# For Canada and for Canada's communities... Can you help? April 2003 Column, Country Life in B.C.

## Wendy R. Holm, P.Ag.

I'm just back from Cuba with the last delegation of Canadian farmers for this season and have hit the ground running! (Translation: I want to wax eloquent, but just don't have the time...) So here in plain talk is an update of where we are with a bunch of things.

### Firstly, Cuba...

Cuba was a blast and anyone who has not gone should speak with someone who has and get themselves registered for next winter! Aside from the professional work, one of the neatest things for me is to welcome off the plane 2 dozen men and women who farm across Canada and put back on the plane at the end of two weeks time what has become like an extended family... Some comments from this year's Delegates:

- Who could have ever imagined that our eyes and minds would have been opened so wide?
- ... it has been an unbelievable experience. The picture in our heads about Cuba has changed dramatically.
- ...a most undeniably fantastic time for us!
- ...an absolute "blast"
- Looking at Cuba through your eyes has been a wonderful experience. Thank you. I saw so much more...

In November, the Canadian International Development Agency presented to the Cuban Government a palate of potential projects and Cuba's MINVEC (international economic cooperation ministry) picked our Project One (Enhancing Sustainable Diary Production Capacity in Cuba) as a project of importance to Cuba. A Spanish translation of Project One has been presented to ANAP (Cuba's national farmer organization) and a Canadian team is being assembled.

The other side of the coin (bi-lateral perks) is to make Cuba's expertise in the large-scale use of bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers accessible to Canadian farmers. BC IPM-guru Dr. Deb Henderson is already drawing on Cuba's biopesticide expertise in commercial cranberry and greenhouse applications and plans are in the works for her to lead a UBC Spring Break course down there next year... Why NOT a Western Canada Centre for Excellence in Large Scale Sustainable and Organic Production Methods?

On a personal level, I find myself drawn to the idea of doing a PhD (the physics of capital and the role of ethics in markets: a challenge to "modern" economic theory, perhaps jointly with a university in Cuba) if it could be fit in with the Project work.

#### Farmers Resolution to Exempt Water from the NAFTA

We are now at the point of rolling this campaign out across the rest of the provinces. My task list for the coming months is:

- Identify a farmer in each province prepared to write a letter to other farmer groups urging support for the Farmers Resolution.
- Compile a mailing list for each province that includes ALL the grassroots farmer organizations in that province (commodity associations, breed associations, farmers' institutes, women's institutes, Young Farmers of Canada, 4-H Clubs) and create a computer label file.

- Secure provincial funding to cover production and mailing costs (with VanCity's leadership in BC, it is reasonable to assume that credit unions in each province can be convinced to participate at the fairly modest distribution costs of \$10 per farm organization).
- Duplicate the video (my interview with Fanny Kiefer, a good overview), stuff, address and mail the information packages to farm organizations in each province.

When I was in Ottawa on Valentines Day, I told the politicians that I would be back "this time next year" with the resolutions of farm organizations across Canada (A Table with a Thousand Legs) backed up by a very visible demonstration of support from the Canadian public ("we support Canada's farmers in this").

A few weeks ago, I asked the BC Women's Institute – at their AGM - for assistance in organizing a cross-Canada speakers tour for November (two or three farmer meetings in each province where I present the information, mop up any resolutions not yet passed and begin to roll out the message to the Canadian public).

All pretty simple stuff, but it takes time. And money.

In olden times (say, the 1970's), the government would engage people like me on your behalf to fight for what was right and to open new doors of opportunity for Canada's farmers.

I feel privileged to lead this issue. As a two-times Queen's medalist and Agrologist of the Year for this work, I am in a unique position to put this forward credibly and professionally with no partisan voice. But as a single mom with a daughter just out of university, I am financially tapped out. Not a good position for the task ahead.

Over the next 11 months, we need to take the incredible momentum the water resolution has achieved in BC and realize that for Canada. We have a big job to do and an empty cupboard (no funding).

### Can you help?

A grassroots initiative sometimes must call on grassroots support. Can you help?

For Canada and for Canada's communities, if you are in a position to put some money aside for <u>The Farmers Resolution to Exempt Water from the NAFTA</u>, your support is warmly welcomed and badly needed. Please call me to discuss! Wendy Holm, P.Ag. RR #1, HP-8, Bowen Island, BC V0N 1G0 604-947-2893 holm@farmertofarmer.ca, www.farmertofarmer.ca

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EDITORS NOTE: Because of its length, the list of farm organizations that have signed the resolution can no longer be run alongside this column; Wendy is giving consideration to posting it on the website's water page (farmertofarmer.ca). For those of you who have not yet signed it, The Farmers Resolution to Exempt Water from the NAFTA will continue to be run in each issue of Country Life in BC; this month it appears on page \_\_\_\_)