



Out of an Abundance of Caution

Report

CFFO Seminar Series 2004

Released November 2004

Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario
Guelph, Ontario Canada

Out of an Abundance of Caution

Report CFFO Seminar Series 2004

This report is based on the data collected from the
CFFO Seminar Series 2004.

A total of 11 seminars were held throughout the province of
Ontario from February 12, 2004 through April 10, 2004.

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Released November 2004 by
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario

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Front cover

During the Middle Ages, in France, the rooster became popular as a symbol of watchfulness. Eventually it came into use as a weathervane, and one finds these installed on many old barns. This report calls for a greater level of watchfulness about the regulatory burden that is changing Ontario agriculture.

Executive Summary

This seminar series was designed in response to the wave of regulations, protocols, plans and certifications that have emerged throughout Ontario agriculture.

Participants came to the seminar series with a wide range of involvements with regulations, protocols, plans and certifications. During introductions they shared one or two of these involvements, usually ones they believed are beneficial for the environment or food safety. These experiences were so varied that there was no one assurance scheme that attracted group-wide concern or support. Invariably as the listed involvements grew, a general concern about the amount, types and pervasiveness of the emerging rules in the food chain intensified.

With the help of overheads, four challenges were introduced:

- Society has become more cautious about food safety.
- Society has become more cautious about farming system safety.
- The science message is changing.
- The food system message is changing.

These brief glimpses about the cautiousness emerging throughout our society confirmed for participants that, in general, society is much more cautious than they are. They also confirmed that it is not possible to avoid responding to the growing public cautiousness.

Participants viewed the four-minute flash video, *The Meatrix*. It is both a spoof and a multi-layered advertising campaign aimed at consumers. It's a spoof on the Warner Brothers popular action/thriller/science fiction Matrix movies. Leo, a young pig, lives on a good-old-days family farm. Moopheus, a mysterious cow, answers the question, "What is The Meatrix?" by touring agriculture's ghosts: animal cruelty, antibiotic resistant germs, massive pollution and destroyed communities. All are described as the consequence of factory farming. Leo joins the resistance. Moopheus invites consumers to do the same.

Many participants agreed that the flash video made a valid point about industrial agriculture, however many more agreed that it made a valid point if they could also be critical of its message. Participants shared general concerns about industrial agriculture's

impact on animal welfare, antibiotic resistance, pollution and communities but found some or all the criticisms in the video exaggerated. They found the video's choice of language too melodramatic. If they were to write their own criticism of industrial agriculture they would likely choose unremarkable phrases.

Four speakers tackled the theme: *Can Still More Regulations Make Farming Safe for Food and the Environment?* They gave participants little hope that an alternative to more regulations is possible nor did they suggest that the emerging regulatory regimes would make our farming systems safer for our health or for our environment. Their messages focused on the merits of more regulations and other initiatives to respond to the growing risk averseness of our society and the public perception that our food system has become riskier for health and for environment. Their overall advice: farmers and farming actively need to challenge the public's conceptions and misconceptions.

The third major presentation of the seminar was the David Suzuki video: *Corporate Agriculture: The Hollow Men*, documenting the application of the principles of the assembly line to pork and beef production and suggesting that this has led to severe environmental, social and cultural problems.

Participants agreed that industrial agriculture has led to severe environmental, social and cultural problems. They did not apply this criticism to their own farms. A majority agreed strongly or agreed somewhat that the documentary made a valid point. When asked if this valid point was overstated, quite a few withdrew their support. However, their agreement was limited to the criticism of farming in North Carolina and Alberta. Many emphasized that the farming shown in the documentary did not compare to farming in Ontario and did not include the land-based livestock system that dominates Ontario.

In breakout groups participants were asked to identify what is driving society and farmers to be so cautious. They concluded that society has become cautious because consumer attitudes and characteristics have changed, society's ability to take risks is fading, the media has emphasized perception rather than fact, trust throughout the food chain has eroded and governments have lost credibility. Further, they reported that they themselves are adopting more cautious approaches on their own farms

because of market signals, their own desire to be responsible, fear of liability, the pressure of regulations and a sincere desire to reassure consumers.

Having spent a day exploring all the cautions that have emerged in the food chain, the final plenary discussion and the final

What participants think needs to change by theme (200 comments)

Farm policy.	29
Message about farming.	23
Farmers/farming	22
Food chain/alliances	14
Resistance to change.	10
Comments on the seminar	4

exercise in the participant survey were opportunities for each participant to identify what he or she thought needed to change. Participants were very willing to identify needed changes, however, less than one-quarter of the proposed changes focused on themselves and their businesses. Most wanted changes in farm policy, a change in society's understanding of farming and restructuring of the food chain. Their reluctance to look to their own farm businesses first is linked to the wide variety of cautions that they are already expected to adopt.

Most participants were still willing to "go along to get along" with the growing cautiousness throughout the food chain and society at large. However, the level of frustration with having accommodated mounting cautions for more than a decade while the number of expected new rules just keeps rising is testing their willingness to continue. An urgent need exists to evaluate the wide variety of cautions that are being implemented, reduce their number and restructure them so that they are practical and meaningful to farm families and businesses.

1 Introduction

This seminar series was designed in response to the wave of regulations, protocols, plans and certifications that have emerged throughout Ontario agriculture.

It all started more than a decade ago with voluntary pesticide certification and the voluntary Environmental Farm Plan. Now they are everywhere and few are voluntary or will stay voluntary for long. A sample list includes HACCP (hazard analysis critical control points), marketing contracts, meat and bone meal-free feed, nutrient management plans, quality assurance schemes, refugia for BT corn, technology use agreements and traceability protocols. And more are likely coming: deadstock procedures, animal transport standards, antibiotics resistance rules and source water protection plans.

The number and variety of these control schemes have grown to such an extent that many farmers have become frustrated and are no longer willing to just “go along to get along.” “I’m glad I’ll be retired before I have to do all that,” has become a typical refrain among older farmers.

By creating a focused discussion on the growing regulatory burden, CFFO hoped to generate some insight into alternative ways of responding to the public’s expressed and perceived needs. The approach was a mixture of presentation, discussion in plenary sessions and in breakout groups plus an opportunity for individual reaction through a participant survey.

The agenda for the eleven seminars can be found at Appendix A. The schedule for the series can be found at Appendix B. All the events were scheduled to run from 9:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Throughout the series a total of 218 attendees completed the participant survey.

