



UPDATE

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AGCare 2004 Annual General Meeting "Farming in the Post-Walkerton World"

Guelph Holiday Inn

Tuesday, April 13, 2004 12:30 pm - 7:30 pm

co-hosted by the Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC)

Join us for an information-packed day! Network with colleagues and get up to speed on agricultural-environmental issues. Get practical tips on how to meet the requirements of current legislation and get a heads-up on what's to come.

Our line-up of speakers will inform farmers and rural business owners on what it takes to farm in the post-Walkerton world.

Minister of the Environment, the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, has been invited to discuss her government's plans for the Nutrient Management Act, source water protection, and other environmental issues that affect farmers and rural businesses.

Walkerton Lawyer, Bryan Hicks (LL.B) will explain how farmers have been exposed to lawsuits in the past and how the legal climate has changed since Walkerton. As managing legal counsel for one of the defendants in the Walkerton class action civil suit, he will discuss how environmental legislation such as the Environmental Protection Act and the Nutrient Management Act affects farmers in order to provide an understanding of the legal implications of farming in the post-Walkerton world.

David Biesenthal, Walkerton-area farmer, **Chris Attema**, Water Quality Specialist for the Ontario Livestock Commodity Group, and **Peter Doris**, OMAF Nutrient Management Specialist will participate in a panel

discussion on what rural landowners need to do to comply with current and emerging nutrient management and water quality legislation.

End the day in a casual environment over some food and refreshments with your colleagues. The "**Pub and Grub**" offers a great opportunity to network, discuss the issues, or simply relax with friends and catch up.

Registration fee:

Early Bird Special!
Prior to March 23 = \$50.00

After March 23 = \$60.00

(OFAC members deduct \$10)

OFAC / AGCare AGM Registration Form

Name: _____ Affiliation: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Fax Number: _____

Email: _____

Registration fee (includes reception and all presentations) can be paid in advance or at the door, however, "no-shows" will be invoiced. Cheques may be made payable to either OFAC or AGCare **FAX to 519-837-3209**.

Full house learns about environmental program for UK farmers

AGCare, in partnership with the Ontario Institute of Agrologists (OIA), was very pleased to present Dr. Gordon Gatward at a lunchtime forum on November 27 in the Atrium of the OMAF Building in Guelph. Dr. Gatward shared the story of the UK's LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) program with a packed Atrium of farmers, students, university faculty and staff, OMAF staff, agri-business, and professional agrologists.

LEAF was set up as a charity in the UK in 1991, designed to help farmers improve their environmental and business performance and create a better public understanding of farming.

LEAF's vision for the future is a sustainable agricultural system that meets the economic needs of farmers, addresses the concerns of consumers and minimizes any impact on the environment. IFM provides a "common sense" and realistic way for farmers to produce food that is wholesome and affordable.

The objectives of the LEAF program are to encourage farmers throughout the UK to adopt IFM, to promote its benefits to consumers, and to raise awareness of the way that farmers are responding to consumer concerns.

LEAF defines IFM as a whole farm policy providing the basis for efficient and profitable production that is both economically viable and environmentally responsible. IFM integrates beneficial natural processes into modern farming practices using advanced technology. It aims to minimize environmental risks while conserving, enhancing and re-creating that which is of environmental importance.



Dr. Gatward shared the results of case studies done on LEAF IFM systems, noting achievements such as a 30% reduction in usage of crop protection products over a 4 year period, increased earthworm populations, reduced carbon emissions, and reduced nutrient loss. All of this was achieved while increasing farms' gross margin by 6%, on average. LEAF members farm 15% of the UK's farmland.

Not only is the LEAF program doing good things for the environment, it is also pro-actively informing consumers about what LEAF farmers are doing. Their "Speak Out" program is providing farmers with the communications skills to tackle negative media and controversial issues.

A network of 46 demonstration farms throughout the UK have hosted over 100,000 people with incredible results. Ninety percent of these visitors said the tour was worthwhile and informative and 89% mentioned that the visit had helped address their concerns about food safety.

