 10

A picture of the 'average farm woman'⁷ responsible for a substantial proportion of the farm work, in addition to 97 percent responsibility for family and household care, and 85 percent for community work, was intended by WSA to 'shock' farm women into realizing the value of their work - the replacement value for which was estimated at \$922.80 per week (Watkins, 1985, page 18), and to illustrate the underestimation inherent in government statistics (see Smith, 1987). Seventy-two percent of the women surveyed 'participated actively' in on-farm work; 27 percent worked a 'triple day' (Watkins, 1985, page 14). Documentation of women's labour contribution to the family farm from the WSA study confirmed the findings of the earlier national study carried out by Susan Koski (1982) for the National Farmers Union; Gisele Ireland's (1983) research for the Concerned Farm Women in Western Ontario; and Suzanne Dion's (1983) study among 'femmes dans l'agriculture' in Québec. For WSA it provided the rationale for further political action and the knowledge base from which to proceed. Immediately, it involved WSA initiating contact between women's groups and representatives of Statistics Canada to discuss recognition of women's labour on the farm (WSA Newsletter March/April 1991:2).

In retrospect, and in light of the new national farm women's network in Canada, formed in 1991, it is difficult to appreciate the groundbreaking significance of these studies. They certainly projected women as other than the 'invisible pitchfork' through recognition of the hours of women's labour. In so doing WSA contested the meaning of 'farmer' and a discourse which privileged male labour on the farm. Further, the research raised disturbing questions which led to the deeper probing of the means through which women's contributions to agriculture are marginalized; but they also raised disturbing questions. Among these three stand out with respect to WSA activity: To what extent do women, working on or off the farm, control the

7 Unfortunately, the data provided by Watkins do not allow for a breakdown of farms according to dependence on capitalist relations of production ('modernization') which, as Reimer and Shaver (1987, pages 13-15, 23) demonstrate, affects women's and men's relative participation in agricultural labour. With increasing social differentiation in rural Canada, further research which explicitly addresses class and gender configuration of power is vital.

proceeds of their labour in terms of capital invested in the farms? To what extent is non-farm labour, or 'pluriactivity' (Fuller 1990) a prerequisite for family farm survival and to what extent are women involved in this? To what extent has women's invisible, unpaid, labour on the farm contributed to keeping food prices below parity? Politicizing these questions has led WSA members to engage in an increasingly explicit feminist discourse, whose strategy centres on the creation of an oppositional or 'reverse' discourse around farm partnerships. I will turn to examine the first question here, returning in part 3 to the two remaining.

Recognizing women's labour contribution to the farm enterprise, whether on or off-farm work, led WSA to question the degree to which women were legally protected in the event of a decision to farm in their own right or in the advent of marriage breakdown. The survey of 1985 had shown that, despite changes to the Income Tax Act R.S.C. of 1980 which allowed a spouse to claim payment for farm labour, 47 percent of those surveyed received no wage (Watkins, 1985, page 14). Proof of the extent to which they were active partners in the farm would, without such documentation, be more difficult to prove and would preclude participation in the Canada Pension Plan. WSA members had lobbied effectively to change the policy of Revenue Canada with respect to a spouse being able to claim payment for farm labour. Of those women working off the farm, the fact that on average 58 percent of the earnings were allocated to family and household expenses (ibid.: 6) means that their contribution to capital growth on the farm becomes invisible. Of the 32 percent of earnings spent directly on the farming operation, whereas women 'usually' had their name on the title deed of land or a building purchased with their earnings, the purchase of livestock or machinery was unlikely to be in their name. Women's lack of control over investments in the farm confirmed Dion's (1983, page 38) and Ireland's (1983) earlier findings.

The need to ensure women's security on the farm prompted WSA to provide the intricacies of Ontario law with respect to the implications of farm ownership and farm partnerships. The 1978 Supreme Court of Canada decision of Rathwell v. Rathwell and the 1980 decision in Pettkus v Bekker illustrated that increasing legal recognition was being given to the economic contribution of women to the farm through management of the home in the division of assets or dissolution of a marriage (Canada, Supreme Court 1978, 1980). But it was also clear that the lack of recognition in such decisions of property interest on the part of women led to insecurity in enforcing the ruling. In the case of Pettkus v Bekker, the Court found that each (common-law) partner had contributed equally, albeit in different ways, and ordered an equal division of assets, but not of the property. The subsequent uncertainty and inability of Rosa Bekker to effect enforcement of the decision in the six years that followed led her to take her life.

The Family Law Act (Ontario) 1986 resolved some of the problems. Under the new Act, marriage property includes any gain, during the marriage, of property by one of the spouses - not only tangible assets such as land, house, furniture, tractors or car, but also stocks, bonds and insurance policies (Meanwell and Glover 1984, with 1986 addendum; Boivin 1987). The Act gives each spouse a right to half the net value, but not the property, of the farm (Hendin, 1989, page 61). In practice, case law illustrates as in Rawluk v Rawluk (1986) and Mackay v Mackay (1986), both heard before the Ontario Supreme Court, that women have been awarded a proprietary interest under the Family Law Act 1986 in situations where title to land had not been registered in their name (Ontario Supreme Court, 1986).

Despite changes effected through the Family Law Act 1986 and case law, WSA has continued to politicize among its members and wider community the need for women to negotiate legal partnerships with their spouses.⁸ Their booklet, Cover your Assets: A Guide to Farm Partnerships (WSA 1987), produced in consultation with lawyer Judith Hendin, Ottawa, details both the reasons for entering a formal partnership agreement, and how to establish one.

8 One notable silence in WSA's action has been over inheritance practices. Frequently, there will be no discussion in a household around whether a son or a daughter inherits the farm — it is assumed that a son will take over.

The grounds for establishing a business partnership between spouses include those specifically affecting a partner's security and practical, financial benefits. Among the former, WSA cites the acknowledgement of equality in a working relationship, the identification of clear rights and responsibilities, the ability to contribute to a Registered Retirement Savings Plan and Canada Pension Plan according to share in the partnership; and security for the farm, whereby, for example, in the event of a husband's death, a wife will have greater credibility vis à vis a creditor than would otherwise be the case. Economic advantages of sharing ownership in the business include, first, on sale of the farm, each partner's eligibility to claim a \$500,000 lifetime capital gains exemption introduced (by the federal government in 1985) as a direct result of effective WSA lobbying. Both Diane Harkin and Dorothy Middleton had appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs (14 March, 1985) to press the case for tax reform through acceptance of the principle of parity under Bill C-215 (Part 4), but discussion was diverted owing to surprise evoked among Committee members by Middleton's disclosure of how the spousal unit concept worked to the disadvantage of farmers in general and women in particular (House of Commons, 1985, 29-32). Under the terms of the capital gains exemption introduced in 1985, each partner is eligible to claim full exemption, in contrast to the previous situation where the farm was treated as one undifferentiated spousal unit. Second, a legal partnership agreement allows two partners to apply for a maximum loan from the Farm Credit Corporation (the FCC is the largest single holder of long-term farm credit, 29 percent of the total [Canada, FCC 1991: 6]) of \$600,000. The maximum loan for a family farm with one qualifying applicant is \$350,000 (Canada, Farm Credit Act, 1985). Finally, registering the farm under a partnership agreement may result in tax savings (WSA 1987: 2).

WSA, through its Newsletters, speeches by members and extension courses, such as the Survival Techniques for Farm Women run annually since 1980 at Kemptville College of Agricultural Technology, has continued to alert women to the legal reality that, as entitlements under the Family Law Act 1986 only come into play on dissolution of a marriage, a legal partnership is essential to ensure women's security. The case of Atkinson v Atkinson and Lloyds Bank v Atkinson and Atkinson heard before the Supreme Court of Ontario in 1988 bears witness to the significance of WSA's effort. In brief, Gordon Atkinson of Simcoe, Ontario, the sole owner of a \$2.5 million dairy enterprise which bred Holsteins for an international market, used all his business assets (including the milk quota) as collateral for a loan of several million dollars. This transaction occurred without any participation of his wife, Ruth Atkinson, who had laboured with him on the farm (interview, WSA member, July 1991, Hendin, 1989, page 67). The Bank negotiated the business agreement with the husband, treating him as the sole owner. The wife's only dealings with the Bank concerned taking out a mortgage on certain real estate of her husband's. Part of the husband's loan was used for speculative purposes and lost. When the marriage subsequently broke up, Ruth Atkinson claimed 50 percent of the assets of the farm under the Family Law Act 1986, and priority in her claim over the Bank. In his ruling, Judge Thompson found that the bank had not been negligent in conducting business solely with the husband with respect to negotiating a loan on the basis of the business:

Everything connected with the farming and livestock operations was in the name of Mr. Atkinson, as were the milk cheques. Everything indicated that the husband was the only person carrying on the business and in my view the Bank was entitled to treat Mr. Atkinson as such ... I should add that there was no evidence adduced to support the position that Mrs. Atkinson was a partner with her husband in the business (Ontario, Supreme Court, 1988, Reasons for Judgement: pages 11, 13).

The vital point made from this case by Middleton is that without a legal partnership, a spouse's assets may be whittled away to zero before marriage dissolution, without the spouse having a say in the decision-making (interview, July 1991).

While an economic justification for a formal partnership arrangement appears solid, Watkins' (1985, page 4) survey indicated that only 37 percent of the partnerships were legally registered with the Provincial Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations. A WSA member commented: 'People in our society feel

you must mistrust your partner to get a legal contract' (interview, July 1991). A man feels threatened, she argued, when confronted with a decision to legalize the partnership - or to have co-ownership of the farm:

If the man is the sole owner and says, 'You're a partner dear' — what advantage is there for him to put her name on. A mental thing happens to the guy - they see themselves in a power position. With someone else's name, they see their power/decision-making threatened ... The ownership thing is very important, they feel they lose their authority and power (ibid.).

'Women have to realize they are business people', the farm woman continued later, and detach business in their minds from a marriage. Supporting women's ability to do this has been key to WSA's educational strategy for rural women through workshops, courses, speeches and, occasionally, personal intervention. In one instance, for example, a WSA member recalls her intervention in a situation where an accountant advised a woman who had recently migrated to Canada with her husband from the UK, that she should roll her inheritance (of approximately equal value to the sum brought by her husband) into the purchase of a farm to be registered in her husband's name. A phone call from the WSA member indicated that she would expose the company's practices among WSA members if such advice continued, and suggested an alternative, equitable arrangement.

Reconstruction of a woman's identity as a farmer in her own right and as an equal partner is behind WSA's stand against the 'spousal unit concept' implicit in agricultural policy and practice. Over the years, the organization has lobbied against a husband and wife being treated as one unit instead of legal partners with respect to capital gains, loans, quota allotment, advance grain payments, stabilization payments, crop insurance, farm management, safety and repairs programs, and farm-start programs. WSA's politicization of two cases may serve to illustrate the situation.

In the first, Lorraine Lapointe, a WSA member in Glengarry, applied to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food to reduce her interest costs (from 13.5 percent to 9.25 percent) under the Beginning Farmer Assistance Program (BFAP) in 1984. She had obtained from the Farm Credit Corporation to purchase her father-in-law's 50 percent share in the family farm. She qualified for the BFAP in all respects except that she was the spouse of an existing farmer: a husband/wife partnership (she and her husband had a 50-50 legal partnership) was considered as 'one person', whereas a father/son or brother/brother partnership was regarded as involving two people. Upset and angered that she was denied assistance on the basis of her marital status rather than being treated as a business partner, her subsequent politicization of the issue led to her case being taken up by the Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), a Toronto-based group of professional women and lawyers. After four years of struggle with BFAP, LEAF decided it could not take the case to court as it lacked the necessary evidence in terms of more general discrimination against women farmers (particularly the percentage of women who did act as farm operators); at present, the case is being reviewed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. In the event, Lapointe was able to obtain a rebate on interest through her husband's application for a rebate under the Ontario Interest Rebate Programme (he had had to co-sign the FCC loan taken out by his wife). As she indicated; 'it was my debt, but he got the interest rebate on his debt and my debt'. One result of the publicity surrounding the case was a change in BFAP language, allowing a spouse to claim an interest rebate when another farm (ie: not one on which the person is living) is purchased. Lapointe argues: 'the new language just masks the discrimination. They just masked it with language', as a very few women would have the resources - financial or otherwise - to purchase a separate farm. OMAF, according to Lapointe, is afraid to 'open the floodgates' to women claimants who have managed to negotiate a legal partnership. As far as Lapointe is concerned, although there have been changes in OMAF eligibility criteria for several programs with respect to assisting women become equal partners on a farm, women continue to be discriminated against as through interest rebates, despite a documented business partnership, they are judged as a spouse not a business person (interviews, May 1988, July 1989, August 1991; WSA Newsletters, January/February 1989).