2 Seminar Participants

At various points during the seminar, participants were asked to complete specific parts of a survey.¹ We asked participants about their history of involvement in CFFO regional events. Twenty-two percent (22%) indicated that this was their first event. Almost half (48%) of the participants had experienced a CFFO workshop or seminar three or more times. The survey was completed by 218 participants.²

Table 1: Percent of participants who attended previous Workshop Series

All Series	15
3 to 5 Series.	33
1 or 2 Series.	28
None	22
No Answer	2

We asked for information about their farm business structure. Forty percent (40%) had sole proprietorship farms. Twenty-nine percent (29%) were in a farm partnership while twenty-three percent (23%) were involved in a farm corporation.

More than half (54%) of the participants have gross farm incomes over \$100,000. This compares to thirty-one percent (31%) of Ontario census farms with this level of gross income. The largest group, thirty-six percent (36%), had gross farm incomes between \$100,000 and \$499,999. Those with incomes between \$10,000 and \$49,999 made up the second largest group: twenty-six percent (26%).

Fifty-three percent (53%) of participants estimated that more than seventy-five percent of their family income comes from their farm businesses. Only eighteen percent (18%) estimated that their farm businesses contribute twenty-five percent or less to their family income.

Table 2: Percent of participants by gross farm income category

Gross Farm Income Category	Percent Seminar Participants	Percent Census Farms 2001
\$0 to \$9,999	7	26
\$10,000 to \$49,999	26	32
\$50,000 to \$99,999	13	11
\$100,000 to \$499,999	36	25
\$500,000 and over	18	6

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of participants listed cash crops as a commodity that generates more than twenty-five percent of their gross farm income. Twenty-seven percent (27%) wrote down beef or dairy while thirteen percent (13%) registered hogs. Twelve percent (12%) named poultry, and seven percent (7%) identified sheep. Eighty-two (82) participants listed two commodities

¹ See the Participation Survey in Appendix C for details of the requested information.
² See Appendix D for detailed information about the participants.

and thirty-four (34) recorded three. The commodities represented throughout the seminar series were very similar to those represented in the CFFO workshop series 2003. (See Table 3)

Fifty-six percent (56%) of participants were over 50 years of age. Thirteen percent (13%) were 40 or under. In three of the sessions there were no participants 40 and under: New Liskeard, Richmond and Thessalon. Half of participants over the age of 60 reported gross farm income less than \$50,000. None of these reported \$1,000,000 or more. Younger participants were more likely to be part of corporations. Sixty-five percent (65%) of participants between the ages of 31 and 40 are part of corporations while fifty-two percent (52%) of those over 60 were involved in sole proprietorships.

A large majority (88%) were members of CFFO. Many (59%) of those who were not CFFO members were attending their first CFFO regional event. Non-members were much more likely (68%) to estimate that less than fifty percent of their family income comes from their farm businesses. Members were more likely to estimate that more than 50% comes from their farm businesses (70%). At three of the events there were no non-members present: New Liskeard, Ridgetown and Thessalon.

Table 3: Percent of participants by commodity

Commodity	Percent of Participants	Percent of Participants 2003
Cash Crops	39	32
Dairy	27	27
Beef	27	27
Pork	13	12
Poultry	12	11
Sheep	7	7
Horticulture	6	6
Off-farm income	4	2
Custom work	3	2
Forestry	1	0
Horses	1	0
Agri-tourism	0	0
Not applicable	7	11

3 What Have You Done

After a brief introduction to the seminar series, the participants were asked to introduce themselves by stating their name, community, farm commodity and by responding to: “What have you done recently or expect to do that makes your involvements with the food chain safer for health or the environment?” Throughout the series a total of 206 actions were recorded.

Forty percent (40%) of participants mentioned changes in management practices: modified manure handling, less pesticides, more emphasis on stewardship, more record keeping, less fertilizer, testing soil and water, changes in feed such as less antibiotics, changes in rotation and deadstock management.

Table 4: What we have done for food and environmental safety	
Management Changes	40
Certification	29
Physical Changes	18
General Comments	12

Getting involved with various certification programs was mentioned by twenty-nine percent (29%) of participants: environmental farm plans, livestock medicine certification, livestock identification, quality assurance for pork, organic certification, hazard analysis critical control points, nutrient management plans and standard operating procedures. Eighteen percent (18%) listed physical changes on their farms: more manure storage, milk time temperature recorders, run-off control, decommissioned wells, fencing, fuel tank modifications, grassed waterways, buffer strips, well upgrades, tree planting and ponds. Twelve percent (12%) of participants made general comments about educating consumers about the safety of food and farming, expressing concern about all the emerging regulations and noting that they would soon retire.

Participants came to the seminar series with a wide range of involvements with regulations, protocols, plans and certifications. During these introductions they shared one or two of these involvements, usually ones they believed are beneficial for the environment or food safety. These experiences were so varied that there was no one assurance scheme that attracted group-wide concern or support. Invariably as the listed involvements grew, a general concern about the amount, types and pervasiveness of the emerging rules in the food chain intensified.

4 The Challenges We Face

With the help of overheads, four challenges were introduced to participants:

- Society has become more cautious about food safety.
- Society has become more cautious about farming system safety.
- The science message is changing.
- The food system message is changing.

Examples of the growing cautiousness about food safety included: hazard analysis critical control points, quality assurance schemes, antibiotics resistance management, traceability programs, meat and bone meal-free feed, removal of specified risk material and proposed zoning of Canada for infectious disease management. Society has become more cautious about food safety.

A long list of initiatives that demonstrated the growing cautiousness about the safety of farming systems was reviewed: environmental farm plans, refugia³ for BT corn, technology use agreements for transgenic seeds, traceability programs, buffer strips, green cover programs, tree planting, no-till field preparation, the emergence of AGCare⁴ and OFAC⁵ to defend normal farming practices, anhydrous safety course, pesticide safety course, livestock medicines course, proposals for wildlife corridors, deadstock management, nutrient management plans, animal transport standards and source water protection plans. Society has become more cautious about farming system safety.

Continuous scientific developments, at any one point in time, are making it very difficult to claim that “sound science” supports farm practices and food programs. The example discussed was the finding by the Harvard Study in November 2001 that the “risk of BSE⁶ occurring in the United States is extremely low.” Yet the International Review Panel reporting on February 4, 2004, concluded “there was a high probability that other infected cattle

³ The requirement to plant 20% of any BT corn field with non-transgenic corn seed.

⁴ Agricultural Groups Concerned About Resources and the Environment, a coalition of Ontario farm groups.

⁵ Ontario Farm Animal Council, a coalition of Ontario farm groups.

⁶ Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy aka Mad Cow Disease

have been imported from Canada, and possibly Europe.” The science message is changing.

Canadian retailers have agreed among themselves that they will not compete for the attention of consumers with claims that their food is safer than others. An article in the February 5, 2004, *The Globe & Mail*, with the headline, “Loblaw makes food safety top priority,” hints that the agreement may be unraveling as it has in Great Britain. The story suggests that smaller enterprises are less safe than larger ones. John Lederer, president of Loblaw is quoted: “I’d rather have one factory than 300 factories because a meat shop is a factory.” The food system message is changing.

