

## **Women's Roundtable Discussion 2011**

The Agricultural Institute of Canada (AIC) held its third annual women's roundtable discussion in Winnipeg on December 6, 2011 in partnership with the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Chair for Women in Science and Engineering for the Prairies (NSERC-CWSE-Prairies), Dr. Annemieke Farenhorst. The meeting took place at the Bruce D. Campbell Farm and Food Discovery Centre, University of Manitoba.

### **The objectives for the event were to**

1. Explore views of professional women working in agricultural sciences from a broad cross-section of disciplines and professions.
2. Strengthen a network of women in Manitoba working in professional agricultural sciences, particularly to assist our future generation in becoming successful professionals in agriculture.
3. Report on the discussion actions already taken by the AIC and the NSERC-CWSE-Prairies to raise awareness about gender equality in agricultural sciences.
4. Listen to women's ideas on how to assist women in Manitoba working in professional agricultural sciences.

### **NSERC-CWSE-Prairies**

Ongoing projects include:

- Website (<http://cwse-prairies.ca/>) and Facebook.
- \$500 Logo contest
- Aboriginal Student Recruitment and Retention, including a video project in collaboration with the Recruitment Office at the University of Manitoba.
- Water Rights Research Consortium and Aboriginal youth engagement.
- International Collaborative Academic Network for Women in Science and Engineering (ICAN-WISE) which will be an Internet-based tool that will aggregate information about women scientists and engineers from across the Prairies into a searchable database, combined with \$15,000 per year in women student-professor mentorship funding from 2013 onwards.
- Research Program with a PhD student examining factors influencing the participation of women in science and engineering.
- Showcasing sustainable food production and processing to school children and the public – linked to the Bruce D. Campbell Farm & Food Discovery Centre of the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences.

### **AIC**

Gender mainstreaming resources available include a case study, GEM of the Month Digest, and Monthly report. (See <http://www.aic.ca/> and click on the Gender Equality button.)

Note that student membership within AIC is free. (See <http://www.aic.ca/membership/become.cfm> for an application form.)

## Discussion Summary

About 30 women from academia (including graduate students), provincial and federal governments, and industry attended the discussion. Three were members of AIC, and several were also members of scientific societies (CSSS, CSAS, CSA, and CSHS). They explored their experiences related to the themes of:

1. Career Choice
2. Equal Opportunity/Leadership/Managerial Opportunities
3. Work-Life Balance
4. Mentorship
5. Earning Potential
6. Research and Publishing
7. Membership within a professional organization or scientific societies

At least one participant posted a tweet about and during the event on Twitter.

The discussions on work-life balance predominated for most women.

## Evaluation Comments

All participants who provided feedback were positive about the opportunity to attend the event, about the questions which focussed the participatory discussion, about the networking opportunities, and about the opportunities to participate in future events in rural and urban settings. One participant stated:

*This is the first time I have been invited to participate in a meeting of women working in agriculture. What a great experience. I feel so positive about agriculture's future after spending time with such a group of positive, supportive, confident and accomplished women.*

### 1. Career Choice

The participants began with a brief profile including educational level, what attracted them to the sector, how long they have been working in the sector, and current position. The key point was that many women did not choose agricultural sciences initially but came into the profession through other avenues. This information was deemed to be useful for future career counselling and student recruitment.

Advice to high school students: The profession provides opportunities for great summer work and stipends for students, unlike some other professions.

The profession provides steady employment for long-term careers. It offers flexibility and opportunities for change and mobility within Canada.

Some recommendations in this theme include the following statements from the participants:

- Good teachers need encouragement and to be shown curricula and appropriate ways to bring examples of science (including agriculture) in everyday life to lessons.
  - Volunteer opportunities to promote agriculture are available with organizations such as Ag in the Classroom <http://www.aitc.mb.ca/>

## **2. Equal Opportunity/Leadership/Managerial Opportunities**

Graduating classes of 30 years ago began to show increasing numbers of women who are now well established in their careers, yet the memberships of professional organizations do not reflect this.

Poor Internet access in rural areas of Manitoba can limit the opportunity to work virtually, making it more difficult for some women to have a work-life balance.

Some women have been denied a job in the past because there were toilets only for males.

Once women are given the opportunity to speak, they are listened to; it's getting that initial confidence or opportunity that can be challenging.

Socializing after work (over beer or golf) with colleagues is a way to become part of the "inner circle" that male colleagues are often part of, but it is not the way some women choose to spend their time. It requires a decision – do I want to be part of the "drinks after work culture", or do I walk away?