Consumers began to ask where they could purchase food produced under LEAF's IFM system, which led

to the recent launch of the LEAF marque for products on supermarket shelves. There is a lot of interest in the retail industry with three of the UK's major grocery stores stocking LEAF marque products.

Dr. Gatward is a Methodist Minister and the Director of the Arthur Rank Centre, which provides the chaplaincy to the UK farming community. Gordon has a keen interest in rural affairs and international development issues. In addition to working with farmers in the UK he runs his own flock of sheep. In 2000, Gordon was deeply involved with the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) tragedy in his capacity as agricultural chaplain, for which he received the prestigious Order of the British Empire. Gordon has also driven relief lorries to Romania and completed his doctorate on animal welfare, specifically on the ethics of livestock management.

Dr. Gatward was on a week-long tour of southern Ontario with the Christian Farmers' Federation of Ontario (CFFO), who brought him over to speak at their annual meeting. The forum was made possible through sponsorship from the Agricultural Institute of Canada Foundation's Klinck Lecture series. AGCare would like to thank CFFO and the OIA for the opportunity to meet with Dr. Gatward.

**For more
information
about the LEAF
program visit
www.leafuk.org/leaf**



LEAF
Linking Environment And Farming

The Need for Science in Decision-Making

Is a whale a mammal or a fish? According to a recent story reported in the Washington Times, the answer may be found not through science, but in the results of a public opinion poll. Though the concept seems absurd, governments increasingly place public perception above scientific scrutiny when formulating policies regarding scientific issues.

We've seen this happening in municipalities across the province that have created or are considering anti-pesticide bylaws. Public pressure and well-organized activist groups have led municipalities such as the City of Toronto, the Town of Caledon, and the Town of Cobalt to create bylaws that prohibit the use of government-approved products within their municipal limits. Canadian Tire can still sell pesticides, but those who buy the products cannot legally use them since these municipal councils have bowed to pressure from what is usually a vocal minority of their constituents to ban products that a federal agency has studied and found to be safe.

Do municipalities have access to scientific studies that somehow contradict those of our senior levels of government? Is the federal government approving unsafe products? No, but these municipal councils have made their decisions based on what they are told by activists, not scientific evidence.

For now the focus has been on urban, "cosmetic" pesticide use; however this is clearly the "thin edge of the wedge" and some activists have made it known that they intend to focus their efforts on agriculture once they "conquer" the urban use sector.

Biotechnology is also under intense public scrutiny. The British government conducted a massive study last year to find out what the public thought about genetically modified (GM) foods. Given the level of activity of anti-biotech organizations in Europe, the results were predictable.

Naturally, people who oppose biotechnology made up the majority of attendees at the public meetings (total participation was less than 0.1% of British voters), and anti-biotech groups organized to rally their supporters to ensure that they would attend and fill out the questionnaires. Resulting media coverage then compounded the bias.

What the UK government decides to do with this information remains to be seen. Using this public "vote" rather than scientific studies to determine the fate of biotechnology in the UK would be unfortunate.

Here in Canada, a recent survey determined that 88% of Canadians wanted mandatory labelling of GM foods. Were participants told that the federal government has approved GM foods in the marketplace as safe? Or that under current legislation GM foods must be labelled if they are nutritionally different than their conventional counterparts? Or that mandatory labelling would increase food costs and is virtually always misleading due to exemptions? It's unlikely, as the results would no doubt have been far different had such facts been included.

Should the government make labelling of GM foods mandatory because this survey tells them that most Canadians want it? No, the government should maintain its position that mandatory labelling is only necessary for issues truly related to health, based on scientific evidence.

Which brings us to one of the many challenges that AGCare will be taking on in 2004. How can we ensure that our regulatory system to assess products of biotechnology remains science-based?

Currently, all new plant varieties produced through biotechnology must be assessed and approved by Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) before they

can be sold or grown in Canada. A broad range of international scientific bodies supports this approach. Yet, there has been recent pressure to incorporate "market acceptance" into this regulatory system.