Questions about the merits of all the emerging rules dominated the short conversations that were part of these presentations. For example, in quite a few sessions participants challenged the idea that the science message about BSE changed from the 2001 study to the 2004 report. They thought that, at the farm level, these findings were equivalent but they also recognized that consumers would interpret the words used in the reports as defining dramatically different levels of risk. These brief glimpses about the cautiousness emerging throughout our society confirmed for participants that, in general, society is much more cautious than they are. The glimpses also confirmed that it is not possible to avoid responding to the growing public cautiousness.

5 The Meatrix⁷

“Psst, Leo! Do you want to know what the Meatrix is?”

So begins a four-minute flash video that has been viewed more than five million times from their website, according to the originators, Global Resource Action Center for the Environment. It is likely that as many others have viewed the video because of its wide distribution. Seminar participants were shown this flash video and asked to react verbally and through a participant survey.

The Meatrix is both a spoof and a multi-layered advertising campaign aimed at consumers—consumers recognized as having a firm grip on market power. It’s a spoof on the Warner Brothers popular action/thriller/science fiction Matrix movies first shown in 1999. But instead of a Hollywood hunk, The Meatrix stars a young pig, Leo, who lives on a good-old-days family farm. Along comes Moopheus, a mysterious and shadowy cow in sunglasses and a trench coat, who offers to answer the question, “What is The Meatrix?” When Leo agrees, Moopheus takes him on a Scrooge-like tour of agriculture’s ghosts: animal cruelty, antibiotic resistant germs, massive pollution and destroyed communities. All are described as the consequence of factory farming. Leo joins the resistance. Moopheus invites consumers to do the same.

We are asked to what extent participants agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. Forty-five percent (45%) agreed strongly or somewhat with the statement: “The Meatrix makes a valid point about industrial agriculture.” Thirteen percent (13%) disagreed strongly or somewhat. The rest were undecided (24%) or did not answer (18%).

“The Meatrix makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it overstates the criticism,” drew agreement from forty-six percent (46%) and disagreement from fourteen percent (14%). Sixty-four percent (64%) supported “The Meatrix makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it does not present a viable family farm alternative.” Six percent (6%) disagreed. Sixty-three percent (63%) gave support to: “The Meatrix is a clever flash video that gets its

⁷ The Meatrix was created by Free Range Graphics. Free Range created the movie in collaboration with GRACE (Global Resource Action Center for the Environment). The Meatrix can be viewed at www.themeatrix.com

	agree strongly	agree somewhat		disagree somewhat	disagree strongly	N/A
1. The Meatrix makes a valid point about industrial agriculture.	13	32	24	9	4	18
2. The Meatrix makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it overstates the criticism.	21	25	21	10	4	19
3. The Meatrix makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it does not present a viable family farm alternative.	34	30	11	4	1	19
4. The Meatrix is a clever flash video that gets its point across very effectively.	33	30	13	3	2	19

point across very effectively.” Five percent (5%) did not give their support.

It was noteworthy that participants with the lowest gross farm income were more likely to disagree with the statements in the participant survey. For example, only twenty-one percent (21%) of those with gross farm incomes under \$10,000 agreed strongly or somewhat with “The Meatrix makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it overstates the criticism.” Meanwhile fifty-seven percent (57%) of those with incomes between \$500,000 and \$999,999 agreed strongly or somewhat. This statement received more support from those with farm corporations (62%) than those with sole proprietorships (43%) and farm partnerships (41%). Those who estimated that 51% to 75% of their family income came from their farm businesses were the most likely to agree with this statement (67%). Those who estimated 26% to 50% were least likely to agree (32%). Of those estimating less than 25% farm income, only one-third (35%) agreed; while fifty-two percent (52%) of those who estimated that more than 75% of their income came from their farm business agreed.

The verbal comments throughout the series ranged from negative to positive. Almost half of the observations were negative. A number described the video as propaganda, skewed, sensationalized, oversimplified, or exaggerated (18%). Quite a few accused the video of not presenting a viable alternative (14%). Others said

the information or analysis was wrong (8%) or accused the creators of being anti-livestock farming (7%). One participant noted: "It tells a lie because food is safer than 20 years ago."

Just over one-quarter of the comments was positive. These participants focused on the quality of the video (10%). For example, one said: "I would like to have those creative people on my side." Others agreed with the video that agriculture, as we know it, is not in balance with nature (10%). Still others noted that there was some truth in the video (7%).

About one-quarter of participants was undecided, but had questions or observations: "There was no definition of family farm," "Is factory farming a matter of technique or size?" "Change is already happening," and "Farm magazines still tend to portray the good old days."

Based on the participant survey, most of the participants had a mixed reaction to the criticism of industrial agriculture as presented by The Meatrix. Many agreed that the flash video made a valid point but many more agreed that it made a valid point if they could also be critical of its message. In other words, participants shared general concerns about industrial agriculture's impact on animal welfare, antibiotic resistance, pollution and communities but found some or all the criticisms in the video exaggerated. The verbal and written comments confirm this conclusion. Most of those who had negative comments about the video accused it of oversimplifying, sensationalizing or failing to present an alternative. Seminar participants were critical of industrial agriculture but they want to be fair in their criticism. The video's choice of language, "animal cruelty, antibiotic resistant germs, massive pollution and destroyed communities," was too melodramatic for them. If they were to write their own criticism of industrial agriculture they would likely choose unremarkable phrases: animal welfare leaves something to be desired; antibiotic resistance will likely increase; there is more risk of pollution and the quality of life in local communities is being eroded.

6 Can Still More Regulations

Make Farming Safe for Food and the Environment?

After lunch one of four speakers tackled the theme: *Can Still More Regulations Make Farming Safe for Food and the Environment?* The approaches were unique to their experience and background. Each speaker engaged the participants in a discussion about food safety and agriculture's impact on our environment

6.1 Sheila Forsyth⁸

Sheila Forsyth traced the history of food production from hunting and gathering societies through the arrival of the industrial revolution and the technology ride that has characterized farming ever since. The food system has become anxious with the arrival of fast food and the loss of food as thanksgiving and celebration. Recent events have created a sense of public anxiety: SARS, mad cow disease, Avian flu in BC, Starlink corn, enviro-pig disposal, antibiotic resistance, GE wheat, and GMOs in general. Public anxiousness can be linked to consumerism, body consciousness, environmental issues and degradation, food security, loss of control, change in how we see the world (spirituality, environment) and loss of trust in authority.