Some recommendations in this theme include the following statements from the participants:

- Establish access to more female mentors.
- Establish a network of female colleagues and make time for this.
- The challenge is to find a partner who can be supportive as they would need to follow you with the job. A teacher who has summers off may be a good choice for a partner as they have time to be supportive during the busy summer field season!
- Be more assertive and value your professional skills.
- More professional development and leadership development is needed for women.
- A women's development program can be a springboard to identifying what you want and what to do when you are stagnating in your job.
- Choose your battles or pick your opportunities to lead and gain respect.
- Accept the drinks or the round of golf if this is the status-quo at your workplace, or develop your own network.

### 3. Work-Life Balance

It's important to set personal goals and block off time on your calendar for important home and work priorities. However, it can be difficult to prioritize work over private life and to decide what is important. We need to make decisions about what to sacrifice when life gets hectic, and be willing to delegate. Know what your job goals are, take the time to identify them, and don't be afraid to say no. Use a schedule for work and personal life to remove the possible stresses of unplanned events.

Identify what you want and need and then position yourself in an environment where you can get what you need from your work. It's OK to be selfish – everyone has to be.

There are differences in lifestyle between rural and urban work situations related to part-time work, daycare availability or flexibility, and quality of Internet access (virtual offices) which affect work-life balance. These factors influence choices to be made about returning to work, or stepping away from a career temporarily or permanently.

It can be easier to achieve balance when working in private industry than in education.

Being one of the few women in a workplace or in a sector can lead to overload as a representative on boards or committees if the organization wants a “woman's” perspective. This just adds one more thing to an already busy schedule.

Set personal goals that have nothing to do with work.

What creates a positive environment for women faculty? [See UBC Science reports.<sup>1</sup>]

In private industry, companies have gender on their radar and are tracking women by levels of employment. However, action at hiring women into upper management is limited. It is not necessarily negative attitudes towards women, but women can be excluded from the “inner circle”.

[See [www.catalyst.org](http://www.catalyst.org) for various reports on benefits to business of increased gender-inclusive management and boards.]

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<sup>1</sup> A new summary of data on faculty recruitment and advancement, with particular regard to the status of women faculty at UBC Science, for the period of 2007-2010 is available at [www.science.ubc.ca/sites/science.ubc.ca/files/faculty/UBCScience\\_EquDiv\\_2007to2010.pdf](http://www.science.ubc.ca/sites/science.ubc.ca/files/faculty/UBCScience_EquDiv_2007to2010.pdf). The report comprises data on hiring (including partner accommodation); promotion and tenure; career success and recognition; and new policies, e.g., pertaining to parental and maternity leaves. We expect that these UBC Science data will be of interest to others who are working to advance women in Science. For more information on UBC Science's faculty diversity initiatives, see [www.science.ubc.ca/faculty/diversity](http://www.science.ubc.ca/faculty/diversity). Latest news with regard to equity and diversity from UBC include the appointment of a Senior Advisor on Women Faculty: Dr. Rachel Kuske (more at <http://vpacademic.ubc.ca/announcement-selection-of-a-senior-advisor-to-the-provost-on-women-faculty/>). We are very excited about the Provost's initiative and look forward to her work with the Senior Advisor to fulfill her mandate of transforming the environment for women faculty at UBC.

Flexibility from an employer or supervisor is key to work-life balance, but may not be built into the structure of employment. Rules may need to be stretched to allow for flexibility around things like picking up kids from day care, children's illness, etc.

Some recommendations in this theme include the following statements from the participants:

- More opportunities are needed for part-time work.
- Employers need incentives to create more part-time positions.
- Flexibility is needed in working conditions in higher education.
- More childcare centres with flexible schedules are needed.
- Prioritize work and play. Use a schedule to identify what is of personal importance.
- Don't be afraid to say no.
- Accept the give and take needed to succeed; make concessions as needed but keep within your goals.

#### **4. Mentorship**

Mentorship of youth: University of Saskatchewan Saturday Clubs - Girls Exploring Science <http://www.scifi.usask.ca/> and in Manitoba, the Kid-netic Energy Camps <http://www.umanitoba.ca/outreach/wise/kidnetic/about.html> toured in rural small towns in Manitoba. These are great opportunities for the children who attend and for young science teachers in the making (the students who implement these programs). Now we need those girls who now understand that science can be for them to follow through in science careers and professional leadership.

