

# Involve women in farm policy <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Farmer Wendy Manson knows what it's like to be one of just a few women present during discussions on the ins-and-outs of transportation policy or other pressing agriculture issues.

"I've represented the (National) Farmers Union in lots of policy venues so I understand how few women there are doing that work," said Manson, who operates a mixed grain and cattle farm with her husband and two other men at Conquest.

With more women at the table, "the world would be a better place," said Manson with a laugh.

Manson, a member of the National Farmers Union (NFU), wants that to be the case. She helped facilitate five workshops involving 105 farm women across Canada for a project that began in 2003. The result of those meetings is the research study *Farm Women and Canadian Agricultural Policy*, publicly released last month.

The study says women need processes to ensure their concerns are heard and given equal weight in policy development.

Manson hopes the federal government takes note of the work as its current *Agricultural Policy Framework*, an overarching five-year plan, is set to expire in 2008.

The *Farm Women* study, initiated by the NFU with funding from Status of Women Canada, identified five key areas of concern: quality of life in rural communities, health and environment, the farm financial crisis, increasing control over the food system by large corporations, and government policy direction.

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University of Regina assistant professor Annette Desmarais, one of the study's authors, said women felt agricultural policy should strengthen the voices of farm families, rather than any other part of the industry.

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When it comes to community infrastructure, women talked about access to services for child and elder care. They also talked about having technical support and financial incentives for the inter- generational transfer of family farms, she said.

"They felt that was one of the major blocks to keeping young people on the farm."

Desmarais said the women who participated were a range of ages and involved in a variety of farming sectors.

"I'm really hoping that (the research study) will be used by politicians."

But women can't just be invited to farm consultations at the last minute -- with issues such as child care to contend with -- and the environment has to be one where they feel free to express their concerns, Desmarais said.

"Unless you develop processes and mechanisms to make sure that women are actually sitting at those tables, they won't be there."

- reprinted from the Regina Leader-Post

**Related link:** REPORT: Farm women and Canadian agricultural policy <sup>[2]</sup>

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