There are alternatives to regulations for managing this anxiety: voluntary programs, incentive-based programs, best management practices, agreements, farm plans (self-analysis and self-improvement). Science has a role because it is good at asking questions but it often results in still more good questions.

Forsyth was skeptical that the public's anxiety can be changed with rules and regulations. More can be accomplished by challenging perceptions and mindsets. Solutions include connecting people back to the land, thinking of food as health, designing production as healing for creation and getting back to food as celebration.

6.2 Spencer Henson⁹

Spencer Henson provided a variety of insights into consumer perceptions of food safety by reviewing research, his own and that

Forsyth's Options:

- Voluntary programs
- Incentive-based programs
- Best management practices
- Agreements
- Farm plans (self-analysis and self-improvement)
- Regulations

⁸ Environmental Consultant, Freelance Writer, Former Executive Director of the National Agricultural Environment Committee, Former Columnist for *Earthkeeping Ontario*

⁹ Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics and Business, University of Guelph, Former Reader in Food Economics and Marketing at The University of Reading, U.K.

of others, with an eye for the differences in perspective between consumers and scientists. Consumers are not good with probabilities. One study, comparing prompted consumer concerns with unprompted concerns, documented a dramatic difference between the two.

According to Henson, there is a lot of work to be done to understand consumer perceptions. Why do they overestimate the low risks and underestimate the high? Why do they mistrust regulators? What makes them assume that it will never happen to them and why will they accept more risks when they are in control? Why are benefits undervalued?

A holistic approach is the first step to understanding consumers. There are no narrow issues. Health and environment are all the same issue. Much is rooted in emotions based on basics such as being a responsible parent. Consumers don't see the world as scientific boxes and do not identify with the science case for safety. All the attention paid to the discovery of one case of mad cow disease in Canada is a good example. The science says there is no noteworthy change in risk to consumers but perceptions of the Canadian food system have changed – we are no longer BSE-free.

For consumers, food safety is inter-related with other issues. Safety issues are so complex that consumers use proxies as shortcuts to determine the safety of food. They will squeeze the vegetables, check the colour of meat and select only trusted brands. Some proxies are not as effective as in the past: consumer food skills have declined, the "diet" industry is confusing and a gap has developed between producers and consumers. Meanwhile new proxies are emerging: country of origin, organic, traditional farmers, "meet the farmer," pay more, nature's choice brands, reliance on government, cooperatives and farm markets.

Henson expects the pressure for more regulations to continue. The level of acceptable risk is declining, governments are more risk-averse, new technology replaces one risk with another creating a "risk treadmill," and consumer reaction to more information is complex because "You are what you eat." He advised participants to be cautious about complaining about over-regulation. Consumers are likely to say: "Good." The biggest challenge is not to regain trust in our actions but to be trusted as actors.

Henson's Conclusions:

- Consumer perceptions are complex
- Consumer perceptions are poorly understood
- Need to consider from an holistic perspective
- Food safety inter-related with other issues
- Regulatory pressure will continue

6.3 Rod MacRae¹⁰

Rod MacRae described the growing layers of regulation in the food chain as a sign of food system failure and described five forces that need our attention. First, he suggested that much of the pressure for change was not coming from consumers but food company interpretations of consumer interests. If farmers could reconnect with consumers they would find many who want to be better plugged into the food system.

Second, market power is in the hands of a few large food retail and processing empires. Canada has the most corporate-controlled food system in the world – three retail firms control seventy percent (70%) of all food retail sales.

Third, public concern about agriculture's impact on our environment is very real. Some of this concern is driven by environmental groups with limited understanding of agriculture, but others are developing respect for farming as a positive force for environmental improvement. Those interested in biodiversity are realizing that reducing the farm footprint is possible without getting rid of farmers.

Fourth, there are professional pressures. Each profession involved in agriculture, whether engineer or extension agent or scientist or policy maker, have their own solutions for farming's challenges. They have particular ways of looking at agriculture's problems, and their solutions are only partial answers suited to their particular silos.

Fifth, farm policy is far less effective than it could be. The federal Agricultural Policy Framework is comprised of five separate silos and provincial integration of programs is not much better. Farmers are overloaded with paperwork. It is clear from the mishmash of programs that governments do not have a clear sense of what the end result should be for farmers and farming.

MacRae went on to recommend the development of a nuanced understanding of the pressures creating the regulations and then find unusual allies to help resolve the problems. One approach

Forces driving more regulations:

1. Consumer interests not the same as food company interests
2. Market power is in the hands of a few
3. Farming's impact on the environment is real
4. Agricultural professionals operate from silos

¹⁰ Former Coordinator, Toronto Food Policy Council, Author of *Real Food for a Change*, Food Policy Consultant

would be to get environmental and consumers groups to support the recognition of all the public goods and benefits that farmers create for society. Farmers should be compensated for the difference between what the market can provide and what it costs to provide those public goods and benefits.

6.4 Hugh Maynard ¹¹

Hugh Maynard began his talk by reflecting on a number of new developments in the food system. Food safety and healthy eating are not distinguished by consumers. One third of college students consider themselves vegetarian. The media loves a feeding frenzy and describes one sick cow as a spreading spectre. We have information overload but a knowledge deficit as a result of unregulated websites. The public has developed misconceptions about Ontario agriculture because too many U.S. examples are used by the media.

Next he discussed the changes that have occurred in the way we understand risks compared to benefits. Risk assessments used to be integrated into daily life: you acted if the benefits outweighed the *risks for you*. But technology and the size of operations have increased the importance of *risks to others* compared to the benefits for the decision-makers. This has led to the pre-cautionary principle that has created accountability for risks regardless of the benefits.

Maynard went on to describe a number of considerations that provide insight into our society's cautiousness. Fear of risk and an expectation of a risk-free world have emerged. Globalization and concentration of ownership in the food chain have destroyed the public's connection to food production. Consumers value tools that are extensions of their hands very differently from the machines that have industrialized farming. This may leave the impression that consumer views about agriculture are stuck in the past, but, at the same time, they expect supermarkets to be full and prices to be low. He cautioned against claiming that we have the best food system in the world – describing this not as misinformation but as non-information. Trust is no longer built on science.

¹¹ Former Executive Director, Quebec Farmers' Association, Former Editor of *Quebec Farmer's Advocate*, Communication Consultant

When the mad cow crisis first hit Canadian agriculture it was deemed more important for politicians to be seen eating beef than for a scientist to be heard explaining the risk factors associated with one sick cow.

At the end of the talk he focused on the specific question, “Will more regulation help?” His answer was a firm “It depends.” More regulations make sense when:

- Not regulating is worse;
- Self-regulation results in a small percentage of unwilling players eroding the credibility of the many;
- The burden of compliance is reasonable;
- There is a balance between intent and application;
- There is predictability;
- There is accountability; and
- There is compatibility.

