

A New Path for the QFA

Andrew McClelland

Advocate Staff Reporter

Thursday, March 31st was an historic day for the Quebec Farmers' Association, as members and the board of directors gathered to take part in a strategic planning exercise and discuss prospects in the organisation's future.

The day-long event, held at the Hotel Plaza in Valleyfield, addressed the internal changes faced in the past year as well as how the QFA can change to better serve the province's English-speaking farmers and rural community. High on the agenda were a reappraisal of the QFA's mandate and mission statement, effective planning for services and programs for the next five years, as well as new models for the organisation's financing and structure.

Susan Grundy, an independent facilitator hired to moderate the discussion and prepare a report on the day's proceedings, led the conference which was attended by 18 participants, among them many long-time supporters of the association as well several new faces interested in the QFA.

"I've just moved here from England," said Michael Knight, an organic farmer from Rigaud, "and when I was trying to find English information on farming here in Quebec, the QFA seemed to be one of the only places offering it."

Making information available to English-speaking farmers remained one of the QFA's most crucial tasks, as participants in the planning exercise discussed what role the association can play in today's changing rural community. Participants acknowledged that the QFA's purpose has shifted in recent years from educating agricultural producers

to facilitating the spread of information available to its membership. Also discussed was the new responsibility faced by the organisation to act as a rights advocacy group for English farmers within a provincial and federal context—a function the QFA has been fulfilling since becoming part of the UPA in January of 2002.

One of the recurring themes throughout the day was the association's need to diversify its funding plan and attract a greater variety of institutions to bolster the QFA's financial resources. However, apart from government assistance and corporate sponsorship, contributors to the discussion agreed that revenue derived from the renewal of memberships—and that from news members as well—were among the association's most reliable sources for finances.

The board urged that the QFA should work in the near future to expand the services it currently offers its members. While the organisation has long offered farmers agricultural information through meetings and the *Advocate*, and continues to make translation services available, some new ideas proposed included offering accounting and agricultural advising to members and organizing seminars on farm-related issues.

Much of the day turned to talk of deciding the key priorities the QFA will address in the coming years. Members of the executive committee voiced concerns that the association must re-establish close ties with its members, and continue to work upon strengthening the lines of communication between the board of directors and the communities served by the QFA. One project suggested to bring about this closer relationship will be a tour by the QFA president of farming regions where membership is substantial. This tour will hopefully take place this coming fall.

As the benefits of being an affiliate of the UPA were reviewed, some participants expressed their wishes to see the QFA form more partnerships with other agricultural groups. Projects for collaboration on both the provincial and federal levels were recommended

The strategic planning exercise also touched upon the possibility of restructuring the administration of the QFA to make communication more effective between members and the board of directors. Regional representation and the organisation of local branches also entered the discussion as members brought forth new ideas to help shape the face and future QFA .

“It’s really great to have a day like this,” said John McCart, member of the board of directors for Grenville-sur-la-Rouge. “We can talk face-to-face, and have someone from outside the QFA moderate for us. It makes everything a lot clearer and the end of the day.”