The role of our regulatory system is to assess whether or not a new variety is safe to grow, eat, or feed to livestock. It is then up to industry to deal with potential marketing issues; obviously farmers are not interested in growing a product they cannot sell. "Market acceptance" is subjective and has nothing to do with the scientific evaluation of safety, and therefore has no place within the actual regulatory system.

Unfortunately, "market acceptance" of GM foods is also largely based on misinformation provided by activists. So how can we build something based on misinformation into a regulatory system that is supposed to assess the real, rather than the "perceived", risks of a new product? Our regulatory system should not turn down otherwise safe GM products just because some extremist groups have convinced people that biotechnology is unsafe with no evidence to support their claims.

Should we have the public vote on whether they think a new product is safe, or should we subject it to scientific study to find out if it is safe? Clearly we should not call a public vote on whether a whale is a mammal or a fish, we should find out by studying the whale.

A whale is a mammal because it is warm-blooded and its young are nourished with milk. Public opinion cannot change a whale into a fish.

This column appeared as
AGCare's February monthly
contribution to *The Grower*.

What's New?

Municipal Pesticide Control By-Laws

CropLife's challenge of the City of Toronto's pesticide by-law was dismissed by the Ontario Superior Court with the judge ruling that municipalities do in fact have the authority to create by-laws controlling pesticide use in Ontario.

The judgment ignored the fact that the Pest Control Products Act and the Ontario Pesticides Act regulate the use of pesticides. CropLife has filed an appeal of the decision based on weaknesses in the judgment. It is thought that the Appeal will be heard in the fall of 2004.

Source Protection Planning

The McGuinty government is picking up where the former government left off with source water protection planning.

As recommended in an advisory committee report from April 2003, two more advisory committees have been appointed. One committee will deal with implementation issues. This committee includes Allen Gardiner (OFA), John Maaskant (OFAC), Dr. Gordon Surgeoner (University of Guelph and Ontario Agri-Food Technologies), and a number of representatives from municipalities, conservation authorities, environmental groups, resources users, First Nations, water industry, urban development, and the health field.

A technical committee has been assigned the task of creating an Ontario-based threat assessment process. Representatives on this committee include Dr. John

Fitzgibbon (OFEC), Dr. Michael Goss (University of Guelph), Dr. Bruce MacDonald (retired from Agriculture Canada), and others from academia, municipalities, conservation authorities, environmental groups, the health field, and government agencies.

The government released a "White Paper" on February 12 to consult on the planning aspects of source protection legislation, including the preparation, roles and responsibilities, and approval of source protection plans.

Nutrient Management

The new Liberal government has put its own stamp on the Nutrient Management Act (NMA) by shifting all compliance aspects of the NMA to the Ministry of the Environment (MOE).

Prior to the change farmers had been told that OMAF staff would be "first on the farm" to deal with compliance. Farmers want to ensure that staff dealing with compliance under the NMA are trained and have an understanding of agriculture.

A positive outcome of this change is that it may increase public trust with respect to integrity of the NMA and its enforcement. Farmers have been assured that compliance staff will be trained and will have an understanding of agriculture.

The Minister of the Environment has stated that she wants to work more closely with the agricultural community. Its now up to the agricultural community to help the MOE understand our issues and strengthen our relationship with this increasingly important ministry.

About AGCare

AGCare (Agricultural Groups Concerned About Resources and the Environment) is funded by all major Ontario farm organizations involved in crop production. Over 45,000 Ontario horticultural and field crop producers are represented on agricultural pesticide use, crop biotechnology developments, nutrient management, water quality and quantity and related environmental issues through 17 member groups:

Christian Farmers' Federation of Ontario
Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario
Flowers Canada (Ontario) Inc.
Ontario Bean Producers' Marketing Board
Ontario Beekeepers' Association
Ontario Canola Growers' Association
Ontario Corn Producers' Association
Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board
Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association
Ontario Potato Board
Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers
Ontario Seed Growers' Association
Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association
Ontario Soybean Growers
Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board
Seed Corn Growers of Ontario

AG Care

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