6.5 The Future of More Regulations

Our four speakers gave participants little hope that an alternative to more regulations is possible.

- Forsyth encouraged them to challenge perceptions and mindsets by connecting food to land, health, healing for creation and celebration.
- Henson cautioned that the level of acceptable risk is declining and urged participants to regain the status of trusted actors.
- MacRae proposed unusual alliances with environmental and consumers groups, especially for the official recognition of all the public goods and benefits – in addition to food – that farmers create for society.
- Maynard described a number of circumstances in which more regulations make sense: when not regulating is worse; when self-regulation results in a small percentage of unwilling players eroding the credibility of the many; when the burden of compliance is reasonable and when there is a balance between intent and application.

Our speakers also did not suggest that the emerging regulatory regimes would make our farming systems safer for our health or

for our environment. Their messages focused on the merits of more regulations and other initiatives to respond to the growing risk averseness of our society and the public perception that our food system has become riskier for health and for environment. Their overall advice: farmers and farming actively need to challenge the public's conceptions and misconceptions.

7 Corporate Agriculture: The Hollow Men

The third major presentation of the seminar was the documentary: *Corporate Agriculture: The Hollow Men*, first shown on CBC's *The Nature of Things* on January 7, 2004. The documentary, hosted by David Suzuki, examines the application of the principles of the assembly line to pork and beef production and suggests that this has led to severe environmental, social and cultural problems. Most of the scenes in support of this critique were from North Carolina and Alberta farms controlled by multinational corporations.

The documentary also gives voice to those who are critical of this form of agriculture and to a moderate-size family farmer in Alberta concerned about his "factory farm" neighbours. Scenes of Ontario farms said to be part of the problem were very similar to the typical full-time enterprises run by many CFFO members. The video concluded with a promise of a second video showing alternatives¹² to factory farming and showed scenes of free-range pork production.

Participants had three ways to respond to the video: a plenary discussion, an evaluation in the participant survey and an opportunity to comment in the participant survey.

In the participant survey we asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. Sixty-seven percent (67%) agreed strongly or somewhat with the statement: "The documentary makes a valid point about industrial agriculture." Four percent (4%) disagreed strongly or somewhat. The rest were undecided (10%) or did not answer (19%). It was noteworthy that participants with farm corporations (74%) were more likely to agree with this statement than those with sole proprietorships (65%) and farm partnerships (59%).

Sixty-one percent (61%) supported "The documentary makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it does not present a viable family farm alternative." Nine percent (9%) disagreed. Sixty-seven percent (67%) gave support to: "The documentary gets its point across very effectively." Six percent (6%) did not give their support.

It was noteworthy that the statement, "The documentary makes a

¹² This second video was shown on *The Nature of Things* on January 14, 2004.

Table 6: The extent to which participants agreed or disagreed with statements about the documentary						
	agree strongly	agree somewhat		disagree somewhat	disagree strongly	N/A
1. The documentary makes a valid point about industrial agriculture.	32	35	10	4	0	19
2. The documentary makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it overstates the criticism.	17	32	21	13	9	12
3. The documentary makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it does not present a viable family farm alternative.	35	27	16	7	2	14
4. The documentary gets its point across very effectively.	37	30	16	5	0	12

valid point about industrial agriculture but it overstates the criticism,” drew agreement from only forty-nine percent (49%) and disagreement from twenty-two (22%). Those with gross farm incomes under \$100,000 were the least likely to agree that the criticism of industrial agriculture was overstated – thirty-six percent (36%) compared to fifty-seven percent (57%) for those with gross farm incomes of \$100,000 and over. A similar difference existed between those who estimated that less than 50% of their family income came from their farm businesses versus those who estimated more than 50% from their farm businesses – thirty-seven percent (37%) compared to fifty-seven (57%). Older farmers were also less likely to agree that the criticism was overstated – forty-four percent (44%) of those over 50 years old compared to fifty-five percent (55%) of those 50 years old and under agreed or strongly agreed that the criticism was overstated.

Thirteen percent (13%) of the verbal comments during the plenary discussion and those written on the participant survey were emphatically positive. They viewed Suzuki’s work as an effort to save the family farm. A large majority of the 142 comments were generally positive (72%) but included a concern about the documentary. Eighteen percent (18%) suggested that facts were missing; another seven percent (7%) said the facts were over-stated or one-sided while five percent (5%) noted that agriculture in North Carolina and Alberta should not be compared to Ontario. The lack of a credible alternative in the video

bothered twelve percent (12%) while nine percent (9%) pointed out that the documented concerns would not apply to the land-based livestock agriculture we have in Ontario and four percent (4%) expressed a desire to see the second video, which was described as documenting alternatives. Ten percent (10%) thought the documentary demonstrated the power of money and political connections while six percent (6%) added that it proved that factory farming should be banned.

About half of the nine percent (9%) of the comments that were decidedly negative, used phrases such as “too extreme” and “not

a lot of fact.” The other half worried that the video would create a negative image for all of agriculture and provide ammunition for anti-livestock activists. A small group of respondents were undecided (6%). Before making up their minds they wanted to know things such as the reaction of consumers to the video. A few just commented on the quality of the seminar.

Participants agreed that industrial agriculture has led to severe environmental, social and cultural problems as documented by the Suzuki video. They did not apply this criticism to their own farms. In the participant survey a two-thirds majority

agreed strongly or agreed somewhat that the documentary made a valid point. When asked if this valid point was overstated quite a few withdrew their support. The verbal and written comments confirmed that they agreed with Suzuki’s criticisms. However, their agreement was limited to the criticism of farming in North Carolina and Alberta. Many emphasized that the farming shown in the documentary did not compare to farming in Ontario and did not include the land-based livestock system that dominates Ontario.

Table 7: Participants’ overall reaction to the corporate farming documentary by theme (142 comments)

Emphatically positive	13
Positive but facts missing, overstated, one-sided or not comparable to Ontario	30
Positive but did not show a credible alternative, such as Ontario’s land-based livestock.	25
Positive and proves that money talks and factory farming should be banned.	16
Negative	9
Undecided	6

8 What is Driving Us to be So Cautious?

In breakout groups of three to five, participants were asked to identify what is driving society and farmers to be so cautious. Each group recorded their answers on a large flipchart sheet. Throughout the seminar series a total of 370 reasons for caution were recorded. Grouping them resulted in a number of themes for both society and farmers.

Society has become cautious because consumer attitudes and characteristics have changed, society's ability to take risks is fading, the media has emphasized perception rather than fact, trust throughout the food chain has eroded and governments have lost credibility.