The second case concerns Diane Masterson's bid to claim crop insurance for her farm. Following Rae Kabernick's successful claim in Manitoba to be recognized as a farmer in her own right 'regardless of marital status' (cited by Dawson in The Manitoba Cooperator, 22 June 1989, WSA Newsletter March/April 1990, page 4), Diane Masterson fought the Ontario Crop Insurance Commission's insistence on insuring the crops from her husband's and her farm jointly. She and her husband Jim Masterson, own and operate their own farms separately (they are approximately 6 kms apart near Chatham), share some equipment (transactions are recorded meticulously), and live together. Diane has operated her farm independently since she began farming in 1975 and has her own line of credit. Until a few months ago when, on appeal, the Commission reversed an earlier decision for the 1990 crop year, Diane Masterson could not obtain separate crop insurance, despite paying full premiums. In the event of crop failure on one site, averaging production from the two sites would likely lead to a lower insurance payment. Unlike the first case, this particular issue is, however, a 'co-habitant's' issue, not solely a spousal one (Lang, 1990, pages 17, 20; interview, WSA member July 1991). Nevertheless, it has been taken up by WSA in terms of questioning the criteria on which 'difference' is created in government policy and as part of its campaign to distinguish between a business enterprise and a marriage, to construct an image of women as farmers in their own right.

Since 1975, the leadership of WSA, with the endorsement of its membership, has drawn from women's local (on farm) experience to challenge a discourse which has served to marginalize women as equal partners in a business enterprise. In that the new discourse directly assaults gender-based hierarchies on the farm, it is feminist and oppositional. The strategy implicitly recognizes the relationship between knowledge of women's labour on the farm, of the legal implications of farm partnerships and the concept of spousal unit, and empowerment. WSA has, then, created particular claims to power/knowledge, based on women's experience as farmers, which constitutes a 'localized resistance' in Michel Foucault's, (1978, page 96) conceptualization.

But, as will be shown in the remainder of the paper, this resistance is linked to other points of struggle which rest on a common concern of agricultural producers on family farms to survive. The degree to which the knowledge has been successful, I will suggest, rests on its ability to mobilize the symbolism of the family farm in a nationalist discourse among its members and the wider public.

Reconstructing the Family Farm

As a community, farmers in Eastern Ontario were, in the mid 1970s, not as severely affected by an economic crisis precipitated by low commodity prices, soaring interest rates and spiralling production costs as the beef producing farmers of Western Ontario. Individually, younger generation farmers and beef farmers, encouraged to expand and capitalize their operations and to specialize in the 1970s in order to qualify for loans by banks, including the Farm Credit Corporation in the 1960s and early 1970s, were beginning to suffer the consequences of stress. As Rankin (1987, pages 30-31) points out, farmers were gradually pushed into a cost-price squeeze. WSA was born into this increasingly problematic climate for the family farm, and as its record of lobbying, public speaking, workshops and newsletters illustrates, its objectives of building a secure future for the family farm have been intertwined with those of a more explicitly gendered dimension.

In the 'second wave' of rural women's political activism (Rankin 1987), members of WSA initiated on a national basis the portrayal of a farm woman as an effective economic participant. In a very real sense, WSA's economic agenda was part and parcel of the strategy to deconstruct the power of a discourse which named women as 'farm wives.' Through increasing members' knowledge of the broader political economy of agriculture, and the role of the family farm in agricultural production in Canada, WSA intended to construct an image of women as equal partners in farm businesses and as legitimate, well-informed and articulate political actors. The economic agenda was, then, integral to building discourse of resistance which was both feminist and struggled to counter the threat to the family farm. In this section of the paper, I focus on those issues that WSA defined as central for the survival of the family farm; parity, the Canada-U.S. Trade Agreement and GATT negotiations, farm debt, and most recently, 'pure milk.'

The political niche within which WSA launched its activism into the economics of agriculture, in the face of substantial local opposition, particularly from members of rural Women's Institutes, is revealed in the following conversation with the husband of a WSA member:

Husband: I thought there was a great need for more political interaction between the farmers and the policy makers. And the way farmers were going about doing their lobbying was very amateurish, I thought. And then when I heard about what WSA was doing in Michigan⁹, and I thought well—I said gee, you know, maybe that's the answer, getting women involved. And [wife] had been coming to Federation meetings and I thought it might be a good idea for women here to get organized.

F.M.: Why a separate organization for women? Why not try to get women into the OFA? [Ontario Federation of Agriculture]

Husband: I saw it because, for one thing, politicians are fearful of women—they are very fearful of women. If a woman called up or anything like that, they didn't know how to deal with them but they gave them attention because they were afraid not to. And I thought, that's a wonderful way of getting your point across ... I thought that was a good way to get some of the ideas and messages across to the politicians, the policy makers. But I couldn't see this happening through the male organizations, the OFA.

Wife: The major organizations that existed were bogged down with their own bureaucracy ... We were such a small group and so naive that we just figured that you make an appointment and walk into a Minister's office and you talk to him ... We didn't have to go through all the bureaucratic baloney of the other organizations ... If something came up in the news this evening, within 24 hours WSA could react.

Not all farm men were as supportive, as WSA's early response to the view that farmers were overpaid showed.

WSA's first study, to measure the cost of a quart of milk, responded to the accusation of Beryl Plumtree, Chair of the federal Food Prices Review Board, that the cost of milk to the consumer was too high (WSA Newsletter, May 1975, page 3). A WSA member recounts her view of one man's response to WSA's attempts to collect data from the family farm:

'There's no goddamn way any woman's gonna look at my books', which was a laugh because the men didn't keep the books. It was hilarious the devious ways we'd get the information. We'd get a phone call from a woman: 'That snarky old bugger's in the barn right now, so come on down and look at my books 'cos he won't be in for two hours'—or someone would bring shopping bags full of receipts and books—and give us three days to look over the stuff' (interview, WSA member, July 1991).

'We were terrified' presenting the survey to Plumtree, a WSA member said, and recounted how the study was discredited because 'we'd interviewed small, medium and large farmers and she'd only accept information on large "efficient" farmers'. But, the WSA lobbyist recalls, 'that was the last time she said anything negative about dairy farmers' (ibid.).

9 The husband had heard a spokesperson from WSA Michigan speak at an OFA meeting in Toronto. Later, Diane Harkin asked the Michigan group if her network could use the same name. There is no affiliation between WSA in the US and WSA in Canada.

Alerting its membership, the public and members of government to the relatively cheap cost of food in Canada has constantly been a focus of WSA's lobbying efforts, culminating in support for Bill C-215 1984, the Parity Prices for Farm Products Act. What are you Worth? (Watkins, 1985, page 4) had revealed a staggering 51 percent of the farms surveyed in Eastern Ontario fell below the poverty line, but action to educate family farmers about their low economic position vis à vis the rest of Canadian society proceeded from the organization's inception. That 'food is a real bargain in Canada' is a theme reiterated through newsletters and speeches. A WSA Newsletter for 1989 records that: 14 percent of weekly income is spent on average by a Canadian for a food basket which includes meat, dairy products, fruit, vegetables and other 'common foods'¹⁰ (12). This, the article claims, contrasts with figures of 20 percent for England, 24 percent for Italy, 31 percent for Japan, and 38 percent for Spain. While the relative share of income spent on other goods had risen (private transportation by 10 percent, education by 14 percent, clothing by 3 percent), the percentage spent on food declined by 7 percent between 1982 and 1986, it is claimed (WSA Newsletter, July/August 1989:6). Where food costs have increased for the consumer, Newsletters are quick to point out corporate responsibility for the mark-up. The staging of a Farm Gate Feast by an offshoot of WSA in Prince Edward Island, the Central Branch of Women in Support of Agriculture in PEI, was intended to increase consumer awareness of the low prices received by farmers. The WSA Newsletter, (July/August 1986, page 1) notes that 300 lunches consisting of beef, turkey or egg sandwiches sold at \$0.16 each, potato salad at \$0.05, a glass of milk \$0.07 and a strawberry sundae, \$0.07, sold very fast (retold from The Island Farmer July 21, 1986). The corporate responsibility for costs passed on to the consumer was well publicized.

In recognition of the significance of these issues for the family farm, WSA adopted support for parity legislation as one of its three main goals for 1984 (WSA Newsletter September/October 1983, page 4). Diane Harkin and Dorothy Middleton took their lobbying to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs, as part of their brief on taxation issues in agriculture (Canada, House of Commons, 1985:26-29). They, and other members of WSA, argued here and in other situations that Lorne Nystrom's private members' Bill C-215, Parity Prices for Farm Products Act, would lay the basis for fair prices for farmers. The Bill, defeated in its third reading in 1985, proposed to provide parity prices to farmers calculated on a cost of production formula for wheat, oats and barley and through the establishment of voluntary marketing commission's for pork and beef (Nystrom 1985). The lobbyists appealed for 'Farm Parity Not Charity'.

More recently, WSA's 'price war' is conceptualized in terms of the relationships among low commodity prices, farm crisis, and the increase in off-farm income. There is increasing concern that off-farm employment is accepted as a long-term solution for family farm income problems on the part of government. The bitterness felt from an intensification of exploitation of the labour of the family farmer through employment off the farm, is captured by guest editor Kathryn MacDonald writing for the WSA Newsletter; (March/April 1991, pages 1-3).

I resent very much the fact that off-farm income has, in so many cases, become essential to keeping the farm afloat. I resent the fact that off-farm income must subsidize the farm and in turn the manufacturing and consumer sectors of Canadian society. If the farm wife and/or the farm husband work off the farm in addition to farming, if farm children contribute labour in the form of regular chores or seasonal work, we not only compound the overall person hours of work, but we add the appalling element of unpaid, unacknowledged labour ... High input costs, combined with low commodity prices, have forced many farm families to find essential off-farm income in order to obtain adequate cash flow and to keep the banks at bay.

10 A more recent figure (Hunt, 1991, page 17) for 1989 indicates little change: as a percentage of total expenditures on consumer goods and services, 11.10 percent was spent on food purchased in stores, and 4.77 percent on food purchased from restaurants.

The impending threat to Canada's food security by government's 'disempowerment' of agricultural producers provides the banner under which battle is engaged.

An ideology of Canadian sovereignty, in which the family farm rather than a large-scale corporate alternative is a keystone, has similarly been introduced recently into a defence of supply management in the dairy industry by WSA. When the Economic Council of Canada produced a report in 1981 advising a gradual elimination of marketing boards in the interest of the consumer, Dorothy Middleton, on behalf of WSA, was immediately on the phone to Eugene Whelan, federal Minister of Agriculture and Herb Gray, Minister of Trade. Subsequently, she appeared on CJOH TV's six o'clock news (Ottawa) to publicize her response to the ECC. Her argument was based on a rationale of economic efficiency in the face of alternative corporate take over (implicitly, as in the US). 'There she stood in her work clothes, telling the real farming story from a dairy farmer's point of view', the editor of the WSA Newsletter remarks (May/June 1981, page 2). Concurrently, President of the WSA, Diane Harkin, wrote a rebuttal of the ECC's statements to be published in the Ottawa Citizen the following day (ibid.).

More recently, national interest, to which the family farm is seen as integral, has provided a powerful strategy to counter proposals to end supply management under the Canada/US Trade Agreement. WSA was active in lobbying that a motion opposing Free Trade was adopted at the Second National Farm Women's Conference; (WSA Newsletter November/December 1985); it made a presentation to this same effect before the National Liberal Task Force on Agriculture hearings in Finch, Ontario in January 1986 (WSA Newsletter January/February 1986). More recently, and in recognition of the diverse regional and commodity interests that arose at the Third National Farm Women's Conference, WSA has, in line with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, adopted a view that the CUSTA poses a threat to many agricultural sectors in Canada, and called for the protection of 'orderly marketing systems' (including the Canadian Grain Commission, the Canadian Dairy Commission, and the Canadian Wheat Board) under any trade negotiations (WSA Newsletters September/October/November 1987, page 6; January/February 1989, page 3; July/August 1988, page 6; Proceedings, Third National Farm Women's Conference 1987).

In like vein, the WSA Newsletter has kept readers informed of the ongoing GATT negotiations on agricultural issues. Supportive of Canadian dairy farmers' long struggle to control the import of ice cream and yogurt from the US, WSA has continued to monitor the Canadian government's response to the unfavourable GATT ruling. It is critical of the present government's policy of awaiting the final outcome of the Uruguay round before making a decision as to what action to take, causing ongoing uncertainty for dairy producers (WSA Newsletters, May/June 1988, page 5; November/December 1989, page 6; July/August 1990, page 5; see also Ontario Farm Women's Network Newsletter, March 1989, page 2).

