

Their Status in Professional Agriculture

FEBRUARY 3, 1967 was an important day for the women of Canada. On that monumental Friday, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson announced in the House of Commons the Federal Government's decision to establish a Royal Commission to "inquire into and report on the status of women in Canada and to recommend steps that might be taken by the Federal Government to ensure their equality with men in all aspects of Canadian society".

What effect, if any, will this Royal Commission have on the status of women working in professional agriculture? What, indeed, IS the status of women in professional agriculture?

The AIC

There are now more than 3,500 members of the Agricultural Institute of Canada, of which 32 are women. Of the 171 Fellowships in the AIC awarded up to and including 1966, only one was to a woman, the late Dr. Mary MacArthur, named in 1952 in recognition of her distinguished service to Canadian agriculture, especially her work during World War II when she took the lead in Canada in research on dehydrated vegetables of high quality. Two women, Mrs. F. H. Grindley and Miss Helen Henry, have been given Honorary Membership Awards. It might also be mentioned here that, while not a member of the AIC, the Ontario Institute of Agrobiologists at its conference at Guelph in April honored journalist Miss Ethel Chapman with a Centennial Agriculturist Award in recognition of her work in agriculture.

The lack of formal research and statistical matter about women in professional agriculture is regrettable. To aid with this study, we selected at random 16 women's names from the AIC membership (half the women members) and sent out a questionnaire asking:

1. Why did you choose a career in agriculture?
2. How were you treated as a student (a) by your professors (b) by your male counterparts (c) by female students in other disciplines?

3. Did you have any difficulty finding a job in the field in which you wished to work?
4. Has your financial remuneration and job advancement been equal to that of men with the same education and experience?
5. Is the status of professional women in agriculture changing?
6. Would you advise high school girls to enrol in a degree course in agriculture?
7. Are you concerned with the question of the status of women? Do you agree there is a need for a Royal Commission on the question?

Of the women who replied to the questionnaire, many seemed unhappy, even bitter, about their position in the profession. Almost all had a farm or rural background and had entered agriculture as a "natural direction" for continuing their education.

At university, their professors treated them, for the most part, as equals with their male counterparts but, as one woman said, "Things were a little rough in some courses for the first month or so, but once the professors realized we were in the course to get an education, their attitudes changed". The male students, on the whole, treated them as they would any other female students although some looked on the co-eds as "exhibitionists" and others adopted a "faintly patronizing" attitude towards them. Other female students made no difference, they said.

Once out in the working world, most had no difficulty finding a job in their chosen field. Those who said they did qualified their replies, citing inadequate specialization, self-imposed restrictions as to where they would work, the depression and competition with veterans immediately following the war as the causes.

It was on the job where the real difficulties—and the bitterness—arose. Only two women were fully satisfied that their job and advancement and financial remuneration had been equal to that of men in the same field. The first, a gold medalist at university,

received job offers from several colleges upon graduation. "The only field I know is agricultural research", she said. "I received the same wages and job advancement as the men from graduation until I retired." The second, also in research, feels she is accepted as an equal in her field, but feels that, had she entered administration, this would probably not have been the case and it certainly would not have been in extension.

Perhaps the most telling comment on the whole question of job advancement and remuneration comes from still another research worker: "Although my research is different (mutation cytogenetics), I am always under their (male) supervision. There is subtle opposition and extreme reluctance to recommend advancement to women. 'He is ambitious' is praise; 'She is ambitious' is derogatory."

To balance the survey, we also wrote to the deans of agriculture at universities across the country — all of whom replied — asking about the kind of academic records female 'ag' students maintain in relation to male students and the demand for female graduates from potential employers. We also asked whether the deans encourage female high school students to enrol in the degree course in agriculture, and left room for any comments on the question the deans chose to make. Information was also asked for about the number of female students in the agricultural degree courses at each institution in the past 10 years, and this is summarized in the Table (except for the three veterinary colleges, which are dealt with separately).

Better Records

In university degree courses, according to the deans, women in general have better academic records than their male counterparts. "They win more than their share of the top academic awards, and a higher percentage have first or second class honors than men," according to Dr. G. Dion of Macdonald College. But then, as

Year	Canada	NSAC	Laval	Macdonald	OAC	U of Man	U of Sask	U of Alta
1957-58	44	1		23	15	2	1	2
1958-59	31	1	not given	13	13	2	2	0
1959-60	35	3		14	13	4	1	0
1960-61	38	3	3	10	16	4	0	2
1961-62	54	3	3	17	24	2	0	5
1962-63	69	5	6	13	33	4	2	6
1963-64	80	3	8	17	44	5	2	1
1964-65	101	4	10	20	46	9*	3	9
1965-66	125	4	10	33	53	12*	1	12
1966-67	122	not given	10	27	53	19*	1	12

¹No breakdown was given for UBC. Dean Eagles notes there have always been women in the Faculty of Agriculture there, the first graduating in 1921. Of the 1,525 Bachelor's degrees awarded by the Faculty, 174 or 10.8 percent have been to women; they have received 31 or 10.1 percent of the 307 Master's degrees and 2 or 28.8 percent of the 7 Doctorates.

*Includes pre-veterinary year

Dr. Rolland Poirier of Laval University writes, "Women who study agriculture are a bit more motivated than the men." They have to be because, says W. A. Jenkins, principal of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, "We believe that ladies must attain higher academic standards than males to compete for the same jobs".