According to participants, consumers have become more health conscious, are better educated on the connection between food and health, are more likely to make decisions based on emotions and have become detached from the source of their food. This disconnect, between consumers and producers, is turning into a fear of the unknown. Society, in general, has become risk-averse in response to globalization, to awareness created by the discovery in Canada of SARS, Avian flu and mad cow disease, to technology such as transgenic modification and in response to the terrorist threat. Concerns about the food chain are blown out of proportion by the media through sensationalism, emphasizing the risks and perceptions while not bothering with sound comparative facts. A lack of trust and fear of the unknown were blamed on anonymity – the lack of relationships between the participants in the food chain. Government credibility was described as non-existent because they had emphasized cheap food for too long.

Farmers are adopting more cautious approaches on their own farms because of market signals, their own desire to be responsible, fear of liability, the pressure of regulations and a sincere desire to reassure consumers. One of the breakout groups wrote: "We are no longer innocent until proven guilty."

Participants themselves have become more cautious and support

Table 8: Percent of reasons for becoming so cautious by theme (370 comments)

Society	
Consumer attitudes and characteristics	30
Society's ability to take risks	29
Media sensationalism	22
Lack of trust in the food chain	14
Government credibility eroded	5
Farmers	
Market signals	30
Stewardship	22
Pressure of regulations	20
Fear of liability	18
Reassure consumers	11

various assurance schemes to protect market shares and slim margins, to gain an edge in the marketplace, to be part of “new and improved” products, to access premiums, to open export markets and to meet and exceed standards. They recognized that the concentration of market clout by a few transnational corporations creates competition and access issues that keep them scrambling to keep up with the pace of change. Participants want to be good stewards. They wanted to be recognized as proactive, responsible, caring, constantly improving, professional, science-based, accountable and committed to sustainable agriculture. They wanted to be able to take pride in their production. Others felt forced into cautious activities to meet regulations, document their due diligence, create traceability and get the few who are careless to meet standards. One breakout group wrote “have to go along to get along.” A number have changed practices out of fear of litigation and nervousness about some of the recent experiences in the Canadian food system such as the discovery of mad cow disease and Avian flu. Others are participating in documented assurance programs to emphasize the need to maintain consumer confidence in farm practices and products.

9 What Needs to Change?

Having spent a day exploring all the cautions that have emerged in the food chain, the final plenary discussion and the final exercise in the participant survey were opportunities for each participant to identify what he or she thought needed to change. A total of 200 comments were recorded and their advice varied significantly.

Well over one-quarter (29%) called for changes in a range of farm policy issues. The largest group (11%) called for government policy that clearly favoured small farms and family farms, with regulations capping the size of subsidies and farms or tied livestock numbers to a land base. The second largest group (10%) focused their comments on the process of public policy. They were frustrated with the lack of common sense, practicality and leaders who are statesmen. Their solutions included more farmers in politics, less government, cost-benefit studies for all new regulations and proportional representation. The remaining eight percent (8%) proposed three policy changes: break up the corporate concentration that has emerged in the food chain, protect agriculture's land base and support better research.

Table 9: What participants think needs to change by theme (200 comments)

Farm Policy	29
Message about Farming	23
Farmers/Farming	22
Food Chain/Alliances	14
Resistance to Change	10
Comments on the Seminar	4

Twenty-three percent (23%) of the participants discussed the need to change the message about farming. A number of these comments (5%) were the general ones usually heard in our farm community: more communication, better education, tell more than science stories and focus on young people. Similarly, another group (5%) targeted the media with comments about holding the media more accountable for how they tell the farm story and going to journalist schools to participate in the development of future writers. A third subgroup (6%) proposed ways of engaging the public in farming rather than educating them about farming. They mentioned rural rambles, bringing consumers to your farm, farm internships, more accountability directly to consumers and restoring the trust of consumers. The largest group (8%), however, proposed changing the message about farming itself. They recommended that CFFO not try to speak for all of agriculture but clearly focus on the family farms. The message that a viable family farm alternative exists needs to be emphasized. They urged the creation of professional material of comparable quality to what

was seen during the seminar: “Where is our video with our story?”

Changing farmers and farming was the subject of twenty-two percent (22%) of the comments. Farmers need a change in attitude to one that is more proactive in dealing with change, avoids unrealistic expectations, studies the past, learns from mistakes and does their part to fix problems. Quite a few of these comments focused on values, the avoidance of greed, being good neighbours, stewardship and on being Christians. An environmentally and socially driven, rather than profit-driven, agriculture was their recommended change in farming. They emphasized the merits of a land-based farming system and proposed support for family farms willing to comply with society’s new expectations.

Fourteen percent (14%) recommended modifications to the food chain. They saw a need for long-term planning, re-evaluating globalization, looking closely at local markets, supporting supply management and requiring “cheap food” consumers to pay for impacts on community and environment. Various alliances were recommended: closer consumer-producer relationships, more cooperation, labeling to give consumers choice and making friends with environmentalists and people involved in social justice.

Not all participants responded to the presentations and conversations of the day with a readiness for change. Ten percent (10%) would rather resist more regulations, complicated forms, overload of paperwork and duplication of effort. A small number (4%) of the comments provided advice for improving future seminars or complimented the presentations.