As the agricultural crisis in Ontario has deepened, affecting not only the beef producers of Western Ontario, but also those carrying heavy debt loads on dairy farms anywhere, WSA has mobilized around the issue of farm debt and the consequences of debt and low commodity prices for the increase in stress among farmers. WSA has responded at two levels. First, since October 1980, the course Survival Techniques for the Farm Woman, designed by Dorothy Middleton and run annually at Kemptville College and numerous workshops elsewhere in Eastern Ontario, has aimed both to provide support for women farmers faced with stress and to provide an education in basic skills which can reduce stress. Stress management, first aid, time scheduling, estate planning, record keeping and preparation for widowhood are recurring topics in the courses. More recently, computer courses, business management, personal growth and family violence have been added at the suggestion of participants to the curricula. A major study, Work Smarter... Not Harder: Toward the Economic Equality of Farm Women in Canada (Middleton 1987), was commissioned by the Women's Bureau, Agriculture Canada and conducted through WSA to investigate the training needs and barriers to training that women farmers faced, in order to propose recommendations that would decrease stress on the farm. The research indicated that the most common barrier faced by women was the gearing of courses towards men rather than women (44.6 percent of the respondents named this as a usual barrier). In descending order of importance, the other barriers identified were: inadequate child care (37.6 percent respondents); the

cost of hiring replacement labour (26.67 percent); off farm employment (17.97 percent); family pressures (15.67 percent); the availability of farm help (14.7 percent); and farm work load (13.30 percent).

Second, WSA has actively lobbied at the provincial and national levels to effect changes in agricultural policy with respect to farm debt, particularly since the First National Farm Women's Conference 1980, coordinated by WSA. Action has focused on the Farm Credit Corporation, commercial banks, and OMAF. With respect to recommendations presented from the First National Farm Women's Conference to the Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture, positive action was taken by the FCC through the Farm Credit Act to eliminate discrimination against married partners. A second recommendation, that budget allocations for beginning farmers be increased, a move that could benefit women in particular, did not receive attention in 1982 (WSA Newsletter, March/April 1982, pages 1-2). A letter from WSA to John Wise, Minister of Agriculture in 1987, drew attention to the general dissatisfaction with the FCC. Among the complaints, the WSA noted the continued emphasis of the FCC on 'bigger is better' and specialization of operations, policies which, in WSA's view, had led to the problems of unmanageable farm debt and bankruptcies in the past. Other problems concerned the demand for ever increasing collateral and the attitude of FCC staff to farmers—'impoliteness', 'condescension' and 'intimidation' (WSA Newsletter January/February 1987, page 4). WSA had been active in lobbying the FCC against foreclosures since the early 1980s. A lack of confidence in the FCC is evident in the WSA Newsletter's report of the lifting of the FCC's moratorium on loan foreclosures in 1987 (March/April 1987, page 4). A cartoon drawn from the Ontario Farmer (October 14, 1986) is considered by the editor of the WSA Newsletter to express aptly the insecurity faced by farms vis à vis federal policy. In it, the federal minister of agriculture, accompanied by three worried farmers, is holding a parachute marked 'Federal Farm Assistance'. The caption reads: 'No! No! You don't get the parachute until after you jump!' (September/October 1986, page 2). The cartoon might equally capture WSA's dissatisfaction with OMAF's role in providing relief on interest rates for farmers (eg WSA Newsletters March/April 1984, page 4; September/October 1985, page 2).

WSA's lobbying against harassment by commercial banks draws from members' own experience (WSA Annual Report 1983-1984). With an increase in interest rates from 12 percent in 1979 to 24 percent a year later, on the instruction of head offices, banks in Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry began calling in the loans of beef farmers and those younger or less well-established dairy farmers who were caught by the sudden increase in interest rates shortly after they had expanded in size in response to recommendations of the FCC. In one farm woman's words, 'they hounded and hounded us. The bank manager would phone the wife at a time when the husband was likely to be in the barn', generally on a Friday afternoon leading to an extremely stressful weekend. WSA lobbied the banks and encouraged all farmers to stand up to the banks and refuse to engage in conversations under such terms (interview, July 1991).

The final issue, chosen to illustrate WSA's ability to act immediately in response to an agricultural concern, further illustrates the increasing ease with which WSA members engage in public discourse on agricultural policy at provincial and federal levels. It concerns the sale of milk treated with bovine somatotropin (BST), a synthetic growth hormone under development by four transnational corporations based in the US: Monsanto, Elanco, Cyanamid, and Upjohn. WSA's public action occurred in February 1989 when it became known that milk from a herd treated with BST in Québec was reaching the Ontario market. Dorothy Middleton, then President of the WSA, initiated a telephone campaign. Deluged with approximately 3,000 telephone calls within 48 hours, the manager of Sealtest in Toronto let Middleton know he had told Macdonald College (McGill University) to send its milk elsewhere, pleading with her to call off the campaign (interview, July 1989; OFW Newsletter March 1989, page 7).

Mobilization on this occasion followed an extended altercation between one WSA member, Lorraine Lapointe, and the Ontario Milk Marketing Board (OMMB) over its 'conspiracy of secrecy' pertaining to the sale of milk from two herds with BST in Ontario between 1985 and 1988. The two herds were those of the University of Guelph and of the past Chair of the OMMB, currently Vice Chair of the Canadian Dairy Commission. Lapointe in this instance was acting on her own behalf, instigating a Pure Milk Campaign to publicise the issue, but relying on the individual support of WSA members and others from Ontario, Manitoba

and Alberta. In relating her uphill battle of turning to the Ontario Farm Products Appeal Tribunal (OFPAT) to appeal a decision by the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission (OFPMC) (the body that supervises all marketing boards in Ontario) which had refused to hear her case after the Milk Marketing Board would not investigate her complaint, Lapointe remarks: 'I can't believe that in joining a farm women's organization, I got to this. And that's fighting for my rights ... It's called justice to farmers ... We started off walking like a little baby, now we're running (interviews May 1988, July 1989, August 1991; also WSA Newsletters: July/August 1990, page 6; May/June 1991, pages 5-6; OFWN Newsletters April 1989, page 7; October 1989, page 3; March/April 1991, page 6).

The OFPMC, comprising new members, heard the case as directed by the Tribunal in June 1990. The inquiry exposed, first, the lack of communication between Health and Welfare Canada, responsible for safety in the testing of new products, the Dairy Inspection branch of OMAF, the OMMB, and milk producers; second, the OMMB's lack of a clear policy on the marketing of milk from herds being tested with experimental drugs, including hormones; and third, OMMB's negligence in monitoring research closely with a view towards assessing the implications for producers, milk processors and consumers (OFPMC 1990, pages 7-8). This has been integral to a strategy aimed at changing the power/knowledge structure in rural Ontario, and also has been an essential component of an explicitly feminist discourse.

That Lapointe's 'Pure Milk Campaign' and fight for 'democracy'/accountability to producers on the part of the OMMB changed her reputation (in her words) from being 'a bitch' to becoming 'a witch' signifies for her a recognition of the effectiveness that farmers' actions may achieve. Milk from the two herds was dumped after 1988, the costs being covered by the OMMB (itself funded by the producers)(OFPMC 1990, page 6) and no further milk from cows treated with BST has been sold to consumers.

Reminiscent of the tactics of Choices, an urban-based coalition in Winnipeg, (Silver 1991, page 5), WSA's mobilization around the agricultural issues discussed here has been grounded in research, the common cause of justice and, frequently, humour. In Eastern Ontario, an ideology of an economically viable and ethical rural producer essential to the preservation of Canadian sovereignty provides the soil in which the security of the family farm is nurtured. For WSA, engagement in agricultural politics at the provincial and national levels is achieved through an energetic and constant commitment to educating members about agricultural issues. Newsletters and agendas adopted at the five national conferences of farm women attest to the centrality of WSA's commitment to engage in an efficacious discourse of agricultural policies. Mobilization has occurred around the issues of parity, CUSTA, farm debt and 'pure milk'. The WSA Newsletter of May/June 1990 indicates that the OMMB has accepted all the recommendations.

Conclusion

An analysis of interviews with WSA members, newsletters and research commissioned by the network in Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry counties reveals the creation of a discourse of resistance which reflects changes in gendered dimensions of power within the household, community, province and state. Changes from the names on farm signs and letter boxes to changes in legislation attest to this. WSA is certainly a 'support group' for women who are frequently isolated by the realities of daily life. It continues to lobby for creative alternatives in the provision of rural child care, for measures to increase safety on the farm, for better access to rural health and other services (see McGhee 1984). With considerable pain, caused not least by dissension among its members, WSA has probed the silences surrounding family violence in rural Ontario. One WSA member who spoke openly about the issue in public recalls being 'given much flack'. 'How dare you say there's family violence' she was challenged by a member of the community. The issue, and particularly the revelation of incest, 'cracked things up' in the community (interview, July 1991). WSA's support over an 18 month period led to the establishment of Naomi's Family Resource Centre, a refugee for women and children in Winchester, in 1987. The Centre is now funded by the provincial government.

WSA has woven a struggle on these commonly called 'woman's issues' into a discourse which directly assaults hierarchical relations of power pervasive in agricultural practice. The strategic manipulation of

silence surrounding farm labour, mobilization around the issue of farm partnerships and exposing how gender inequality slips through the concept of 'spousal unit,' for example, have brought relations of power in Canadian society sharply into focus and provide a means by which a dominant discourse which labels farm women as wives may be altered. Women's 'internal exclusion' (Martin 1988, page 13) within the agricultural sphere has provided an effective vantage point from which to expose how power is deployed.

To follow Foucault (1978 page 96), the new 'reverse' discourse is based on 'localised resistances', particular claims to power/knowledge, which emerge as producers on family farms face a common threat to survival. Battle here is engaged with federal and provincial policy makers over prices of agricultural commodities, for the maintenance of supply management in the context of the Canadian-U.S. Trade Agreement and GATT negotiations, for the relief of farm debt, and for the purity of agricultural produce, specifically milk. WSA interweaves a feminist struggle to control land, labour and its product at the household level with a discourse that resonates in the courts of law, banks, and federal and provincial policy, in whose institutions the normalizing power of legal bureaucratic discourse is grounded.

In large measure, I would argue, WSA effectiveness has depended on its strategic manipulation of two contradictory idealogies. On the one hand, the discourse created by WSA challenges male control of land, labour and its product. In this it is explicitly feminist. On the other, by extending the discourse to the broader political economy of agricultural politics, it fights for the survival of the 'family farm' which in the past has served as the site of a gender based hierarchy. The contradiction is recognized by the leadership of WSA. In the words of a former member of the executive: 'We had to use the family farm or we would not have got off the ground.' Referring to the opposition of women and men in rural Ontario to the organizations, a second member stated, 'As a new movement, this is one of the biggest barriers you face - you fight not to alienate' (interviews December 1991). Thus, the explicitly material and feminist struggle over work and property rights was pursued through a struggle to appropriate symbols of the family farm, of national security, and of Canadian sovereignty.

The new discourse draws on specific sites of power/knowledge and localized forms of struggle and resistance. Such a strategy, Martin (1988, page 10) argues, may well be a 'fundamentally more radical and effective response to the deployment of power in our society' than current dominant and centralizing models. For all of (or because of) the apparent fragmentation and ad hoc organizational practice, the recent emergence of provincial networks such as the Ontario Farm Women's Network and a national network formally ratified at the Fifth National Farm Women's Conference held in London, Ontario in November 1991 attests to its effectiveness. As individuals, the increasing appointment of members to national and provincial task forces, boards and commissions begins to challenge the exclusion of women from policy making fora in the field of agriculture.¹¹

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11 These include the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women; the Task Force of the Ontario Institute of Agrologists; and the Ontario Right to Farm Advisory Committee, the Canadian Farm Women's Education Council, the Finance Committee of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues

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Fiona MACKENZIE is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at Carleton University.

AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL RESTRUCTURING GROUP

OLD AND NEW FARM WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS, WITH A FOCUS ON THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTES IN ONTARIO

*Louise I. Carbert
Political Studies
University of Saskatchewan*

ABSTRACT

A clear-cut distinction between the old farm women's movement, represented by the Women's Institutes (WI), and the new farm women's movement, represented by the Networks, cannot be maintained. Such a distinction is largely a political, and sometimes partisan, invention because government departments of agriculture have funded and directed farm women's organizations in Canada since 1897. Official divisions among rival organizations and leaders may not correspond to divisions in the grass roots membership. The old farm women's movement, organized as the WI, remains a viable option because it shares programmatic, organizational, and ideological continuities with the newer, often crisis-oriented, farm women's movement.

