



OFA Celebrates 75 Years of Farm Advocacy

What began as the Ontario Agricultural Conference in **1936** at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto, morphed through many phases – 700 plus kitchen table forums, insurance provider, farm equipment retailer, number one agricultural lobby in the province – the Ontario Federation of Agriculture has witnessed and driven a lot of change.

The name changed in **1937** to the Ontario Chamber of Agriculture and again in **1940** to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. In **1939**, County Chambers of Agriculture were admitted membership for \$50 a year. Peterborough County was first to the table.

January **1941** brought the Farm Radio Forum, a weekly CBC program that saw farm neighbours from across the country gather around kitchen tables to listen and discuss the national broadcast. The forums then fed their insights to a provincial secretary who reported their findings on provincial broadcasts. At their peak, there were 714 forums with 27,855 people participating.

In **1949**, the OFA founded Co-operators Insurance Association of Guelph (CIAG) as a wholly-owned subsidiary of OFA. The company grew rapidly, first taking the United Co-operatives of Ontario as a partner in **1951** and the Ontario Credit Union League in **1955**. Today, The Co-operators is still owned by farm organizations and co-operatives across Canada.

A producer vote held at the **1968** OFA convention to establish the One Farm Organization financed by a producer check-off failed. OFA began discussions to determine its future, leading to individual farm memberships. The first individual membership was sold on September 12, **1969** for an annual fee of \$20.00.

The Ontario Farm Machinery Agency was established as a wholly-owned subsidiary of OFA in **1970** to bring tractors into Ontario from England to force manufacturers to provide competitive pricing and be the Federation's watchdog on farm machinery prices.

Also in **1970**, farmers protested high property taxes and OFA organized a tax withholding action, resulting in the Farm Tax Reduction Program. OFA lobbies annually for the order-in-council to continue the 50 per cent tax rebate.

On Friday February 21, **1992** almost 40,000 farmers rallied at Parliament Hill in Ottawa to make a point with the Prime Minister that the future of Canadian farms must not be traded away. This is still heralded as the largest rally ever held on the Hill.

1992 also brought Our Farm Environmental Agenda leading the OFA to ask every farmer in Ontario to complete an Environmental Farm Plan. Since **1993**, Ontario farmers have invested over \$213 million in environmental, cost-share projects.

In **1993**, the world changed dramatically for the OFA when the provincial government passed the Farm Registration and Funding for Farm Organizations Act. This provided secure and stable funding for general farm organizations. The legislation took effect in **1994**.

Based on restructuring recommendations coming from the **2006** convention, the OFA board was reduced from 100 to 18. The Policy Advisory Council was struck, consisting of commodity groups and members from each region. Its role is to discuss major farm issues and provide policy advice to the board.

In **2010**, the need for a National Food Strategy became a priority for the OFA. OFA is working with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to continue to push for a commitment among farmers, consumers, food processors, food retailers and governments "to ensure safe, secure, accessible and healthy food through a diversified and sustainable Canadian agriculture and food sector."

2011 will see continued commitment to maintaining the momentum OFA has generated in their ongoing efforts to advocate on behalf of Ontario farmers. The past 75 years has laid a solid foundation to build on the mission statement of the OFA for the next 75 years as we work to 'enable prosperous and sustainable farms' in Ontario.

During Canada's Outdoor Farm Show, OFA can be found on Upper Machinery Mall in the OFA Federation House. Canada's Outdoor Farm Show will be held September 13, 14 & 15, 2011 at Canada's Outdoor Park in Woodstock, Ontario. For more information, visit www.OutdoorFarmShow.com