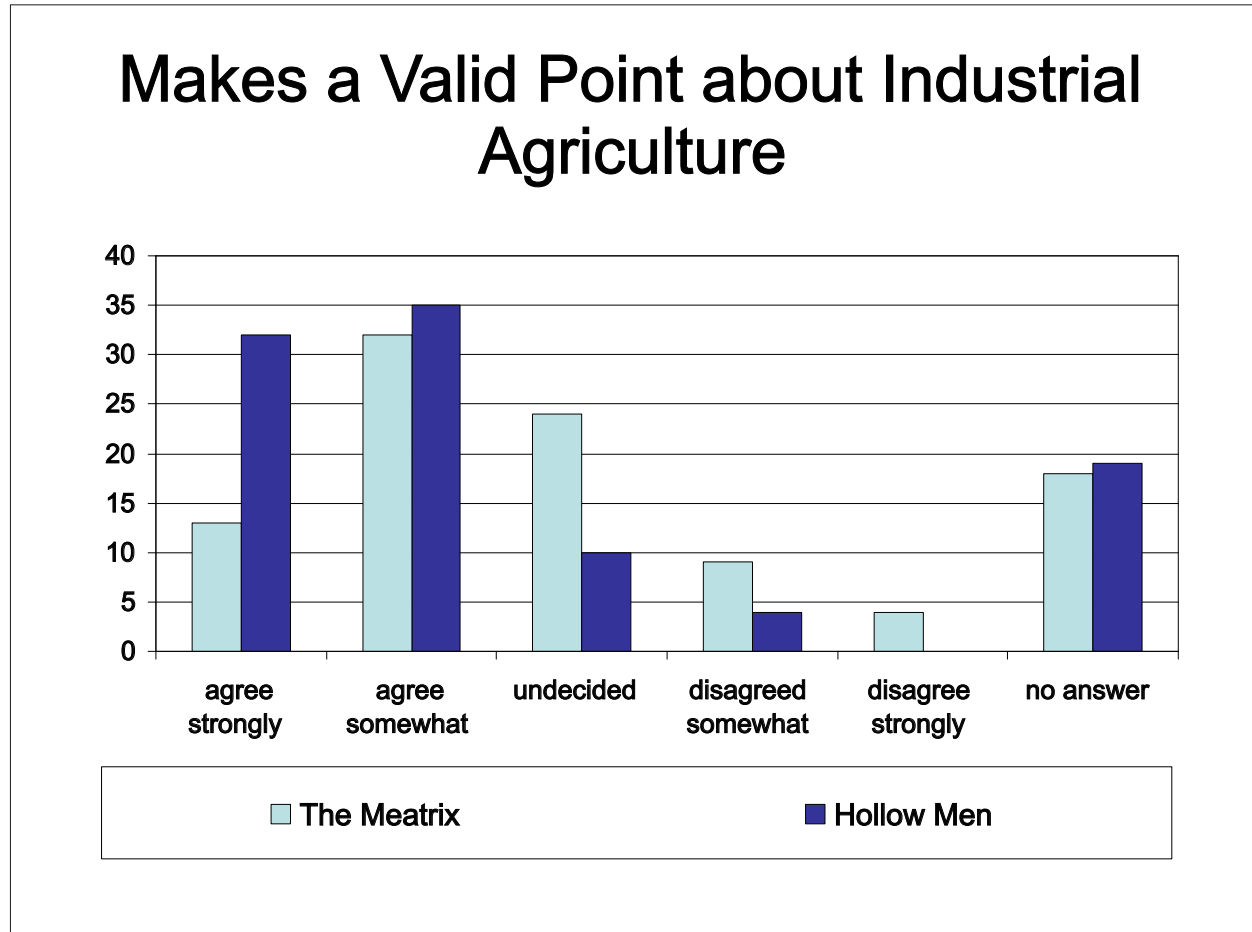
Participants were very willing to identify needed changes, however, less than one-quarter of the proposed changes focused on themselves and their businesses. Most wanted changes in farm policy, a change in society’s understanding of farming and restructuring of the food chain. Their reluctance to look to their own farm businesses first is linked to the wide variety of cautions that they are already expected to adopt. The desire to change the message about farming and thus change society’s understanding of agriculture speaks to a belief among a significant segment of the participants that many regulations, protocols, plans and certifications are driven by perceptions about farming, not reality.

10 Conclusions

- 1 Participants came to the seminar series with a wide range of involvements with regulations, protocols, plans and certifications. During introductions they shared one or two of these involvements, usually ones they believed are beneficial for the environment or food safety. These experiences were so varied that there was no one assurance scheme that attracted group-wide concern or support. Invariably as the listed involvements grew, a general concern about the amount, types and pervasiveness of the emerging rules in the food chain intensified.
- 2 The information provided by the seminars about the cautiousness emerging throughout our society confirmed for participants that, in general, society is much more cautious than they are. The information also confirmed that it is necessary to respond to the growing public cautiousness.
- 3 Based on the participant survey, most of the participants had a mixed reaction to the criticism of industrial agriculture as presented by *The Meatrix*. Many agreed that the flash video made a valid point but many more agreed that it made a valid point if they could also be critical of its message. In other words, participants shared general concerns about industrial agriculture's impact on animal welfare, antibiotic resistance, pollution and communities but found some or all the criticisms in the video exaggerated. The verbal and written comments confirm this conclusion. Most of those who had negative comments about the video accused it of oversimplifying, sensationalizing or failing to present an alternative. Seminar participants were critical of industrial agriculture but they want to be fair in their criticism. The video's choice of language, "animal cruelty, antibiotic resistant germs, massive pollution and destroyed communities," was too melodramatic for them. If they were to write their own criticism of industrial agriculture they would likely choose unremarkable phrases: animal welfare leaves something to be desired; antibiotic resistance will likely increase; there is more risk of pollution and the quality of life in local communities is being eroded.
- 4 Our four speakers gave participants little hope that an alternative to more regulations is possible. Forsyth encouraged them to challenge perceptions and mindsets by connecting food to land, health, healing for creation and celebration. Henson cautioned that the level of acceptable risk is declining and

urged participants to regain the status of trusted actors. MacRae proposed unusual alliances with environmental and consumers groups, especially for the official recognition of all the public goods and benefits – in addition to food – that farmers create for society. Maynard described a number of circumstances in which more regulations make sense: when not regulating is worse; when self-regulation results in a small percentage of unwilling players eroding the credibility of the many; when the burden of compliance is reasonable and when there is a balance between intent and application.

- 5 Our speakers also did not suggest that the emerging regulatory regimes would make our farming systems safer for our health or for our environment. Their messages focused on the merits of more regulations and other initiatives to respond to the growing risk averseness of our society and the public perception that our food system has become riskier for health and for environment. Their overall advice: farmers and farming actively need to challenge the public's conceptions and misconceptions.
- 6 Participants agreed that industrial agriculture has led to severe environmental, social and cultural problems as documented by the Suzuki video, *Corporate Agriculture: The Hollow Men*. They did not apply this criticism to their own farms. In the participant survey a two-thirds majority agreed strongly or agreed somewhat that the documentary made a valid point. When asked if this valid point was overstated quite a few withdrew their support. The verbal and written comments confirmed that they agreed with Suzuki's criticisms. However, their agreement was limited to the criticism of farming in North Carolina and Alberta. Many emphasized that the farming shown in the documentary did not compare to farming in Ontario and did not include the land-based livestock system that dominates Ontario.
- 7 Participants agreed that industrial agriculture has problems. Quite a few more agreed with the criticisms of industrial agriculture in the documentary (67%) than those who agreed with the criticisms made by the flash video (45%). The agreement with the criticism in the documentary was also stronger. The Meatrix overstated the concerns. The documentary received strong support from those who believed it applied to



farming in North Carolina and Alberta but not in Ontario.

- 8 Society has become cautious because consumer attitudes and characteristics have changed, society's ability to take risks is fading, the media has emphasized perception rather than fact, trust throughout the food chain has eroded and governments have lost credibility.
- 9 Farmers are adopting more cautious approaches on their own farms because of market signals, their own desire to be responsible, fear of liability, the pressure of regulations and a sincere desire to reassure consumers. One of the breakout groups wrote: "We are no longer innocent until proven guilty."