INTRODUCTION

Recently a broad distinction between 'old' and 'new' farm women has come into use among academics, government bureaucrats, and some sectors of the farming population to describe the increasingly visible contribution of wives to agricultural production and management. In popular speech, traditional or 'old' farm wives are fundamentally housewives who happen to be married to farmers, whereas modern wives are active, egalitarian participants in financial and agricultural decisions. One of my respondents, for example, explicitly identified herself as a 'new' farm women:

They [WI members] seem pretty boring from the local newspaper articles. They seem like old guard farm women, traditional women who aren't as involved in farming as modern women.¹

¹ This paper draws on face-to-face structured interviews of between one and two hours duration that I conducted with 117 women in adjacent Huron and Grey Counties of Ontario in 1989. This study was designed to investigate feminism where it is least expected; that is, among farm wives. In order to avoid a model of modernizing leaders and passive followers, I deliberately avoided feminist farm women who might be presumed to be at the leading edge of social change in rural communities; instead I began with members of the Women's Institutes (WI). With the approval of the provincial executive of the WI (FWIO), prominent members introduced me at local WI meetings where I spoke formally and informally about my research project. The women were remarkably cooperative and responsive to requests for interviews with themselves and with their neighbours; some women provided lists of up to 20 names of local farm women. Of 124 contacted later by letter and telephone, only seven refused to be interviewed. A total of 117 respondents was the most I could achieve on my own during a single season in the field: 67 WI members and 50 nonmembers were interviewed. Apart from being less educated, WI members were not significantly different from nonmembers. Interviews were concentrated in selected townships in a north-to-south interview corridor along Lake Huron, chosen to take advantage of a remarkable diversity of landscape, commodities, and prosperity in a manageable geographic area. Its commodity structure varies from the red-meat industries of beef and pork in the north to

Similar themes of self-ascribed superiority and commitment to social change occurred during several interviews. For example, this woman credited her urban background for a marriage that she considered more egalitarian than her neighbours' marriages:

A feminist will vocally stand up for women. Women around here are so ... husbands won't babysit and women can't get out to meetings. They defer to husband's hard work. I go out to just as many meetings as my husband. [Because of my urban background] we don't defer to farm business, the house has high priority. Our marriage is more equal than others' around here. We discuss everything together.

On the subject of social change, another woman contrasted excessively rapid implementation of employment equity legislation in local schools to static rural communities:

But around here, farmers don't change. They still rule the roost and the women are passive. Who's getting through to them?

These three women implicitly relied on a model of modernization, operating through generational shifts and urbanization, to explain perceived social changes in rural communities.

The distinction between new and old farm women made one of its earliest official appearances in a report submitted to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) in 1984. The report's author, Molly McGhee, identified a 'new breed of farm women developing, anxious to discard the stereotype of farmer's wife and helper ... to be regarded as equal partners' (1984, 4). McGhee's report discussed at length a perceived 'generation gap,' corresponding to organizational affiliation, in rural Ontario:

Over half questioned whether the Women's Institute adequately represented rural women today. Because of the younger women's time pressures, their interest in single-purpose issues, they are reluctant to join the traditional organizations with their all-encompassing objectives and programs (1984, 39).

Her recommendations to OMAF included state services for farm women's activism through Rural Organizations and Services (ROS) and thereby spurred the emergence of the Ontario Farm Women's Network (OFWN). The OFWN currently supervises the continued implementation of those recommendations.

The distinction between old and new individuals thus corresponds to the distinction between old and new farm women's movements. The WI founded in 1897 during the first wave of feminist and agrarian reform, is contrasted to a series of organizations that has sprung up across North America, culminating in the new farm women's movement (Branden 1985; Haney 1983; Miller and Neth 1988; Rankin 1989). Ontario has seen the emergence of Women for the Survival of Agriculture (WSA, founded in 1975) and Concerned Farm Women (CFW, founded in 1981) whose leading members subsequently founded the Ontario Farm Women's Network (OFWN) in 1989. In addition to the WI and provincial bodies of the Canadian Farm Women's Network, English-speaking farm women might also affiliate with the National Farmers' Union (NFU, founded in 1969).

field grains of corn and soybean in the south and thus profiles, in microcosm, Ontario's prosperous and diversified agricultural industry. Finally, the area remains predominantly rural and agricultural, and its political heritage as a hub of agrarian protest in Canada since the mid-nineteenth century continues to draw the attention of outside observers. The first part of the survey employed closed, multiple-choice questions which are standard to rural sociology on variables of a woman's involvement in agricultural production in questions which explored paid employment, farm tasks, decision-making, farm's legal status, size, commodities, and prosperity, life satisfaction, and a range of demographics such as age, children, and education (Rosenfeld 1985; Ireland 1983; Dion 1983). The second part of the survey explored women's politicization under categories of political salience, conceptualization, participation and opinions. Women's quotations not otherwise documented are from Carbert 1991.

Recent surges of activism in the new farm women's movement have been attributed to two causes. The first is the current economic crisis - caused by government fiscal and agricultural policy leading to high interest rates and scarcity of capital on one hand and inadequate commodity prices on the other - which threatens the continued viability of family farming and is often first on activists' agenda, ahead of feminism (Rankin 1989, 322-3). Women who actively contribute to farming operations are more likely to combine their gender-based concerns (discriminatory inheritance, tax, divorce laws, and subsidy policies) with commodity-based concerns to protect farmers as a class (Haney 1983, 188; Miller and Neth 1988, 360-78). Second, the new farm women's movement has implicitly relied on parallels to critical or progressive new social movement; new social movements presume that feminism diffuses to rural peripheries after a decade or more time-lag. Its most explicit version states: 'the Women's Liberation Movement has allowed Canadian farm women to see themselves in a new light. Following the example set by their urban counterparts, they are stepping out of their previous, stereotyped role' (Bruners 1985, 19).² Such accounts are not inaccurate, but they lack historical perspective since both the farm crisis and the women's movement have been with us for over a century in Canada.

This paper takes a historical perspective to argue that the prevailing distinction between old and new farm women's movements is inadequate, chiefly because it does not account for the central place of the WI in the history of rural Canada. It makes that argument by situating the origins of the WI in state-directed programmes of agricultural modernization that occurred alongside, and in response to, agrarian protest movements throughout North America from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. The WI, just like women's sections of agrarian protest movements, is understood more by its association with the agricultural policy community than by its association with the Canadian women's movement. A clear-cut distinction between gender (the old farm women's movement) and class (the new farm women's movement) cannot be maintained. Instead, the old farm women's movement, organized as the WI, still represents a viable option. It remains so, in part, because it shares programmatic, organizational, and ideological continuities with the newer, often crisis-oriented, farm women's movement. The force of this apparently modest claim only becomes intelligible in terms of scholars' previous claims that farm women's organized activity in agrarian protest movements were historically, and continue to be, superior to activity in the WI movement. In addition to survey material and secondary academic literature, this paper draws on government publications, constitutions of farm women's organizations, and farm/rural publications from 1985-92 (*Home & Country*, Farm Women's Network newsletters, and the *Western Producer*).

A History of Farm Women's Movements in English Canada

The WI movement has its origin in state-directed programmes for agricultural modernization in English Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century. The era also saw the rise of agrarian protest movements in response to the same forces of modernization and those protest movements also enrolled women as members. Competing political parties took up agricultural grievances, but it is doubtful that partisan loyalties penetrated the grass roots membership of farm women's organizations. The history of farm women's involvement in the WI and agrarian protest movements also intersects with that of organized feminism in Canada.

2 See also McGhee 1984, 7; and Miller and Neth 1988, 362.

The Agrarian Origins of the Women's Institutes in Ontario

Although the Women's Institutes did not develop a commodity-based political analysis and did not promote farmers' interests as a producer class in parties of agrarian protest, their origins and activities were no less agrarian. Their origins cannot be understood apart from the origins of agrarian protest movements in Canada. Agrarian protest arrived in Canada during the 1870s when the Grange movement from New England expanded into Ontario (Wood 1975, 24, 30). After flourishing briefly in the 1870s, the nonpartisan Grange was overtaken after 1892 by the Patrons of Industry, a more radical movement that originated from the American Midwest; the Patrons intended to run partisan candidates in a Labour-Farmer coalition (Wood, 109, 115). In the 1894 Ontario election, the Patrons had considerable success, electing seventeen candidates, but were less successful in the 1896 Canadian election which saw only three of their candidates elected, all in Ontario (Wood, 138). After 1896, agrarian protest declined until the United Farmers of Ontario was formed in 1914 (Wood, 147). Meanwhile, in 1885, the Ontario government established educational, nonpartisan Farmers' Institutes after which the Women's Institute movement was modelled. L.A. Wood infers that the purpose of the Farmers' Institutes was to 'coddle [farmers] in order to neutralize the effect of independent thought among the farmers' (1975, 275). If not yet enfranchised farm wives were to be likewise 'coddled,' astute partisan foresight on the part of Ontario politicians may have motivated the founding of the Women's Institutes' in 1897, but the movement's origins are better located in the government's more nonpartisan programme of agricultural reform. For all that politicians and administrators in the Ontario government knew at the beginning of the twentieth century, agrarian populism as a partisan political strategy had been decisively defeated in recent elections, but the rural crisis remained and had to be dealt with.

At the turn of the century, Ontario agriculture was undergoing its own version of the extended and prolonged crisis that occurred as North America made the transition from a rural, unstable, and financially unreliable staple-exporting economy to an urban capitalist economy dominated by industry and the availability of local markets (Cohen 1988, 59-117; Graham 1988, 211-91). This transition was, even within Ontario, geographically uneven. In Huron County, the town of Goderich on the shores of Lake Huron became an important shipping port for grain early on and the Grey-Bruce peninsula was characterized more by forestry than farming, but the areas inland from Lake Huron were settled later and were more isolated from major centres of commerce in Hamilton and Guelph (Scott 1966).

During the nineteenth century, Upper Canada/Ontario exported wheat to Britain until the expansion of railways and a new wave of immigrants opened up wheat and grain cultivation on the western prairies. Just when Ontario's virgin soils, depleted by half a century of reckless farming practices, had given up producing high grain yields without fertilization or conservation, technological innovations arrived to encourage Ontario farmers to shift to dairy production and animal husbandry. The invention of the automatic separator allowed first creameries and later on individual farmers to separate cream from liquid milk quickly and hygienically. A network of creameries collected cream to produce butter which was distributed not just to Ontario's growing urban population but down the Saint Lawrence and overseas to Britain (Cohen 1988, 109-12; Graham, 282-7). Dairy receipts had supplemented unreliable wheat crops throughout the nineteenth century, but the wholesale shift to dairy production could not take place until Ontario was sufficiently developed and populated to support a network of creameries. Grain products, being less perishable, could be cultivated in the back reaches of Upper Canada or on the prairie frontier, far from eventual consumers, but large-scale commercial dairy production had to wait for refrigerated transport and marketing networks to develop. The development of agriculture in Canada, therefore, occurred together with the development of adequate financial and transportation infrastructure.

Although the shift to dairying marked an increase in farm income occurring after the prolonged depression in grain prices that occurred after the American Civil War (which incidentally gave rise to populist revolt), people were still leaving rural Ontario, either to take up homesteads, first on the American prairies and after 1900 in Saskatchewan and Alberta, or to take waged labour in cities. Agricultural reform happened in the context of the overall transition from a rural, not-entirely commodified agricultural economy to an urbanized,

industrial capitalism in North America (Cohen 1988, 36-41).³ A generation before Canadian farmers became fully aware of the transition's scope and organized coherent political opposition to the new order, the Ontario government prodded reluctant farmers to modernize. When a provincial commission on agriculture observed 'a very large amount of defective farming,' the Ontario Agricultural College was founded in 1874 to reach out to isolated and stubborn farmers through its Agricultural and Experimental Union, which subsidized the educational Farmers' Institutes that had been established in 1885 (Cohen 1988, 112-5; Graham, 263-4).

The Women's Institutes' own somewhat mythologized account of its origins, when read from a critical perspective, reveals how urbanization intersected with agricultural reform.⁴ The organization's reputed founder is Adelaide Hoodless, wife of a wealthy Hamilton furniture manufacturer, who lost her eighteen-month-old son to a bacterial infection from contaminated milk. (Urban households bought milk from farmers who drove into town to sell open canisters of unpasteurized milk.) Overcome with grief and guilt, Hoodless is said to have then made it her life mission to have housekeeping and child care conducted on her, albeit limited, understanding of scientific principles. While promoting the new discipline of home economics or domestic science at the Ontario Agricultural College, she was invited to speak to women at a meeting of the Farmers' Institutes at Stoney Creek, just east of Hamilton. After suggesting that women form their own organization affiliated with the Farmers' Institutes, Hoodless had very little to do with rural women.

