

# A chill in the air...

## November 2002 Column, Country Life in B.C.

**Wendy R. Holm, P.Ag.**

A chill in the air. Fall comes quickly after a long summer. Almost as if Mother Nature wants to “get ‘er over with” and get on with starting a new year still ripe with promise. Something to push the images of drought and flood and late spring frost aside and allow the mind to wander off to that seasonally-optimistic place: planning for next year. Putting into effect the bright ideas of this year to improve the operation. Budding over that block of Spartans. Looking for that new bull. Renovating the south pasture. Adding a new rotation crop. Maybe trying that 30 acres of organic spelt.

A cool November sun breaks the horizon. “Dog’s wanting in early this year” you announce to no-one in particular, opening the sliding door to the deck so he can come in as you make your morning coffee. The dog gives you a look and walks stiffly to his bed, al fresco evenings under the stars apparently over for him for another season. You sympathize...

Pushing aside the chore list, you take your coffee out back and watch the morning mist rise from the fields. Fingers curled appreciatively around a warm mug, it’s easy to be seduced into planning for another season as you stand at this edge of the yard and the farm and survey what still needs doing to get’er all buttoned up and tidy for the winter.

But for how many more seasons? Images of bank managers, pool prices, crop yields and cranky new neighbours from the city crowd for attention. Pretty high sale prices these days. Always figured one of the kids would take over, you’d move to a smaller house on the property, travel a bit, generally keep an eye on things. Now taking over the farm doesn’t seem a fair thing to saddle them with.

Bubble burst, you go back inside, grab some breakfast and begin the day.

If Census Canada could measure the level of stress in farm households, the results would be off the top of the charts. This stress affects men, women, children and grandchildren. Families. Communities. Yet we continue to move forward hoping next year will be a better one.

Who is looking after farm policy in Canada? Stitching together capacity? Mothering projects? Birthing ideas? Growing relationships? Tending priorities? Nurturing potential? Equipping for tomorrow? Enabling stewardship? Keeping the land and her communities in good heart?

What we do with our hands, we feel with our hearts. And in the presence of ethics and passion, hand/heart connections can become powerful agents for change. Through our words, our deeds, our children and our marks, each of us has the capacity to change the direction of the universe. Or at the very least, of our communities...

And if we have the capacity, we have the responsibility. No?

I recall being a child of 7 and standing at the end of my lane looking back toward my house and realizing with clarity and amazement that I would leave this home of my parents and make my own way in life, and that my life would be a reflection of the choices I would make. And that the responsibility to make good choices was mine alone... I remember thinking at the time that this was very intriguing and quite significant.

Over the past 15 years — through this column and through my writing and through public advocacy — I have had the opportunity to speak out strongly on public policy issues related to water (the retention of Canadian sovereignty over our water resources in the face of the NAFTA) and farming (in defense of sane public policy for Canada’s farming communities).

With 32 years of Canadian farm policy experience behind me, it is intriguing to find myself once again leading the water issue — this time at the behest of the farm community — while at the same time bringing farmers from across Canada to Cuba in a project of international capacity building.

The recognition I have received for this work is important to note, both because I am very proud of it and because recognition is an important measure of community priorities:

I was tickled pink — particularly as a former “kid from New York” — to have this fall been presented with the Queen’s Jubilee Medal for contribution to community and to Canada.

The highest honour a professional can aspire to is the recognition of one’s peers. I was therefore most honoured to have been named Agrolgist of the Year 2000 for my work on behalf of Canada’s water and Canada’s farmers.

In 1993, I was delighted to have received the Queens Commemorative Medal in Honour of the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Canadian Confederation, again for contribution to community..

Let’s turn this recognition and capacity into action.

#### WATER RESOLUTION

Whether you love the NAFTA or you hate the NAFTA, water shouldn’t be part of the NAFTA. If your farm group hasn’t already endorsed the farmer’s water resolution (this issue, page \_\_\_\_), do so now and get it back to me quickly. Valentine’s Day (when I present them to Jean Chrétien and others) is coming up quicker than you think. Add your voice to this important chorus and I will bring it forward professionally on you behalf.

#### SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Watch Country Canada at noon on Sunday November 3<sup>rd</sup> for a half-hour special on the Canada Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project. Come with us on one of four trips this year and be a part of change!

#### BEYOND POLITICS

Raising one farm voice on the water issue is an important step towards creating a new era of empowerment for Canada’s farmers. It doesn’t have to be about politics. It doesn’t have to be about partisanship. It really only has to be about speaking plainly and clearly on matters of farm policy. In one voice.

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