

tries have too much technology. Hybrid seeds in which yields outweigh disease resistance are common, requiring the use of more chemicals for production. Bigger equipment requires a larger land base to be efficient. Producers know which technologies best lend themselves to sustainable food production yet the balance book often has more weight during the decision making. For instance, artificial hormones such as recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH) for dairy cows are being forced on producers. Much like chemical use, once multinational corporations like Monsanto have convinced governments to allow new



Karen Pederson (centre, first row) and other members of the Food and Agriculture Working Group.

technology like rBGH, the balance book pushes farmers into using the product to attain a competitive edge. Unfortunately, this creates a dependence on the drug and that whole way of producing. Once farmers are hooked they have usually lost their competitive edge and do not have the capital to stop the dependence by switching the whole premise of their production. In the end, the cash crisis felt by farmers the world over requires more economic efficiencies and more technology, and therefore fewer farmers and less environmental protection.

Once the food is produced, farmers need to market and transport it. Long distances from markets make for high transportation costs. Cash crops are often moved internationally to a market that will pay the highest consumer price. There are only so many means of efficient transportation which makes producers captive shippers. Small pockets of producers, such as the banana producers in St. Lucia, are limited by both markets and transportation. Only one company will buy and transport their bananas so they must accept whatever price that company will give.

One wonders how producers survive at all. Many do not, which is why there is a mass exodus to urban areas. As

more people leave the farm, the small supporting communities die. In Canada many of the producers survive by working long hours both on and off the farm. In 1994, 55 per cent of Canadian farmers' income came from off-farm jobs (Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food). Unemployment rates rise as the exodus to urban areas continues and those that stay on the farms take urban jobs.

The women at the Conference discovered that many of their problems were shared internationally and therefore set to working on common solutions. Producers wanted co-operatives in many aspects of their operation. Working co-operatives would give them control in accessing credit, labour, information, and sharing costs. They wanted land restructuring laws for public ownership of land which would allow access to women. They wanted a return on their labour and investment which would cover their costs of production. Orderly marketing, through supply management¹ and single desk selling,² was proposed as a means to eliminate the many transaction costs created by inefficiencies in the open market.

I found the solutions ironic as I sat and listened. We had already developed these structures in Canada. Many co-ops are currently in the process of being privatized. We have the Canadian Wheat Board and many other examples of orderly marketing. Yet Canadian producers' initiatives are being dismantled in the name of globalization and market freedom. The international trade agreements are destroying the structures that producers have created. Perhaps that was why the Canadian government did not want to tackle agriculture in Beijing. It would be difficult to defend signing two international agreements, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Platform for Action, with diametrically opposed principles.

Women left the workshops of the WFA organized and energized. They had more information and more contacts through which they could channel information. I was able to let people know about Via Campesina, a global movement of farmers' organizations. Through these workshops and the united effort of the WFA, agriculture was integrated into the document. It did not go far enough, but it was a big improvement from the two clauses in the original draft. We succeeded in having economic methods of food production recognized as an important aspect of people's nutrition and health, the environment, and the future of youth.

The Fourth UN Conference on Women is over. We, the participants, have a responsibility to continue the work of Beijing. We need to work towards ensuring governments do not ghettoize women's issues. That means they must be an integral part of any signed UN agreement. At the November 1996 International Food Security Conference in Rome, it is important that women be recognized as the majority of the world's producers and dealt with appropriately. It is also our responsibility to hold our governments accountable to the Platform for Action. This document will mean nothing if we do not force governments to live

up to their obligations. Finally, it is necessary that we bring home our enthusiasm as well as our knowledge from Beijing. We will only achieve equality if we are united and excited.

Karen Pedersen is a 22 year old honey producer from Cut Knife, Saskatchewan. She farms collectively on a small family farm with her extended family while acting as Youth President for the National Farmers' Union. In her two years as Youth President she has been responsible for organizing young farmers and ensuring young farmers' voices are heard on issues which affect them. Over the past several years she has had the opportunity to farm in the United States, Denmark, and Grenada, increasing her understanding of global agriculture.

¹Supply management controls supply of the product so that producers and consumers are assured of a stabilized reasonable price with excellent quality. In Canada, eggs, poultry, and dairy are currently governed by supply management. If supply management were lost the economy would suffer tremendously and the direct impact on consumer prices would only be a savings of \$0.50 per \$100 basket of goods (see Bromfield, Jenness, and Justus).
²Single desk selling is the precept of all producers marketing their product collectively through one agency. This agency allows them to share the cost and risk of marketing and returns the profit from marketing their product to the producers. Organized into a large body, they have the power to ask for a higher price than they would receive on the open market. Without single desk selling, producers are price takers on the open market bearing all the risks individually while middlemen retain the profit. The Canadian Wheat Board is an example of single desk selling.

References

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- Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food. *Stat Facts 12.07*. 1996.
- Status of Women Canada. *Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality*. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1995.

FAWZIA AHMAD

Choice?

I choose to educate today
I choose?
What is choice really?
Choice comes with privilege
It is not a choice
It is not a clear choice for me
Not to challenge racism
I am brown
If I do not challenge
If I do not educate I drown
I disappear
I am silenced
Then how could this really be a choice?
When I do not speak out
Against your racism
Why is my silence taken as acceptance?
How was my silence choice?
When I do not challenge it is because
I am tired
Sick of it
Frustrated
Angry
Numb
No, I remain silent because
I don't really have a choice
I remain silent because
You had a choice
You chose to be silent
Your silence condones my pain
I am silent
In disbelief
My wounds are from choices that you made
Choices that came from your privilege
Choosing not to educate today
Is my way
The only way I know
To survive
So, tell me something
Why do you choose not to educate today?

Fawzia Ahmad is a 30 something political Indian Trini woman. She is a front line rape crisis worker. Her passion is her family, her people, and food. Her work against ALL oppressions is ongoing.