In view of her minimal contribution, the Hoodless cult is entirely unwarranted and distinctly odd.⁶ Reconsider the story of Hoodless's speech to Stoney Creek women critically: a wealthy urban woman warned farm wives about the danger of unhygienic dairy practices, women who almost certainly breast-fed their children and gave their older children freshly drawn milk. Adelaide Hoodless lectured to them as producers, not consumers, of milk. As cities became more densely populated and passed by-laws to prohibit the keeping of cows and chickens in backyards, the quality and delivery of fresh farm produce to urban populations had to be improved and regulated. Using the rhetoric of all women's common maternal responsibility, the WI's original programme directed farm women to imitate urban, scientific standards of hygiene and sanitation, but as producers, not consumers or housewives. Whether farm women actually believed in and took precautions against bacteria is not known. Contrary to the belief that 'slovenly' farm wives lost control of dairy production to large-scale, government-inspected commercial creameries because they deserved to, blame is better shifted from farm wives to inadequate marketing networks (Cohen 1988, 111; Graham, 261-3).

The WI's account of its origins clearly illustrates how the farm population was directed to reform agricultural practices in imitation of commercial manufacturing processes, but still in their capacity as producers of foodstuffs for a rapidly expanding urban population. And, while the WI's original programme apparently imitated bourgeois urban housewifery, it made their members no less farm women; such was simply the rhetoric and content of agricultural reform at that time. Even the apparently trivial suggestion that WI members cultivate flower-beds makes sense in terms of the agriculture ministry's simultaneous campaign to plant trees along concession lines after fifty years of settlers' reckless deforestation (Graham 1988, 278, 287). Agricultural reform intersected with the logic of maternal feminism, epitomized by the tragic death of Hoodless's infant son, to persuade WI members of their particular agricultural responsibility as mothers to all other mothers. Although WI members were less politically sophisticated than populist radicals, their activities were perhaps no less agricultural. And finally, they were dedicated to preserving the agrarian and rural way of life in the onslaught of urbanization and rural depopulation.

3 Capital accumulation was critical to this process; see Graham for a discussion of rural credit practices (1988, 112-6).

4 MacDonald 1986; *Ontario Women's Institute story* 1972, 3-11; Walker et al. 1948.

5 Over the years, WI members have raised funds to commission an enormous oil portrait of Hoodless for the MacDonald Institute at the Ontario Agricultural College and to purchase her birthplace as a museum. See Terry Crowley for just how irrelevant Hoodless was to the Women's Institutes (1986).

The three fledgling Women's Institutes floundered until George Creelman was appointed superintendent of the thriving Farmers' Institutes. The WI movement did not really expand until 1900 when he extended to women the same subsidies and access to resources and speakers enjoyed by the men's organization. Three years later, there were fifty-two WI branches and a paid-up membership of 4,151. By 1905, the ministry of agriculture had hired seventeen instructors from the Ontario Agricultural College to travel the province, lecturing and giving demonstrations, primarily on dairying techniques, to Women's Institutes. To promote the Institutes, he contrasted improvements made to barns and stables by progressive farmers to 'badly planned and poorly equipped' dwellings.⁶ He still associated the dairy and poultry yard with the household and thus suggested that women learn modern techniques in dairying, buttermaking, bee-keeping, and market gardening. Creelman 'saw the Institutes as the way to make the female sector of the rural economy more efficient, just as the male sector had become' (Crowley 1986, 80).

But dairying was already slipping out of women's traditional control as agriculture became increasingly commercialized. Whereas wives previously received dairy cows as wedding gifts to contribute to the household's subsistence and perhaps supplement its income, they lost financial control when dairy cattle became farm property controlled by its sole owner, that is, by husbands (Cohen 1988, 43-7). Marjorie Cohen is sceptical about the provincial government's efforts to promote women's dairying through the WI because, in her view, government clearly intended cheese and butter production to be shifted from farm households to factories (1988, 112-7). She faults the WI for focusing on production techniques rather than marketing which might have kept dairy production in women's control. Although commercial creameries did not overtake domestic production of butter until the mid-1920s (Cohen 1988, 110), it is difficult to see how women, even assisted by government subsidies, might have competed with better financed commercial creameries. The uneven process of rural electrification surely gave commercial creameries an advantage too. Regardless of the shift to factory production of butter, government policy during this period seems confused as to whether or not dairying was men or women's work. But in 1903 when Creelman designed the WI's programme, husbands' access to dairy income was not yet secured or even in the process of being secured in any uniform pattern across the diverse regions of Ontario.

Unlike the *Cercles de fermières* in Quebec which maintained a strong commitment to household production of commodities by its members, the WI movement turned inward to consumption and home economics, subjects that were part of the larger, urban-led 'domestic science movement' (Prentice et al. 1988, 156-8, 183).⁷ After acquiring the franchise in North America, the singular 'woman movement' which fought for suffrage dispersed into the plural 'women's' movement with three broad segments. Whereas one segment of the movement pressed on to secure further citizenship rights (Cott 1987) and another segment turned to labour militancy (Prentice et al. 1988, 226-32), yet another segment, to which the WI movement belongs, retreated from electoral politics to seek practical improvements to women's household work (Prentice et al. 1988, 242-52).

This apparent retreat on the part of the WI might be redeemed by Veronica Strong-Boag's argument that, during the interwar period, 'home economics [had] some of the same consciousness raising and research goals of the modern women's studies programmes' (1986, 44). The criticism that the WI was just 'kitchen, kitchen, kitchen,' moreover, does not quite account for the full range of responsibilities and heavy manual labour involved in 'kitchen' before plumbing, electricity, professional butchers, central heating, birth control, or spending money became widely available to farm women. Home economics, at this time, entailed the growing and preservation of a substantial amount of food, including canning adequate meat, to feed entire families during winter months. In 1927-28, Violet McNaughton, leader of the Women's Section of the

6 Circular sent to prospective institutes in 1900, *Ontario Women's Institute story* (1972), 19. History of Ontario WI taken from above, 17-22.

7 Cohen and Marchand argue that farm women's skills acquired 'exchange-value' outside the home, but do not specify to what extent handicrafts were sold for a profit. Differences between the *Cercles* and Institutes in this regard may be overdrawn; WI members continue to sell handicrafts at agricultural fairs which is their only example of 'exchange-value' (1989, 130).

Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association, led a joint campaign with the WI to install running water in farm homes:

I suffered so much from carrying those pails of water which are a part of the burden of a country woman that it burned into my mind this water question very deeply. ...so that the idea of woman power for handling the water will be abolished.⁸

A few years later, vivid descriptions of malnourished and ill clothed children on the Canadian prairies during the Depression lend further strength to the salience of home economics and domesticity to women (Burnet 1951, 20). Even as recently as the 1940s, wartime rationing of food and petroleum further increased the importance of household subsistence production for rural households and hence the relevance of domestic science programmes which were rapidly becoming obsolete in urban Canada. The WI's home economics programme is an example of a pragmatic feminist strategy focused on household work that was appropriate for that stage in Canada's development but which, critics charge, has failed to move on to more pressing issues.

The WI and Agrarian Protest on the Prairies

The new farm women's movement also has antecedents in first-wave feminism. Because the new farm women's movement is oriented principally to agriculture, it is supposed to descend, in a conceptual sense, from such organizations as the Women Grain Growers' Association (WGGA, founded in 1913), the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA, founded in 1915), and the United Farm Women of Ontario (UFWO, founded in 1918).⁹ These organizations were all affiliated with male-dominated agrarian protest organizations and parties. The farmers' protest movement was geographically based in prairie opposition to the National Policy promoted by central Canadian industrial interests, but it was able to encompass farmers' interests as a class when it spread to rural Ontario.

The history of farm protest movements intersects with that of the women's movement. According to one interpretation, farm women were an exception to first-wave feminist conservatism because they chafed under the dominance of bourgeois, urban suffragists.¹⁰ Along with labour women, women involved in organized agrarian populism suspected that the suffragists' associations with provincial and national Liberal parties precluded more radical economic and social reforms. American farm women participating in populist politics in the 1880s are likewise credited with preceding urban women's political mobilization and superseding their political analysis (Wagner 1988, 330-5). In contrast, members of the largest farm women's organization in Canada, the Women's Institutes, were conservative exceptions to the rule of generally progressive farm women because the WI was aligned with bourgeois urban housewives and Liberal governments. In addition to promoting gender to the exclusion of class, WI branches were further suspect because they were sponsored and subsidized by provincial ministries of agriculture. Although explicitly nonpartisan and nonsectarian (Walker et al. 1948, 30), nonpartisanship did not prevent the WI from being state-funded and possibly state-directed in order to thwart competition from women's auxiliaries of populist parties. Provincial Liberal governments were suspected of funding the WIs in order to purchase women's partisan loyalty soon after women were enfranchised. In like manner, when farm organizations went partisan in the 1920s, their women's auxiliaries were expected to convince women to vote for agrarian parties and against Liberal

8 Speech, 13 June 1928. McNaughton was convenor of the research committee for a survey made under the auspices of the United Farmers of Canada and the Homemakers' Clubs for Extension workers in Agricultural Engineering (22 May 1928). See also: Report of Morning Meeting of the Research Committee and Summarized Report of Conference between Women's Organizations and the Government of Saskatchewan on the subject of Home Economics, 8 November 1927. McNaughton papers, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

9 The line of descent from agrarian protest parties to the new farm women's networks seems to be strictly conceptual, but it is possible that certain individuals, families, or friendships provide a more concrete line of descent from one era to another.

10 See Bacchi 1979, 89-107; 1983, 123-32; Rasmussen et al. 1976, 122-3.

governments that gave women the vote. Thus, according to some scholars, thousands of WI members were conservative aberrations among rural women, while populist leaders such as Violet McNaughton in Saskatchewan and Irene Parlby in Alberta spoke for the vast majority of unaffiliated farm women.

The actual evidence about rural women's affiliations is mixed. During feminism's first wave of collective political action, Canadian writer and activist Nellie McClung shifted back and forth among populists, suffragists, and Liberals; she did not distinguish between two opposing farm women's movements, both of which she considered superior to urban suffrage organizations:

The Women's Institutes and the United Farm Women were not afraid to tackle social problems and their reading courses and discussions showed serious purpose. The women of the cities were more likely to be entangled in social affairs and in danger of wasting their time, but there was real staff in the countrywomen (McClung 1946, 182).

Nellie McClung, moreover, was present among the members of the Manitoba suffrage group who were invited to assist at the founding of the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (SGGA) in 1913 (Bacchi 1983, 125; Menzies 1968, 82). Agnes Macphail (a high-ranking officer in the United Farm Women of Ontario) likewise rarely declined an opportunity to speak to the Women's Institutes (Steward 1991).

As opposed to evidence of an overlapping network of formal ties that linked rural women's suffrage and populist organizations (Menzies 1968, 87), examples of hostility and competition are relatively rare. Correspondence from Irene Parlby to Violet McNaughton, respective leaders of the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) and the Women's Section of the SGGA, provides one such exception. In private correspondence, Parlby was more critical of the WI than is apparent by formal organizational ties alone:

I attended the convention of Women's Institutes in Edmonton ... their line of work does not interest me very much - too much of the housekeeping business, and I think the farm women want to be taken out of their housekeeping troubles, and made to realize there are other things of interest in the world (Parlby to McNaughton, 1916, cited in Rasmussen et al. 1976, 138).

A letter to the editor in 1915 also complained of the WI: 'Always housework, knitting, and the main women's destination: preparing of dainty side-dishes and salads. Kitchen, kitchen, and again kitchen' (*Grain Growers' Guide* 1915, cited in Rasmussen et al. 1976, 132).

But regardless of populist activists' personal impatience with the WI, testimony from surviving members indicates that activities undertaken by any of these women's organizations were identical at the local level. They raised money for community halls, libraries, and restrooms, sponsored courses, and organized community events in order to improve the quality of rural life (Silverman 1984, 173-83; Zacharias 1980, 55-77).¹¹ A recent analysis by R.G. Marchildon likely voices Parlby and McNaughton's ambitions for such activities: '[WGGA was] part of the larger maternal feminist movement, but this analysis is too simplistic. The key element is that these women were part of an aggressive agrarian movement' (1988, 104). Marchildon thus implies that the WI movement, which was not part of an 'aggressive agrarian movement,' must be 'simplistic' because it was part of the maternal movement. Never mind their actual activities, he argues -once

11 The WI often filled the administrative gaps for provincial governments: 'In the earlier years, the Women's Institutes made arrangements and provided voluntary assistance for health inspection of children, a service which led to the present health services for schools provided by the Provincial governments ... same arrangements were made for dental clinics. In more recent years, WI members have been active in the establishment of County and District Health Units. All programs to provide information and promote clinics for the control of major diseases have relied greatly upon the active involvement of Institute members' (*Ontario Women's Institute story* 1972, 51).

women were involved they could be instructed in and mobilized for populist politics through their affiliations to a larger movement. This is a basic principle for women's auxiliaries in all political movements and parties. Perhaps this strategy worked, but whether women were actually mobilized at the local level could only be verified by speaking to survivors or reading minute books, not by relying on leaders' wishful thinking in their correspondence.

With all deference to populist leaders, therefore, the grass roots activities of the competing organizations must be compared apart from the theory of populist and feminist mobilization. To return to Ontario history, Margaret Kechnie suggests that the alleged rivalry between the WI and the United Farm Women of Ontario (UFWO) was largely confined to Emma Griesbach's column in the United Farmers' party newspaper (1985). When the UFO government was defeated in the 1923 Ontario provincial election, the party was in disarray and could no longer assist its women's association financially or politically, leaving the UFWO with no basis to distinguish itself from the WI. Meanwhile, standing apart from partisan competition, the Women's Institutes had already taken up rural issues such as electrification and improved schools that were paramount at that time and were especially compatible with the organization's domestic focus. Without partisanship to distinguish between women's organizations, some local branches of the UFWO promptly converted themselves into Women's Institutes while others survived until 1943 in areas where there were no WI branches (Kechnie 1985, 266-78). Operating subsidies and technical support from the ministry of agriculture were probably further incentives for UFWO branches to convert into WI branches. Kechnie concludes that the United Farmer's movement offered women little more than vague and ambiguous phrases that were no substitute for women's traditional methods to improve their situation and reform society (1985, 276).

The question of partisan-motivated state intervention prompts two responses. The first response is to concede that the WI's history indeed intersects with the partisan competition and that provincial organizations were, at certain times, partisan-motivated instruments of provincial Liberal and Conservative governments. This is known to be the case in Alberta where ill will between WI members and other groups dates back to 1921 when the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) defeated the Liberal government; Irene Parlby, who served as minister without portfolio in the UFA government, favoured the explicitly partisan UFWA over the Women's Institutes.¹² Later in the 1930s, Social Credit women's groups defected from UFWA groups and the only organization to benefit from the split was the WI which grew at the expense of the UFWA (Burnet 1951, 147).

Agriculture was not the only partisan grievance on the Canadian prairies during the interwar period to involve farm women. Especially in Saskatchewan, politics were dominated by 'the politics of prejudice' until the governing Liberal party was defeated by the Conservatives in 1929 (Smith 1975). When ties between provincial and national wings of parties were closer, the Saskatchewan Liberal government was committed to Laurier's national policy of immigrant settlement of the West; it maintained power by skilful manipulation and, in fact, aggravation of antagonisms between Protestant, English-speaking farmers and non-Protestant, Eastern European immigrants (Smith 1975, 136). The Liberal party government sought to pacify British and American settlers whilst protecting immigrants from forced assimilation through English-language education. Organized farmers were among those calling for the immediate "Canadianization" of immigrants and a halt to further immigration from Eastern Europe. The higher status of English-speaking women - as seen in their noble struggle for prohibition and the franchise - was further proof of British civilization as compared to the virtual domestic serfdom of foreign women (Smith 1975, 126). By the end of the 1920s, the Klu Klux Klan found a receptive audience in rural Saskatchewan; it infiltrated the Conservative Party which defeated the Liberals in the 1929 provincial election on the issue of English-language education.

12 Georgina Taylor, *Violet McNaughton and agrarian feminism*, Ph.D. thesis in preparation, Carleton University, based on research in the Alberta Archives. Taylor suspects that whereas McNaughton 'sought common ground' as a general principle, Parlby personally fuelled rivalries among farm women.

The archives reveal that women's organizations share some complicity in these events. In 1926-27, Abbie deLury, director of the Saskatchewan WI (Homemaker's Club until 1972) and employed by the Extension Division of the University, was criticized for publishing a journal that accepted liquor advertisements. The campaign against deLury took a nasty turn: she was the 'ring leader' in a plot to direct Homemaker funds into the Roman Catholic church. But this particular division over liquor among women was fuelled by larger divisions as a prohibitionist anxiously related to her friends:

Protestants are up in arms — The Orange Lodges here are working more than they have for years and several of our men and women have joined the Klu Klux Klan; so until things cool down some there isn't much use to talk of any Women's Christian Temperance Union getting started here.

You folks do not realize how a community can get divided, and you won't unless of Convent [Coven] slips into your town. The Homemaker's Club is divided now.¹³

Only further research can tell to what extent farm women were implicated in the 'politics of prejudice' on the Canadian prairies.

In sum, WI records relate probably apocryphal stories of branches springing up spontaneously across Canada as lonely women picked prairie flowers and pined for their Women's Institutes back in Ontario, but all branches quickly came under the supervision of provincial ministries of agriculture. Since very little primary research has been done on the question of partisan-motivated state intervention in relation to farm women's organizations, it must be laid aside for now.

Even so, any further research along these lines will confront the fact that provincial bureaucracies rarely had the practical ability to carry out the logistics of manipulating society until after the Second World War. Hence the second response to the original question of state intervention is simply that the question is moot. In the 1950s, new tax-sharing arrangements were negotiated between Ottawa and the provinces that permitted 'province-building' to begin in earnest (and largely by the wealthier provinces); until then, provincial governments scarcely had the resources, in terms of finances, personnel, or technology, to embark on ambitious programmes to manipulate voluntary organizations for partisan purposes. In this regard, evidence pertaining to the corresponding organization in Quebec, the Cercles de fermières, is instructive. Examination of the Cercles de fermières' archives convinced Yolande Cohen that the government of Quebec, even in cooperation with a centralized network of parish priests, was inadequate to control or even direct the Cercles. The Cercles asked for more financial and administrative assistance than the Quebec ministry of agriculture was capable of or willing to give (Cohen 1989, 133). In the absence of assistance from the Roman Catholic church's bureaucracy, one can imagine that the rural population of English Canada, especially on the newly settled prairies, was even more difficult to regulate.¹⁴

13 Cullip to Bradley and Bolton, 7 July 1927. Bradley papers, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

14 David Smith notes that political parties and their fragile governments were isolated from society in the newly created prairie provinces: 'From the distance of more than half a century, it is difficult to appreciate the authority once possessed by the organized farmers. Certainly there are no comparable entities on the prairies today who wield their former influence ... Liberals and Conservatives were never so entrenched on the prairies that they could afford to forget the original non-partisan base of territorial politics or ignore the periodic threat of groups who challenged the utility, as well as ethics, of partisan politics' (1981, 37-9).

The WI and the Women's Movement

The WI is an example of first-wave social or maternal feminism.¹⁵ Most scholars consider this category of feminism to have become obsolete soon after the end of the nineteenth century (Kealey 1979, 14). Nonetheless, the WI reached its peak of prestige and influence during the interval between first and second-wave feminism. In Canada, especially, organizations such as the WI survived to bridge feminism's first wave at the turn of the century and feminism's resurgent second wave in the late 1960s (Prentice et al. 1988, 337).

Membership in the Women's Institutes across Canada did not decline after the First World War as drastically as it did in other first-wave women's organizations such as the National Council of Women (NCW, founded in 1893) or the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU, founded in 1874). However, despite the fact that the FWIC had 47,177 members compared to 3,787 WCTU members in 1982 (*Canadian Encyclopedia* 1986, 622), it did not grow successfully into second-wave feminism like, for example, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA, founded in 1870) did. In Ontario, WI membership has declined from a provincial peak of 36,481 in 1962-3, as branches have collectively aged and died along with their members. A minor crisis ensued in 1984-5 when a Canadian Press release publicly ridiculed the WI, and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) cut back funding, an act that reinforced members' doubts about the organization's purpose. The FWIO provincial executive responded by revising its constitution, paying more attention to public relations, and announcing a programme to work on waste-management and recycling projects which members have taken up with great enthusiasm. Their newfound enthusiasm for environmental issues has revived the WI in Ontario.

Declining membership is typical of institutionalized service and interest groups. Even the province's major agricultural lobby, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) which, despite criticism¹⁶, is presumed to be a somewhat more effective and dynamic organization than the WI, bemoans its declining membership. Neither can one overlook the fact that most of the WI's decline, in comparison to urban organizations, is due to the depopulation of farming and rural communities, rather than its failure to update its agenda. With 19,354 WI members and 325 Junior Institute members in Ontario and 35,000 WI members across Canada in 1989, the Women's Institute movement is still a substantial feature of rural life.

The claim that the WI is a relatively intact relic of first-wave social feminism is bolstered by its isolation from the contemporary women's movement (Phillips 1991, 766). The Federated Women's Institutes of Canada (FWIC) was among the original groups who pressured the Canadian government for a Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) in 1967 and, in 1971, was on the original steering committee for the National Action Committee for the Status of Women (NAC). In its lengthy 1967 brief to the RCSW, the FWIC called for, among numerous recommendations already submitted to government, increased access

15 In Canada, the term 'maternal' feminism has been adopted to describe the maternal orientation of first-wave organizations and individuals who relied on women's presumed capacity for nurturance and moral instruction, based on all women's common experience as mothers or their biological capacity for motherhood (Kealey 1979, 7-8). The terms maternal and social are complementary; the first stresses maternal motivations and rhetoric for this orientation to public participation whereas the latter stresses its consequences in programmes for social reform (Black 1989). Finally, Karen Offen identifies 'relational feminism' which is defined by its conviction that the basic unit of society is a 'companionate, nonhierarchical, male-female couple' (1988, 135-6). A substantive criticism relates to whether any of these types of feminism ought to qualify as feminist in view of their evidently conservative commitments to gender difference, domesticity, and conventional family arrangements (Offen 1989). A case can be made for claiming that such a complex of ideas and activities is indeed feminist because (according to its adherents) it facilitates women's entry into public political activity and thus their empowerment. Regardless of its qualifications to be 'feminist,' such a complex exists; it is salient to individual farm women and their organized political activity and thus deserves our attention.

16 'The OFA has done nothing but seek sources of more money to support its "bloated bureaucracy,"' John Dowling, Ontario Coordinator, National Farmers' Union, cited in *Rural Voice* September 1990, 2.

to abortion and contraception, enforced support payments for divorced and deserted wives, and expanded day care. The radical and undeniably feminist content of these recommendations illustrates how, in Canada, well-established service organizations were able to cooperate with the newer women's liberation groups on specific projects and policies at the beginning of the second wave. In its submission, the FWIC further called for legal recognition of and financial compensation for farm women's work and their claims to family assets.¹⁷ Only one other farm women's organization presented a brief, which made no such recommendation, which means that the FWIC deserves credit for the separate section on farm women in the final report (1970, 40-4). The FWIC also called for a government agency to research and deal with women's problems which corresponds to the Report's final recommendation to establish a Status of Women Council (1970, 418). Soon after NAC got off the ground in 1971, FWIC withdrew from the mainstream of the organized women's movement (Adamson et al. 1988, 52).¹⁸

Referring back to the point about agrarian leaders' wishful thinking for populist mobilization, it should be emphasized that neither should the WI be judged by its leaders alone. Even today, the discrepancy between ambitious and pro-active resolutions passed at provincial councils and less-ambitious and indeed traditional activities that occur at local branch meetings is striking. During the late 1980s, the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada, for example, was speaking out on subjects of pornography, violence against women, reproductive technology, and abortion; meanwhile local Institutes had a hymn and scripture reading at each meeting and roll call asking each member to 'name a dessert from a different country or culture' or 'an old implement and what has taken its place.' In 1989, an Ontario branch had members who were acting as conveners present reports on each of the WIs' standing committees on agriculture, Canadian industries, citizenship and legislation, education and cultural activities, family and consumer affairs, and international affairs. In June of that year, the international affairs convener stepped aside to introduce a local Mennonite woman who had been the Concerned Farm Women's delegate on an all-woman, Oxfam-sponsored agricultural tour of Nicaragua.¹⁹ Whereas tour participants were visibly moved by their experience, it was more difficult to generate enthusiasm and sympathy for Nicaragua among women back in Ontario, judging from the sceptical response of local Institute members to a slide-show given on the tour. Less constrained by the formal standing committee structure of the senior institutes, an Ontario Junior Institute had on its 1989 agenda microwave cooking, day care, silk screening, holistic medicine, planting a herb garden, and getting to know your township.

Since withdrawing from the mainstream of second-wave feminism, the WI has had little to do with urban organizations. In 1989 the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) cooperated with the National Council of Jewish Women, another first-wave service organization that is similarly disassociated from the contemporary women's movement. The Ontario Cancer Treatment Research Foundation assisted the Council of Jewish Women to establish workshops on screening for breast cancer which WI members attended and then delivered the information to fellow members at branch meetings. Most recently, the WI has become involved with the Recycling Council of Ontario. Otherwise, the WI is orientated to the rural community,

17 Married women's property rights are a long standing issue for organized farm women. Campaigns to guarantee wives equal rights to farm property date back to the United Farm Women of Alberta in the 1920s (Finkel 1989, 96). Such proposals are not a radical aberration on the part of the FWIC; they are typical of the gap between the national body and the local Institutes which are much more conservative.