- 10** Participants were very willing to identify needed changes, however, less than one-quarter of the proposed changes focused on themselves and their businesses. Most wanted changes in farm policy, a change in society's understanding of farming and restructuring of the food chain. Their reluctance to look to their own farm businesses first is linked to the wide variety of cautions that they are already expected to adopt. The desire to change the message about farming and thus change society's understanding of agriculture speaks to a belief among a significant segment of the participants that many regulations, protocols, plans and certifications are driven by perceptions about farming, not reality.
- 11** A tension, which existed throughout the seminar series, was not captured in the data gathered by survey or flip chart notes. On the one hand there was a desire to regulate or stop some of the developments, such as the industrialization agriculture, that create the sensationalized press coverage about farming. On the other hand, the willingness to propose specific regulations was muted because of the expected spillover to their own businesses – their own businesses being similar to industrial agriculture in a number of respects.
- 12** Most participants were still willing to “go along to get along” with the growing cautiousness throughout the food chain and society at large. However, the level of frustration with having accommodated mounting cautions for more than a decade while the number of expected new rules just keeps rising is testing their willingness to continue. An urgent need exists to evaluate the wide variety of cautions that are being implemented, reduce their number and restructure them so that they are practical and meaningful to farm families and businesses.

Appendix A: Agenda

- Introductions
- Listing the cautions
- Introduction to the Challenge
- Flash video: The Meatrix
- Can Still More Regulations Make Farming Safe for Food and the Environment?
- Corporate Agriculture: The Hollow Men
- Why are we becoming so cautious?

Appendix B: Schedule for the Seminar Series

Date	Location
Monday, February 16	Simcoe OMAF Research Station
Tuesday, February 17	Ridgetown Ridgetown Agricultural College
Monday, February 23	Peterborough Rockhaven Motel
Tuesday, February 24	Belleville Westminster United Church
Friday, February 27	Barrie Northwest Barrie United Church
Monday, March 1	Ingersoll Ramshorn Restaurant
Tuesday, March 2	Seaforth Seaforth Agricultural Arena
Thursday, March 11	Chesley St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Friday, March 12	Fergus Wellington County Museum
Tuesday, March 23	Ancaster Redeemer University College
Friday, March 26	Richmond St. John's Anglican Church

Appendix C: Participant Survey

**Participant Survey
Out of an Abundance of Caution**

Date: _____, 2004

Location: _____

**Please share some basic information about yourself. Please do not add your name.
The information you provide is confidential.**

A . . . Farm Business Structure or Relationship to Agriculture

- Sole Proprietorship Farm
- Farm Partnership
- Farm Corporation
- Farm-related business
- Non-farm business
- Non-farm rural resident (population under 20,000)
- Urban (population 20,000 and over)

B . . . Gross Farm Income Category

- Not applicable
- \$0 to \$9,999
- \$10,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$499,999
- \$500,000 to \$999,999
- \$1,000,000 or more

C . . . Percent of Family Income from Farming

Estimate the percent of your family income that comes from your farm business:

- 0% to 25%
- 26% to 50%
- 51% to 75%
- 76% to 100%

D . . . Commodity

List the commodities that generate more than 25% of your gross farm income:

_____ ; _____ ; _____

E . . . Age

- Less than 20
- 20 to 30
- 31 to 40
- 41 to 50
- 51 to 60
- Over 60

F . . . Member of CFFO

- Yes
- No

**G . . . Participation in Previous
CFFO Workshop Series**

- All
- 3 to 5
- 1 or 2
- 0

H . . The Meatrix

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements. Circle a number where 5 is “agree strongly” and 1 is “disagree strongly”.	Agree			Disagree	
1. The Meatrix makes a valid point about industrial agriculture.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The Meatrix makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it overstates the criticism.	5	4	3	2	1
3. The Meatrix makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it does not present a viable family farm alternative.	5	4	3	2	1
4. The Meatrix is a clever flash video that gets its point across very effectively.	5	4	3	2	1

Comments: _____

I . . . Corporate Agriculture: The Hollow Men

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements. Circle a number where 5 is “agree strongly” and 1 is “disagree strongly”.	Agree			Disagree	
1. The documentary makes a valid point about industrial agriculture.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The documentary makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it overstates the criticism.	5	4	3	2	1
3. The documentary makes a valid point about industrial agriculture but it does not present a viable family farm alternative.	5	4	3	2	1
4. The documentary gets its point across very effectively.	5	4	3	2	1

Comments: _____

J . . . What needs to change?

Comments: _____

Appendix D: Personal and Business Information about Workshop Participants

D1 Percent of participants by farm business structure or relationship to agriculture

Sole Proprietorship Farm	40
Farm Partnership	29
Farm Corporation	23
Farm-related Business	2
Non-farm rural resident (population under 20,000)	2
Urban (population 20,000 and over)	2
No Answer ⁵	1
Non-farm Business	0

D2 Percent of participants by gross farm income category

\$0 to \$9,999.00	6
\$10,000 to \$49,999.00	23
\$50,000 to \$99,999.00	11
\$100,000 to \$499,999.00	31
\$500,000 to \$999,999.00	14
\$1,000,000 or more	2
No Answer	12

D3 Estimated percent of family income from farming

0% to 25%	18
26% to 50%	14
51% to 75%	10
76% to 100%	53
No Answer	5

⁵ Throughout this report we have identified the number of participants who did not complete the various exercises in our participant survey. The reasons for “No Answer” include: the participant arrived late and missed the time for completing one or more of the exercises, the participant left early and the time for completing one or more of the exercises had not arrived, or the participant declined to complete an exercise or part of an exercise.

D4 Percent of participants by commodity

Commodity	Total Number	Percent of Participants
Cash Crops	84	39
Dairy	58	27
Beef	59	27
Pork	29	13
Poultry	27	12
Sheep	15	7
Not applicable	15	7
Horticulture	12	6
Off farm income	8	4
Custom work	6	3
Forestry	3	1
Horses	3	1
Agri-tourism	1	0

Participants were asked to list one or more commodities that generate more than 25% of their gross farm income. As a result the total adds up to well over 100%

D5 Percent of participants by age group

Less than 20	0
20 to 30	2
31 to 40	11
41 to 50	29
51 to 60	30
Over 60	26
No Answer	2

D6 Percent of participants by CFFO membership

Yes	88
No	10
No Answer	2

D7 Percent of participants by participation in previous CFFO Workshop Series

All	15
3 to 5	33
1 or 2	28
None	22
No Answer	2

Notes:

Out of an Abundance of Caution



Notes:

