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Young Farmer Opportunities are 'Driving to Success'

Sunday November 22 – Monday November 23

Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, Toronto ON

By Don McGugan

2009 OYFF Conference Coordinator

'Driving to Success,' the 2009 Ontario Young Farmers' Forum was a huge success as over 70 participants from across Ontario converged on the Doubletree by Hilton in Toronto on November 22nd and 23rd.

This forum was hosted and planned by Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario (JFAO), the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), and the Canadian Young Farmers' Forum (CYFF). The Ontario Young Farmers' Forum (OYFF) seeks to provide an educational and leadership development opportunity for young and future farmers of Ontario, providing participants with a unique opportunity to meet, network and learn with other young people age 18-40 in Ontario's horticultural and agricultural industry.

Betty Hansen, President of Crossroads Planning Group Inc. from Mossley, Ontario, keynoted Sunday's program with a presentation called *Succession for the Successor*. She challenged the forum participants to think strategically about their career and that it is their responsibility to take charge of their life and their goals when considering taking over a farm. A certified financial planner and chartered accountant, Hansen has spoken to many farm groups and organizations on succession planning. Additionally, her business, Crossroads Planning Group, provides succession planning consulting services to individuals and small business in both the agriculture and non-agriculture areas. Hansen's biggest concern is that individuals who wish to take over farms or enter the agriculture industry do not take control of their careers and let others dictate their life. She emphasized that entering a family business has many advantages and disadvantages and you must be aware of both when considering entering or taking over the family business.

Following Hansen's presentation, a panel discussion was held where after a brief presentation from panel member, delegates could question various professionals on Issues to Consider in Farm Succession Planning. Tilbury based lawyer and farmer, Paul Currie, talked about the importance of realizing this is a business – not just a way of life and you need to treat farming like a business. Jeff Sawyer, chartered accountant from Lambton County and farmer, spoke about his personal experience with his succession plan when sudden events created challenges beyond his control and what steps he took to ensure a

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successful succession. Amanda Hammell, a Senior Agricultural Commercial Lender and dairy farmer, discussed what financial institutions look for and need when a succession plan is started. Hansen made a presentation about some of the things she sees when one generation wishes to take over the operations from another generation. Following, forum delegates had the opportunity to ask the panel participants questions.

Dinner and evening entertainment Sunday night included a trip to Yuk Yuk's Comedy Club and the opportunity to socialize with other forum delegates.

Monday morning, OFA Director and Ontario-Quebec Representative to the CYFF Joe Dickenson made a presentation on the Young Farmer Report which the OFA commissioned earlier this year. Dickenson highlighted why the report was created, what the report defined a new farmer to be and what will occur with this report going forward. He challenged all of the delegates to be a participant in the future of the agriculture sector and take advantage of agricultural leadership opportunities now instead of letting farmers looking towards retirement continue to be the only speakers for the agricultural industry.

Amanda Hammell followed Dickenson's presentation with a seminar on the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors (CAFA). This organization is the nationally recognized organization for professional farm advisors and requires its members maintain high standards while continually increasing farm advisory skills and knowledge intended to provide measurable value to their farm clients. All of the panel members at OYFF and keynote speakers are members of CAFA.

Monday's keynote presentation by Betty Hansen focused on communication, not only during the succession planning process, but communicating at any time with other members of a family business. Hansen highlighted her presentation with the thought that we think we know what other family members are thinking and feeling and that we think we know what's best for family members, but we are usually wrong. Hansen highlighted sources of conflict, how to deal with them and how to communicate on difficult conversations. She also emphasized the importance of family meetings, how to operate them and some ground rules which should govern them.

To help forum delegates better manage communication and family relationships, Hansen went through the three circle model where family businesses is defined within three entities: the company itself, the family attached to it and the owners. Hansen highlighted the interdependence of the three circles and the advantages and disadvantages of each person or people within the circle. She also went through a communication model where delegates were encouraged to view communication

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through six separate view points and consider that has happened in the past, what is occurring today and what may happen tomorrow.

The second keynote speaker for the forum, Maurizio Agostino, made a high spirited and information-packed presentation on commodity marketing. Delegates were provided information on ways of managing price risk, the difference between options and futures and what basis is and how it moves. Agostino encouraged delegates to act like hedgers, not speculators, to use tools like technical analysis to assist them in pricing decisions and emphasized the necessity of having a marketing plan. He also presented his 13 rules of Grain and Livestock marketing and provided delegates a variety of resources they can use in selling their commodities.

After lunch, a panel discussion with previous winners of Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Excellence awards was held. Jennifer and Dave VanDeVelde from Delhi explained how they converted their tobacco farm to a fruit and vegetable farm which also has a farm based retail operation, Wholesome Pickins. Ron Van Bakel of Van Bakel Farms from Perth County made a presentation on how he came to design, build and market a successful heat exchanger for barns and how his innovative design has overcome conventional challenges of heat-exchangers. Stephanie Diamont, Fifth Town Artisan Cheese Company in Picton, Ontario, talked about the company's cheese products and their operation which is the first certified platinum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) manufacturing facility in Canada and the first dairy in North America with that certification.

The final panel discussion was held on Programs Available for Farm Transitions. Amanda Hammell talked about her experience with programs available for farm transitions. Peter Coughler from Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs gave an overview of the "Growing Forward" Suite of products which can be used for any farm in transition. Farm Credit Canada (FCC) representative Trish Botter discussed products that FCC has available for farms that are transitioning to new ownership followed by Brian Smith, Chartered Accountant from Allied Associates, who explained how his previous experience with various government programs designed to assist farms in transition. Concluding these presentations, delegates had the opportunity to ask panel participants questions.

After an election of forum delegates who attend the Canadian Young Farmers Forum, delegates adjourned to celebrate the year's successes with OFA convention delegates at the annual Harvest Celebration Banquet Monday evening and returned home with new ideas for successful planning and transitioning farming in Ontario from one generation to the next.

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This year's forum was made possible in part by support from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Agricultural Adaptation Council's CanAdvance Program, as well as Canadian Young Farmers Forum and the Canadian Farm Business Management Council.

While this year's speakers were highly rated by participants, the chance to network with their peers continues to be the most valuable benefit delegates mention in evaluations. This year's forum followed up on last year's requests for even more focus on succession planning. The comments and ideas delegates have provided for next year prove how pleased this year's participants were with this and that too many young people have been left lost as they try to find the resources, knowledge and connections with each other to create stable farm businesses – a challenge for the 2010 Ontario Young Farmers' Forum to continue building upon.

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