18 I tried to learn more about FWIC's involvement in NAC by corresponding and speaking with two women who had been on the FWIC executive during the early 1970s. Both women recollected little about NAC other than to doubt that FWIC had ever been involved with such a radical feminist organization. More research is required, but it is apparent that, however interesting to researchers, FWIC's involvement in NAC was not an important event in the life of the organization. Kay Macpherson who chaired NAC from 1977 to 1979 remembers that FWIC and the National Council of Women both left NAC for the same reason (personal conversation, June 1993). Neither established organization had an ideological dispute with the fledging NAC, but neither did they have an incentive to contribute to another national umbrella network when each organization already maintained a national structure.

19 FWIO President Margaret Munro had also been a delegate on the same tour. See Munro 'Women talking to women on Oxfam tour' *Home & Country* 56:1 (1989) 7.

maintaining interlocking networks with representatives on the boards of directors of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame, the Ontario Agricultural Museum, and the Royal Winter Fair. It also works closely with 4-H, an educational programme for rural and farm adolescents and children, likewise sponsored through Rural Organizations and Services of the provincial government. WI is not affiliated with the antifeminist organization R.E.A.L. Women.

To give some indication of individual members' rural focus, 58 percent of WI members in my survey grew up and have lived in the same township all their lives. Only four members surveyed ever attended university, three of whom were teachers upgrading their qualifications by correspondence courses. In view of the WI's dissociation from the organized women's movement, other organizations whose urban linkages are institutionally fixed (United Church Women, for example) are more likely candidates for the dissemination of second-wave feminism in rural communities since the early 1970s.²⁰ As a relatively intact version of first-wave feminism, the WI is quite accurately an old farm women's movement.

Summary

A focus on the WI implies that as much is to be learned by decline, stagnation, and persistence as from moments of initiative and innovation. Such a focus serves as a useful corrective to enthusiasm that is not warranted by the historical record. Farm women's groups have come and gone in the past century, each hoping to supersede the WI, but they eventually disappeared while the WI, apparently oblivious to criticism, plodded resolutely forward. For example, only a technicality prevented Concerned Farm Women (CFW), often cited as a leader in the new wave of activism, from dissolving in 1988 when the group pondered its future:

From that came the motion to dissolve CFW ... but we had to give written notice of a motion to dissolve. The written notice to dissolve went out to about 75 members and supporters. The meeting to discuss the motion to dissolve drew eleven members and eight media representatives. The members voted not to dissolve but to carry on. 'When I thought about it afterwards, it seemed ridiculous to continue, but I think we were reacting to our feelings,' Joy Ward [President] said. Now is the time for CFW to lie low for a while and recharge their batteries (Stewart-Kirkby 1988, 8).

This is not to say that Concerned Farm Women failed; according to the logic of new social movements, people should coalesce for action around particular issues at crucial junctures, and then move on to other issues rather than devoting energy to maintaining moribund organizational structures.²¹ Even so, critics can still admire the WI's tenacity in maintaining those moribund structures for a century now.

There are evident continuities and familiar patterns between feminism's first and second waves in the history of farm women's organizations. Rivalries from the turn of the century carry over to the contemporary scene where agrarian populists from the 1920s are reincarnated in the 'new farm women's movement' (Miller and Neth 1988, 357). Not only are WI members construed as 'old' farm women, it is suggested that the WI does not represent *real* farm women whereas the new organizations do. For example, Rankin speaks of the 'politicization of Ontario farm women,' implying all farm women, but actually reports on six remarkable leaders of two organizations (one of which did not last the decade) founded in the 1980s. An appreciation

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- 20 One respondent, for example, said that UCW was much more exciting than WI, recalling her participation in an anti-poverty march and conference in London, Ontario, where she met people [activists and social services workers] whom she would never otherwise meet.
- 21 Concerned Farm Women had its origins in the collapse in red meat prices that coincided with extraordinarily high interest rates in the early 1980s - a juncture that put many farms in the Grey-Bruce peninsula into bankruptcy. The crisis prompted armed standoffs in which neighbouring farmers physically prevented bailiffs and bank officials, accompanied by local police, from repossessing indebted farms (Wilford 1984).

of the WI's historical role in the rural life of English Canada minimizes rivalry among farm women's organizations over the past century and thus revises the dominant view.

CONTEMPORARY FARM WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

The case that WI members are not 'real' farm women is no more persuasive now than it was during the heyday of agrarian populism. The WI movement represents farm women's interests no less adequately than do the newer organizations. Just as individual farm women vary among themselves, so too do their chosen organizations vary, with no single organization being especially authentic or representative of all farm women. This argument is made on several counts for the contemporary scene, starting with the fact that, in the absence of a farmer's electoral political party, all farm women's organizations are nonpartisan.

Farm Women's Movements and the State

In addition to a common policy of nonpartisanship, all farm women's organizations belong to the farm women's policy community that is dominated by the Farm Women's Bureau of Agriculture Canada.²² Not all organizations are equal within this particular policy community. Particularly from the perspective of the WI and the NFU, the newer farm women's organizations are rivals that monopolize funding and policy involvement at the centre of the farm women's policy community. Of the fourteen women invited to the Farm Women's Bureau's annual policy consultation in 1991, twelve represented the provincial and national networks whereas the WI and NFU had one representative each (*OFWN Newsletter* 4:3, 1991 8). Without resorting to personal hostility on the part of government personnel, what can explain a perceived bias in state funding that works to the advantage of the new farm women's networks?

During the 1980s, just when the national Women's Program of the Secretary of State cut off block funding for WI and provincial ministries of agriculture and extension programmes of agricultural colleges throughout Canada weaned the WI from state-sponsored courses and workshops, the new farm women's movement became eligible for a series of grants. Agriculture Canada established the Farm Women's Bureau in 1981 to implement Ottawa's Status of Women policies as they apply to agriculture. Since 1988, the bureau has been principally devoted to the implementation of the Farm Women's Advancement Programme (FWAP); it is designed to highlight women's contribution to agriculture and to promote legal, economic, and political equality for farm women in the agricultural industry. The FWAP provides \$150,000 per year in grants for eligible projects (such as conferences, newsletters, and advocacy) that conform to the funding guidelines outlined by Status of Women Canada.²³

State sponsorship begins to explain, in part, the emergence and new found prominence of the new farm women's movement. The Ontario Farm Women's Network (OFWN), for instance, credits its very origins to government initiative:

Government officials, provincially and federally, have been requesting representation and input from this Farm Women's Network. As we had no mandate to represent

22 The agricultural policy community is a network of people and organizations with common and competing interests centred on lead agencies within provincial and national ministries of agriculture. Farm organizations, journalists, academics, individual farmers, and interested members of the general public circulate about government officials in an effort to influence agricultural policy (Skogstad 1990).

23 The seven-person committee that allocates funds consists of one person from the Farm Women's Bureau, one from the Secretary of State for Women, and five from the Communications and Policy Branch of Agriculture Canada. The Farm Women's Bureau sought to bring officials from the Communications and Policy Branch into the process to raise the profile of the Farm Women's Bureau within the ministry.

provincial farm women, we could not reply as a provincial voice ... they definitely wanted a provincial farm women's representative (OFWN newsletter 1:5 1989).

Originally, the provincial farm women's networks were loose networks for the exchange of information and mutual support, but networks do not meet the mandate of the Farm Women's Advancement Programme, namely 'to eliminate barriers to women's participation or to advance women's equality,' and thus do not qualify for funding (*Western Producer* 23 November 1989 23). At the first national conference in 1989, the provincial networks became the Canadian Farm Women's Network (CFWN), a formal, national organization, in order to qualify for government funding.

The creation of a new national organization was not uniformly applauded. To begin with, it was argued that the creation and continued maintenance of another national organization, parallel to the national WI and NFU, would further fragment farm women whose energy and money were already strained. Because the new CFWN was based on individual, rather than group, membership, it could not accommodate either the WI or NFU as affiliated organizations; it allows these organizations only nonvoting memberships acquired by subscriptions to national and provincial newsletters. The NFU, moreover, withdrew altogether because it is opposed in principle to multiple farm organizations. A second criticism was that Status of Women funding guidelines, implemented through the Secretary of State, prodded reluctant farm women toward the formation of a 'lobby group' which they initially opposed. At the outset of the new farm women's movement, leaders publicly stated their abhorrence of lobbying and a few privately expressed fears that the group could 'turn into a militant women's liberation style organization' ('Rural women's group find defining role a problem' *Regina Leader-Post* 22 February [A4], 2 March 1985). Similar sentiments were repeated at the 1989 national conference; opponents argued that the network's new goals of advocacy and lobbying did not come from the grassroots, but from the top down (*Western Producer* 23 November 1989 23). The Farm Women's Advancement Programme thus dictates guidelines that aggravate relations between new farm women's networks, which are currently favoured for funding, and the more established organizations. Whereas the more cynical NFU never expected succour from government, the WI movement is somewhat dismayed at having been abandoned by its traditional sponsors.

The new farm women's networks are uniquely identified with the formal purpose of the Farm Women's Bureau. The provincial networks coalesced nationally to conform to the funding guidelines of the Farm Women's Bureau; their programme is to promote the role of women in agriculture, specifically through the appointment of women to executive positions on the boards of commodity and producer organizations. Equity in professional organizations is a clear-cut, noncontroversial goal for Agriculture Canada which meshes perfectly with its technical, professional orientation. Agricultural policy communities across Canada tend to be closely knit and consensual circles in part because government branches and nongovernmental organizations are dominated by the professional graduates of faculties of Agricultural Science (Skogstad 1990, 73).

The National Farmers' Union and the Women's Institutes, unlike the networks, do not fit neatly in the same professional/technical niche. The NFU, in particular, might be a marginal player in the farm women's policy community for the same reasons that it is marginal to the agricultural policy community in general. The NFU calls for large-scale government regulation of food production as a remedy to 'economic exploitation' (NFU Policy Statement, 1991 A1-2) which is at odds with the free-market orientation of Canadian agriculture (Skogstad 1990 70). The NFU believes that the free-market system, in conjunction with governments, fragments farmers into commodity organizations and thereby 'keeps farmers divided and subject to their manipulation and exploitation' (NFU Policy Statement 1991 M-11). Its candour in criticizing government is exceptional when, for instance, a former women's president attributes antagonistic motives to the government in its deliberately divisive funding policies:

Having so many organizations keeps everyone separated and ineffective and frustrated
.... That is why the government is so willing to fund these small groups. If a single,

powerful and effective group could be formed, the lobbying power would be impossible for politicians to ignore (*Western Producer* 18 July 1985 24).

Explicit antagonism to government such as this illustrates why the NFU is an uncomfortable intruder in otherwise consensual and generally conservative agricultural policy communities (Skogstad 1990 70).

The experience of the Women's Institutes, however, reveals that abiding by norms of quiet diplomacy does not guarantee access to the policy community's centre either. If the NFU women were penalized for their rebelliousness, the WI women were penalized for their deference. Its formal government affiliation may have actually disempowered the Women's Institutes in the long term because bureaucrats fostered a relationship of dependency and deference. When governments began to wean the WI from financial and administrative support in the early 1980s, WI leaders were afraid even to inquire about the status of either their funding or their official ties from increasingly ambiguous and evasive provincial government officials. The positions of the NFU and the WI, although from apparently opposing poles of radical criticism and cautious deference on the political spectrum, are roughly comparable within the agricultural policy community because neither organization is uniquely centred on agricultural policy. Both organizations have overarching programmes that do not comfortably fit into the scope of a single line department. The NFU's critique of private property and free-market trade in agricultural commodities, for example, can scarcely be accommodated by ministries of agriculture. Neither can the WI's programme to improve the quality of rural life be easily accommodated by ministries of agriculture that increasingly devote their attention to the terms of international trade.²⁴

In sum, the exact state of affairs among organized farm women cannot be determined from a survey of their publications and press releases. The foregoing events are not documented in the newsletters of the new farm women's movement. The only evidence of controversy and dissension between old and new farm women's movements is documented by journalists employed by independent newspapers such as the *Western Producer*. It is likely that relations were not historically and still are not entirely cordial, but what purpose would it serve to document rivalry and historical grudges? Leading farm women would deny it publicly all the same. It might be more to the point, therefore, to document the common ground that all farm women's organizations share and to inquire why such a public premium is placed on what they share in common rather than their differences.

Relations between the WI and the new network got off to a poor start, but soon after an initial dispute was resolved, former FWIO president Peggy Knapp stated publicly: 'There is room for both of us. The Network is raising the profile of farm women. WI is more involved with rural women. Rural issues are a little different than farm issues.'²⁵ Leaders like Peggy Knapp might be quick to make amends because there is abundant evidence of overlapping memberships between the WI and new farm women's organizations. Farm women themselves apparently distinguish less between organizations than government funding agencies do; of four CFW and OFWN members surveyed, only one was not also a WI member. OFWN membership amounts to subscribing to a newsletter (which qualifies this author as a member who is ineligible to hold office) which scarcely interferes with local WI activities. Neither a newsletter nor an annual conference substitutes for sociability, which was the most frequent reason given for WI membership.²⁶ The OFWN logo was designed by a WI member. At the national level, Saskatchewan's provincial director of CFWN is still active in local

24 In response to the FWAP, the FWIO revived an apparently defunct agricultural committee to suggest projects that might qualify for funding. The WI has also been involved with Health and Welfare Canada on rural child care facilities and with Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

25 The OFWN received conference funding from the Ontario Women's Directorate on the basis of almost 20,000 members in 1988. Its actual membership in 1989, after the first provincial conference, was 154 individuals and 19 organizations, but all WI members in Ontario were included on the basis of the FWIO's subscription to its newsletter. It was later agreed that a single subscription equalled a single associate membership. 'Profile' *Home & Country* 56:3 (1990) 5.

26 OFWN sponsors an annual provincial conference and sends representatives to the national CFWN conference.

and district WIs and PEI's director credits 'her early involvement in the WI which led to her election to the School Board.' Network women receive WI scholarships and attend WI training courses (CFWN *Newsletter* 3, 1990, 3-4). In discussions led by Diane Harkin, founder of Women for the Survival of Agriculture (WSA), Saskatchewan farm women decided to 'tie in with' the WI in their new movement.²⁷

Further evidence of overlapping membership is inferred from the practice of *Western Producer* journalists to quote NFU women and WI members in their coverage of network conferences. This is likely a calculated appeal on the part of journalists to avoid giving offense to a broad readership, but the point is confirmed all the same: WI and NFU representatives continue to attend network events as nonvoting members and the broad readership of the *Western Producer* wants to know about NFU and WI participation in the new farm women's movement. The practice of covering WI and ACWW events, in fact, dates back to when Violet McNaughton edited the women's section of the *Western Producer* from 1925-50.²⁸ In sum, organizational affiliation is perhaps more fortuitous than ideologically driven.

Returning briefly to the point about overlapping membership, the FWIO provincial executive's resolve to reach an accommodation with the network points to women's observed preference to avoid conflict. Farm women's preference here might correspond to rural geography, as rural distances preclude direct competition. One woman, for example, wanted to attend CFW meetings, but she was too tired after chores to drive thirty miles and back and so joined her local WI branch instead. In relatively stable but sparsely populated areas where anonymity is difficult and relations last a lifetime, hostility is less easily dispersed, and the beleaguered farming population feels obligated to put differences aside. Memberships might overlap (and the WI persist) because women report conflict between wanting to experiment and still wanting to be part of the community; for example, they still feel obliged to participate in bake sales and other traditional tasks in order not to be ostracized.²⁹ As a result, the state of relations between the Women's Institutes and new farm women's networks cannot be reported exactly because farm women themselves are reluctant to speak critically of each other. Newsletters report nothing beyond brief statements of amiable and cooperative relations. Outside of Ontario, Kathryn Habberfield, president of the Alberta Women's Institutes, made the same point in the *Western Producer*:

I see no reason to believe that new groups are causing fragmentation, wasting resources, and causing rivalry. I commend them for forming organizations, and if they wish to study agriculture only, that is their prerogative. Whether we belong to Women's Institute ... or any other organization matters not. What does matter is that we work together to achieve our common goal (18 July 1985, 24).

With the exception of the National Farmers' Union whose leaders call for a single, unified voice, organized farm women's very reluctance to compete openly speaks for an apparent preference for conciliation over conflict.

The 'Old' Discourse of Farm Women's Movements

Leaders of the new farm women's movement articulate a discourse, alternatively called social, maternal, or relational feminism, like that usually associated with the old farm women's movement. The term discourse is used here to stress that socially constructed patterns of speech and knowledge actually create a person's personal subjective identity. Domestic-oriented discourse appeals to some women because it resonates with

27 Proposal for the Saskatchewan Women's Agricultural Network (SWAN), February 1985.

28 Taylor, note 11.

29 Glenis Joyce, 'Report on Women in Local Decision-Making workshop,' presented to Canada Saskatchewan Economic Regional Development Agreement, June 1988; and correspondence with Glenis Joyce, Extension Officer, University of Saskatchewan, March 1989.

their everyday experience of family life and motherhood, and more to the point, it provides a conceptual structure for that everyday experience to create a personal identity as a good wife, mother, and neighbour.³⁰ What has been identified as social feminist discourse uses domestic and familial imagery to describe and justify women's political activity in public outside of their home. To a large extent, social feminism may be characterized as the organized and programmatic arm of 'maternal thinking,' a complex of beliefs that is argued to emerge from the practice of caring for small children (Noddings 1984; Ruddick 1980).

Contemporary farm women do not, of course, speak spontaneously in nineteenth-century rhetoric. Such a discourse precedes their birth and can be dated back to a variety of pernicious and not so pernicious sources (chief among them, the social gospel). It is transmitted from generation to generation in women's publications (Dumont-Johnson 1981) and in the sentimental rituals of women's organizations. Several WI members expressed affection not only for individual friends in their branch, but also for the branch as a collectivity whose history went back almost a century, encompassing all their married life and their mothers' before them: 'I was born, grew up in WI.' WI friendships are 'special - closer and more enthusiastic,' one woman said, 'compared to women's auxiliaries in the Church.' In addition to WI memorial services for deceased members, ceremonies are conducted to commemorate disbanding institutes whose collective property is carefully transferred to neighbouring branches. Over and above the WI members, a further five percent of my survey sample belonged to another, separate women's organization (not including United Church Women, etc., which were coded as religious organizations). From the observation that at least one dimension of many farm women's lives is played out in a separate women's organization follows the claim that women continue to have access to a separate, traditionally female, discourse.

Although it is asserted that 'maternal feminism no longer provides an option for contemporary women' and 'our analyses have become much more complex' (Adamson et al. 1988, 37; Kealey 1979, 14), politically active and dynamic farm women still echo Nellie McClung or Emily Murphy:

... women are nurturers and are interested in the security and future of their families. If my children want to farm, I am going to do my best to see that they can and that the agricultural industry will be healthy for them.³¹

Women, including farm women, think different than men and this to me is good. Let's take advantage of the way farm women think as opposed to farm men ... appoint more women to Boards and Committees.³²

[On women getting involved in male-dominated agricultural organizations:] It's a lot like motherhood actually, if women waited until they were absolutely sure they were ready, there would be fewer children in this world. Instead we get in there and just do it.³³

[On being a township councillor:] There is still a stigma to a woman running for office. I took the third baby (born 1981) to council meetings. Women are decision-makers at home which is good experience. There is no room for error at home when you're under pressure to make quick decisions. This carries over to council where women make decisions quickly and accurately. Women are busy and don't have time for nonsense.

30 This discussion of discourse as the basis for subjective identity is taken from Alcoff 1988, 312-5; and Hekman 1990, 62-104.

31 Maria Van Bommel, one of the original organizers of WSA and OFWN, cited in 'Women in Profile: Maria Van Bommel' *Home & Country* 54:3 (1988) 22.

32 Claire Belluz, 'Women's Equality on Farm Committees and Boards' *OFWN Newsletter* 2:4 (1990) 9.

33 'Women in Profile: Brigid Pyke [former President of OFA]' *Home & Country* 53:4 (1987) 4.

Maternal imagery persists in the new farm women's movement: the passing of the OFWN constitution is compared to 'being somewhat like giving birth'; the network is 'conceived' and must be 'nurtured' (OFWN newsletter 1:5, 1989, 2).

To what strategic purposes might farm women direct such rhetoric? It holds no persuasiveness with policy analysts, administrators, and agronomists within ministries of agriculture; and it holds even less persuasiveness with academic observers. If such rhetoric serves no strategic purpose with bureaucratic and academic members of the policy community, it must be directed solely to farm wives and husbands. Its strategic purpose is transparent - to articulate and justify women's political activity outside of private households in terms of their familial responsibilities. It justifies political participation in terms that appease husbands left at home to babysit, suspicious neighbours, and colleagues who begrudge women's admission to public office. But it also articulates their sincerely held conviction that the standards and practices of domestic life can indeed improve political life and public policy. Whether identified as social, maternal, or relational, this discourse is strategic because it still articulates the sentiments and situation of contemporary farm wives in regards to their public political participation.

Farm women might adopt such a discourse because an orientation to family and children is grounded in the household economy that characterizes agricultural production. Farm women's greater fertility in comparison to urban women, although it is diminishing, may be more than an historical artifact of delayed social change. Children are a financial liability only in a waged economy - as distinct from a technologically advanced or modern economy - where their labour cannot significantly contribute to household income. It is not simply that children contribute their labour to farming because it is less complex than technologically sophisticated occupations; farming is equally sophisticated, but the conditions of waged-employment contracts exclude other family members. Children cost less, too, under conditions of household production when parents have access to assets other than wages to cover the full cost of children's reproduction. Testimony to children's potential and actual value as assets to non-waged enterprises was brought home by the example of a thirteen-year-old boy who was instructed by his (departing) father as to the imminent arrival of a freight truck, payment to its driver, and delivery of grain feed into the appropriate bins. Despite the physical hazards of operating oversized equipment, children learn to master the most advanced agricultural technology, thereby suggesting that a household economy is another factor rather than tradition alone in encouraging relatively higher fertility among farm families.

Finally, such a discourse corresponds to the observation that old and new movements alike centre on farm *wives* or on women as members of families. All these organizations take the family farm as their basis: as the basic membership unit for the NFU, as the basic social unit of the rural way of life for the WI, and as the basic economic unit of production for the networks. None of these organizations represents women who are nonfamily employees, typically foreign guest-workers or recent immigrants to Canada, on large-scale capitalist farms who are the lowest paid workers on the entire spectrum of occupations. No organization reviewed here can claim to speak for these women who are equally 'farm women' because a family-oriented discourse is inadequate to articulate the class relationship of economic exploitation between employer and employee on capitalist farms. This is an evident blind spot on the part of farm women's organizations, but a word might be said in their defense. Nonfamily labour is concentrated in horticultural industries (fruits, vegetables, and tobacco) of southern Ontario and British Columbia. Not only is this type of farming geographically distant from many women, it is conceptually distant as well in that these organizations are ideologically committed to families as the economic, social, and moral basis for farming.³⁴

34 General farm organizations lobby government to defend family farming against large-scale, capitalist corporate farms. This is all the more reason for farm women's organizations to make common cause with farm employees whose low wages ensure that corporate farming is profitable.

CONCLUSION

The distinction between old and new farm women's movements may be reassessed in light of the preceding discussion. The new farm women's movement is keen to promote women's contribution to an agricultural policy community that is characterized by complex issues of farm income protection, but its activities represent a remarkable and ambitious group of individuals, rather than a conceptual division in the entire population of farm women. Differences among individual women do not correspond easily to organizational affiliation; for example, neither housewifery nor farm work may determine organizational affiliation. In other words, some OFWN people might fit in comfortably with the WI, while the very 'newest' of new farm women might reject both organizations. Not all Women's Institutes are centred on housewifery. This WI member explained, for example, why she wanted to leave the organization: 'I feel out of place in my branch because I'm not involved or interested in farming. Some of the girls come in, they're so excited about being up all night with some cow giving birth, and on and on about some new calf.' In sum, ministries of agriculture and relevant state agencies ought to be warier of aggravating financially, and academics should avoid entrenching conceptually, the rivalries that farm women themselves disavow. Official divisions among farm women's organizations do not mirror, in a straightforward fashion, social or personal divisions in the grass roots population. Instead such divisions may be a creation of government funding policies dating back to 1897. The division between old and new farm women, as it has formulated in the past, should be revised by further research.³⁵

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35 My own research, for example, arrived at a three-fold typology of farm women based on quantitative measures of association between political behaviour, demographic characteristics, and three types of farm work (administration, animal husbandry labour, and mechanical work). The first orientation combines farm administration with a keen interest in politics among older women. The second orientation combines farm labour with a strong equality version of feminism among younger women, but not politics conventionally defined in terms of partisanship and public affairs. The third orientation combines mechanical work with personal control and happiness.

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Louise CARBERT teaches political science at York University in Toronto. She is the author of AGRARIAN FEMINISM: THE POLITICS OF ONTARIO FARM WOMEN (University of Toronto Press, 1995). She has also published on women in Saskatchewan politics. Her current work is on feminism in public opinion.

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