

MANITOBA FARM SAFETY PROGRAM

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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FARM SAFETY IS NOT GENDER-SPECIFIC

The Manitoba Farm Safety Program celebrates women in agriculture this International Women's Day

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA – March 7, 2018 - This year's theme for International Women's Day (IWD) is #MyFeminism, inspired by the role feminism continues to play in shaping Canada and countries around the world. The Manitoba Farm Safety Program (FSP) wants all Manitobans to join in celebrating the women in their lives who are vital to farming, and on March 8th, help promote gender equality in agriculture.

The number of female farm operators in Manitoba is (slowly but surely), on the rise. Statistics Canada tells us women accounted for approximately one quarter of farm operators in Manitoba in 2016. In terms of provincial enrolment in agriculture-related university programs, women currently outnumber men. Women are, as they have always been, innovators in the industry and have a clear desire to pursue agriculture professionally.

When it comes to safety, FSP has found that women are more likely to participate in safety training and awareness events, and are generally more receptive 'to hearing the safety message'. That said, there have been challenges in that message translating to practice on the farm.

"I have observed over my many years working with farmers that women are more willing to develop safety programs and mandatory safety documentation. However, they cannot always get the necessary input from men who may be more familiar with the work and equipment operation," says Morag Marjerison, FSP's Farm Safety Consultant and former Workplace Safety and Health Agricultural Safety Officer. "Having also been a wife and farm business partner, I see the difficulty in getting some farmers to adopt systems women have developed."

Marjerison summarized her comments by saying that in general women tend to be more cognisant of safety, but effectively changing routine behaviours can be a challenge.

Recent results of a three-year survey by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC), on barriers for women in agriculture found that one of the top barriers was the feeling of having to break into the 'old boys club'. Second to that was balancing career and family responsibilities, and finally, a lack of female role models in positions of leadership.

Diane Riding, 55, is one of four women who sit on the Manitoba Beef Producers board of directors. When asked about her thoughts on the CAHRC survey results, she said “I don’t feel it’s an *old boys club* anymore like it was 30 years ago when I first started. Things have evolved quite a bit, but as a woman you do develop a sense of humour. You have to.” In terms of balancing family and career, Riding said “There are lots of women out there doing livestock plus raising kids, they just aren’t visible due to time constraints. This day in age mothers are still the primary caregivers when kids are small, but once they are grown up [or before having children], you see women coming out to sit on boards in leadership roles because they have the time.”

In Manitoba we are fortunate to have female-driven organizations like the Manitoba Farm Women’s Conference, and the Manitoba Women’s Institute that work hard to offer supports to women in the industry. After presenting on safety at the Farm Women’s Conference in Brandon last fall, FSP received more inquiries about their mandate and services than after the majority of other events. Indeed women are interested in learning how to make farms safer, but they takeaway message is that *safety is not gender-specific*. Safety is a small part of everything we do, regardless of your gender.

On March 8th, let us celebrate the women who are the backbone to our farms and families!

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