Some recommendations in this theme include the following statements from the participants:

- Establish a personal "board of directors" as a support group to provide you with mentorship from a range of people. They can be male or female and of any age, but are people who have a close relationship to you.
- Don't forget to call on resources from people when you are in a difficult situation.
- Bring the roundtable to rural Manitoba for input from rural women.

## 5. Earning Potential

Resources are available online about average salaries for positions. See <http://www.manitobajobs.com/> - agriculture is listed. See also pay scales and collective agreements for provincial and federal governments.<sup>2</sup>

Some recommendations in this theme include the following statements from the participants:

- Women may need resources in learning how to negotiate a wage at the onset of a new job. Have value in yourself as an employee. If you don't ask for it, you may not get it.

## 6. Research and Publishing

As a society, we need to talk more about the way in which scientific advancement occurs as a means of generating interest in youth (male and female) to pursue careers in science. This includes the controversy within scientific discourse which is part of finding the way forward that challenge among the scientific community is part of healthy exploration and not right vs. wrong or good vs. evil.

When discussing a particular study result, we need to underscore that the way a study is done is as important as the findings and that the findings are limited by the scope of the research study under discussion. This is a lesson for both the public and the scientists who are drawn into discussion.

Some people doing this for example:

Articles penned by Mark Winston a 2004 NSERC Award winner for Science Promotion and now a Fellow at the Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue <http://www.sfu.ca/biology/faculty/winston/articles.htm> and <http://www.sfu.ca/mecs/wosk+dialogue+centre/index.html>

Groups like the Partnership Group for Science & Engineering <http://www.pagse.org/>

Some recommendations in this theme include the following statements from the participants:

- We need to support science journalism and the art and science of communication. This includes positive images of women scientists within publications for the public.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the Manitoba Civil Service Commission Collective Agreement is posted at [http://www.gov.mb.ca/finance/labour/coll\\_agree.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/finance/labour/coll_agree.html). The Treasury Board of Canada posts collective agreements for federal employees at [http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs\\_pol/hrpubs/coll\\_agre/siglist-eng.asp](http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/hrpubs/coll_agre/siglist-eng.asp).

## 7. Membership within a professional organization or scientific societies

Women were asked to comment on the need or motivation for membership within a professional organization or scientific society. Responses to the following questions include the following comments:

*If you belong to a professional organization/scientific society, what motivated you to do so?*

- Employer pays for membership in scientific societies so that the employee can access new scientific journal articles.
- To network with researchers in the scientific society.
- To access news about job postings in the scientific society.
- The student membership fee in the scientific society is affordable.
- To identify as being part of a professional organization.
- Participate in conferences to spread research and intercommunication.
- Through many years of working, the participant has not always been a member of the provincial institutes or societies and not until the last few years has she been a member of the AIC. Why did it take her so long to recognise the benefits, she asks herself? Do young grads feel that it is valuable to be a member of the societies? Are the societies relevant? Do they make themselves relevant? Contrast that to Pharmacy for example which makes joining the Pharmacy association a right of induction to the first year of undergrad training. Need to continue to strengthen and understand students' and early professionals' needs.

*What other services would you like from the organization?*

- More networking opportunities
- Information about job opportunities
- Use of social media outreach to youth e.g. Facebook, blog about women in agriculture (events, news, articles, scholarships, etc.)

*If you are not a member of a professional organization/scientific society, what is a reason why you have made that choice?*

- As a student, may consider membership in the scientific society for the benefit of including it on my resume.
- Upon graduation, I'll consider P.Ag. designation to enhance job opportunities.
- Based on past experience [when AIC and PI membership was integrated], AIC is an old boys' club.

## Next Steps

Building on a successful roundtable discussion at the Bruce Campbell Discovery Centre on December 6 2011, the NSERC-CWSE-Prairies and staff in the Soil Science Department at the University of Manitoba are developing some ideas to pilot to help women develop some of the tools and support systems they

need to progress in their careers. This is likely to take the form of a one-day seminar for students, researchers and staff from the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences initially and will focus on: identifying strengths and development needs, understanding preconceptions and making them positive, defining goals and outcomes, the value of networks, and writing a personal development plan.

## **Evaluation Comments**

All participants who provided feedback were positive about the opportunity to attend the event, about the questions which focussed the participatory discussion, about the networking opportunities, and look forward to future events, in rural and urban settings. One quote:

*This is the first time I have been invited to participate in a meeting of women working in agriculture. What a great experience. I feel so positive about agriculture's future after spending time with such a group of positive, supportive, confident and accomplished women.*