And it is at this point that women often must overcome the biggest hurdle of their years at university: at the Bachelor's level, according to Dr. L. H. Shebeski, University of Manitoba, "Female graduates find it rather difficult to obtain employment in which their agricultural training is required; however, at the Master's level, they have less trouble". "Potential employers still express some surprise and astonishment that a girl in agriculture should be looking for a job", according to Dr. Dion. And, says Dr. Poirier, government agencies provide the most opposition to the employment of female agrolgists.

For the most part, however, female agriculture graduates are placed successfully—provided they chose the right field of study. Some of the 'best' fields for women, as listed by the women graduates and the deans, include plant pathology, entomology, nutrition, agricultural biochemistry, journalism, agronomy, horticulture, food management and teaching. "In certain fields", Dr. Blythe Eagles, of the University of British Columbia writes, "women in my judgment are far more adept than men, particularly where coordination and manipulation of the hands and eye are required". "With the great shortage of male graduates in agriculture I suspect many jobs are now done by ladies which were formerly performed by men, as in economics, statistics, biology and laboratory work", writes Mr. Jenkins.

Veterinary medicine, supposedly a hard field for a female to crack,

holds many opportunities for women. Ephrem Jacques, director of Ecole de Médecine Vétérinaire de la Province de Québec, finds females have records as good as those of their male counterparts. Dr. D. L. T. Smith, Dean of the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, Saskatoon, has found that, "With the possible exception of large animal clinical medicine, women are welcomed into the various facets of the veterinary profession".

Women entering this field should be prepared to stick with it, however, Dr. T. Lloyd Jones, Dean of the Ontario Veterinary College, Guelph, says: "A number of women students, varying from six to 10, are accepted into the course each year, depending on the academic standing of those who apply. Because of the large number of applicants and the great need for veterinarians, we are anxious to accept women students who will utilize the training in a lifetime career. The fact that a few women do not carry out this plan is the only influence which acts as a handicap to women seeking to enter the course."

This year, there are 18 women enrolled in the course at Guelph; at Saskatoon, there is one girl slated to graduate in 1969, three in 1970 and one is taking post graduate studies. At the Quebec school, there are two women in the pre-veterinary year, two in the first year, four in the second, three in the third and one in the fourth.

Their Place

Is there a place for women in professional agriculture?

Of the women interviewed, most said yes, provided the person involved is ready and willing to work hard. "Women must be a little more clever than their male associates if they are going to succeed in a man's field. They must remain very modest and

non-aggressive", one warns. Another says, "(They must be) prepared to take a highly specialized course and make good grades and be willing to have patience and determination. I would also suggest a very good business course to go with it."

For the most part, the deans of agriculture don't actively encourage women to enter their faculties because of their apparent difficulty in obtaining jobs. However, they do not actively discourage them either: but they stress that a woman embarking on a degree course in agriculture must have a very high academic standing and a thorough understanding of what she is attempting to do.

To guide prospective female students, Dr. C. F. Bentley of the University of Alberta, sends out a mimeographed bulletin on "Women Students in Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine" in which he warns the girls: "There are some types of work for which few if any employers are likely to employ women graduates. For most positions, men with similar qualifications are given preference to women." He lists types of agricultural work in which women are especially successful in finding satisfactory positions and concludes, "Interest and dedication can do much to overcome some of the disadvantages which face women students in professional agriculture".

N. R. Richards, of the Ontario Agricultural College, says: "There are many exciting and challenging opportunities for female graduates and I would hope that larger numbers would choose to enrol in the degree course in agriculture".

At the same time, Dr. Bentley writes: "I am of the opinion that women in Canada and the United States have in terms of broad generalization, not taken anything approaching full advantage of the expanding opportunities available for them. As a consequence of the increasing (though admittedly as yet far from achieved) approaching parity of opportunity for careers and employment compared to men, I recognize that women do face some substantial discrimination, but I am of the opinion that too few have the grit and will to dig in and to demonstrate by output and competence their actual ability to produce and to do. It should be understood that these comments refer to all areas of employment and opportunity and have no particular reference to careers in professional agriculture for women graduates."

Is there a need for a Royal Commission on the status of women?

Of the women professional agriculturists interviewed, only 60 percent felt there is a need for such an investigation. One, qualifying her answer, stated: "There is a need for a Royal Commission to point out areas where there is definite discrimination. More difficult to determine will be the areas where the opposition is subtle and in these areas, women will have to prove themselves, perhaps as individuals, in ways that a Royal Commission will have little if any significance."

Dr. Margaret Newton, one of the outstanding women members of the AIC and the second woman in this country elected to the Royal Society of Canada, has her own formula for the problem: "(Before I retired) I had quite a number of men working under me but I never told them what to do. I discussed the problems with them each day and took their suggestions for the work wherever possible. I told them what and why I thought the work should be done in a certain way and if they saw weaknesses in my suggestions, I dropped them. We worked very smoothly together and needed no Royal Commission."

Another answered: "I have always felt that most of the talk of discrimination came from women who weren't going to make the grade anyway."

References

The following were consulted as possible sources of reference material for this article. With only one or two exceptions (marked *) the works had little or no bearing on the topic being considered, but are listed here to help readers who might wish to delve further into the question of the status of women in professional agriculture.

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