

RURAL WOMEN'S FORUM
Muenster, Saskatchewan
November 24-26, 2006

Joanne Havelock
Noreen Johns
Diane Martz
With assistance from Noreen Streuby

Project #147



centres of excellence
for WOMEN'S HEALTH

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pour LA SANTÉ DES FEMMES

PRAIRIE WOMEN'S HEALTH
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
RESEARCH ■ POLICY ■ COMMUNITY

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Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE) is one of the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health, funded by the Women's Health Contribution Program of Health Canada. The PWHCE supports new knowledge and research on women's health issues; and provides policy advice, analysis and information to governments, health organizations and non-governmental organizations. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policy of the PWHCE or Health Canada.

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INTRODUCTION

This document reports on the Rural Women's Forum held November 24-26, 2006 in Muenster, Saskatchewan. This report is similar in style to other reports from rural Women's Action Workshops, but with information particular to the Provincial Forum.

Work with rural women began as a follow-up to the *Rural, Remote and Northern Women's Health* report, and was moved forward by the creation of the Rural Women's Issues Committee of Saskatchewan (RWICS) in 2004.

Rural, Remote And Northern Women's Health Report

In June 2004, the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE) and the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health (CEWH) released the report *Rural, Remote and Northern Women's Health: Research and Policy Directions*. This was a comprehensive, national project on the health concerns of women who live in rural, remote and northern Canada (see page 3). As requested by the community women involved in the project, a plain language community kit was developed shortly afterwards. PWHCE also committed to providing other follow-up to the research. In September 2004 PWHCE began working with rural women in Saskatchewan as one step in carrying forward the *Rural, Remote and Northern Women's Health* report's recommendations.

A Rural Women's Health Workshop was held November 17, 2004 at Christ Lutheran Church in Young, Saskatchewan. The purpose of the workshop was to offer women the opportunity to become familiar with the national Report's recommendations and determine other recommendations and follow-up action for Saskatchewan. Some of the participants had participated in focus groups as part of the initial research for the national project. New participants included rural women, Métis women and Francophone women.

The women at the workshop identified a wide range of factors affecting the well-being of rural women in their local communities, and began determining actions to address these factors. It was evident that more time was needed to move from ideas to actions. The Rural Women's Issues Committee of Saskatchewan was formed at that meeting, to determine how this group might meet again, and also how to involve other rural women in similar events.

RWICS Workshops

RWICS held a second workshop in Young, Saskatchewan on March 15, 2005, sponsored by PWHCE. To address the issues identified at the November meeting the women produced detailed action plans and made personal commitments to move the actions forward. In 2005 and 2006 RWICS received grants from the Women's Program of Status of Women Canada which, combined with continued support from the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, the Centre for Rural Studies and Enrichment in Muenster, Saskatchewan, and the support of RWICS' enthusiastic volunteer committee members, enabled RWICS to propel its work.

As a result, additional workshops were held in rural Saskatchewan:

- April 25th - 26th, 2005 in Nipawin
- May 17th -18th, 2005 in Swift Current
- April 7th - 8th, 2006 in Carlyle
- October 20-21, 2006 in Unity
- October 27-28, 2006 at Christopher Lake

And to complete the process, the Rural Women's Policy Forum was held on November 24-26 at St. Peter's College in Muenster, Saskatchewan.

RWICS Goals

Saskatchewan has a strong history with women and women's organizations leading the way to many policy improvements and important social reforms. In recent years, it has been more difficult for rural women's organizations to remain active and present their views. This has been partly due to factors such as the aging of the rural population and reductions in funding to women's organizations. Another major factor is the heavy workload carried by rural and farm women. In addition to the homemaking, parenting and maintaining community organizations, there is the paid work, including both on-farm and off-farm work for farm women. In the overload, community involvement may not be possible, and separate women's organizations often do not flourish.

In its work RWICS hopes to address some of these difficulties by linking with individuals and organizations working to improve the situation of rural women and bringing the recommendations of rural women forward to decision-makers. Our goal is to support and encourage rural women to name their own issues, create their personal action plans and achieve their own visions.

Rural, Remote and Northern Women's Health National Project

In 2001 the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health (CEWH) and Health Canada started a two-year national study on rural, remote and northern women's health. The final Report was released in June 2004.

The purpose of the study was to develop a policy framework and a research agenda on rural and remote women's health in Canada. The Centres had noticed that although there was new interest in doing research on rural peoples' health, and there was endless discussion about health care and health care reforms in the media and elsewhere, there did not seem to be much understanding at all of the needs and concerns of women. Although 30% of Canada's population lives in rural and remote locations and most rural residents are female, rural women in Canada have largely been invisible to researchers and policy makers.

The study was funded by the Women's Health Bureau of Health Canada with assistance from the Office of Rural Health (Health Canada) and the Institute for Gender and Health of the Canadian Institutes for Health Research. A research steering committee, composed of the CEWH directors and seven other academic and community-based researchers, and a representative from Health Canada, directed the study.

Rural women were deliberately consulted so that they could contribute their knowledge to help develop better policies and programs and to create effective research and program agendas for rural women's health. All the work was done in both French and English.

The study included a number of steps:

1. A roundtable discussion involving rural residents and health researchers in October 2001.
2. A thorough review of Canadian literature in English and French on topics relating to women, health and rural living.
3. Twenty-eight focus groups, video and teleconferences from coast to coast to coast (including remote communities and the high Arctic) involving over 200 women between November 2001 and January 2003.
4. A second roundtable for rural health policy makers in November 2002.
5. A national consultation in March 2003 at which 50 researchers, participants, policy makers and managers from all parts of Canada addressed the question: "What are the challenges and opportunities for ensuring the best state of women's health in your community?"

Members of the steering committee analyzed the data at various points, with all the findings synthesized in a final **Summary Report, Rural, Remote and Northern Women's Health: Policy and Research Directions**.

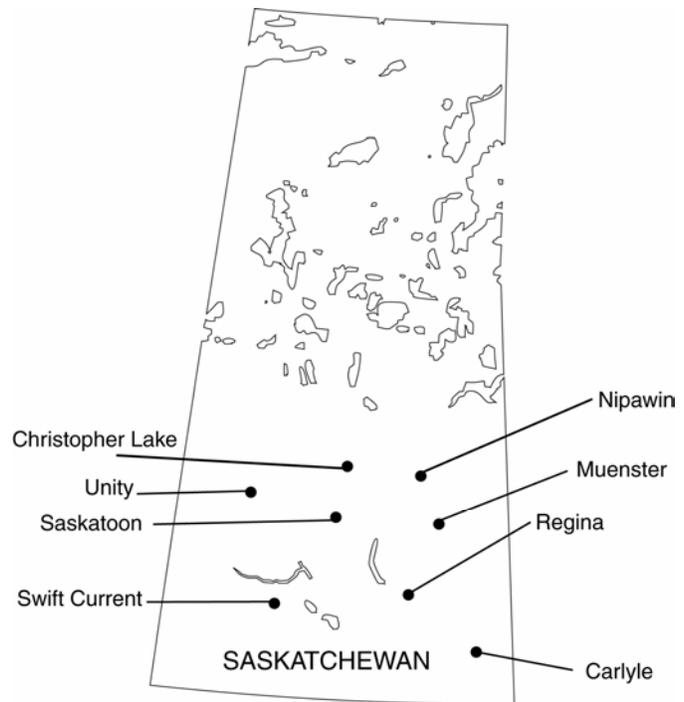
Women who were involved in the national study asked that a plain-language kit be developed to help share and disseminate the research findings more widely. The **Community Kit** provides summaries and background information about the national research project, as well as information for local communities to use in advocating for change.

The Report is written in sections that can be used together or separately. The Report and the Community Kit are on the PWHCE website and available from:

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THE WORKSHOP PROCESS

The Forum was held at St. Peter's College in Muenster, Saskatchewan with seventeen women attending from several nearby communities and from more distant locations. They included women who had participated in the RWICS workshops in Carlyle, Christopher Lake, Unity and Nipawin; rural women who were new to the group; and representatives of Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food and Status of Women Canada. A number of other women told us they would have liked to participate, but health, work / family / community commitments, long driving distances, and a winter blizzard limited their attendance.



The meeting room featured a display of relevant reports from the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, a display showing the origins and achievements of RWICS, and a table with information about organizations providing services of interest to rural women.

The event started Friday November 24 in the evening and continued on Saturday and Sunday. Some participants were not able to attend until Saturday, but most stayed for the entire 3 days. The meeting convened with introductions and an overview of the workshop process by facilitator Noreen Johns. Joanne Havelock of PWHCE described the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health and the Rural, Remote and Northern Women's Health Report that inspired this process.

Photo Wall

Participants had been invited to bring a picture or two of themselves and their home, community or business. These were displayed on the wall. The women took turns talking about their pictures and why they were important. This was an excellent way for the women to share experiences about their lives as rural women.

Topic Discussion

Discussion topics were chosen to represent the major themes that had come up repeatedly in the regional workshops. The major discussion topics included Rural Women's Health, Women in the Rural Economy and Women and Leadership/Power Networking. Each discussion began with an overview of the topic area and then women broke into groups to discuss the issues they thought were most pressing. Women were asked to consider: policy, program or other changes needed; the individual, local, provincial or national actions that would lead to change; and, to propose specific actions with realistic timelines.

As part of the introduction on Saturday morning, Joanne Havelock noted some of the key actions that had been recommended by participants in the previous workshops. The intent was to move from these actions to create a summarized action plan. However due to the creativity of the participants at the previous workshops there were many actions listed and in the short time available it was difficult, especially for new participants to prioritize all of the recommended actions in a comprehensive manner. However, prioritization did occur in the small group discussions where participants selected from the previous recommendations which of the goals, policy or program changes within their topic were higher priorities and outlined the action steps needed. The results of these discussions are outlined in the following pages.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

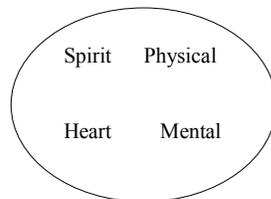
RURAL WOMEN'S HEALTH

Three topics were discussed under Rural Women's Health, these included:

- mental health,
- health information and patient advocates, and
- self care.

1. MENTAL HEALTH

- a. **The major issues surrounding mental health** include the need to educate youth, avoid stigmatizing mental health, address post-partum depression, address bulimia, and deal with the systemic origin of mental illness (environment and/or genetic predisposition). Women felt that mental health should be incorporated in health education. However, they also noted that more than education is needed – we need **wisdom** to deal with concerns such as: teen pregnancy, drugs, smoking, and violent relationships.
- b. Mental health is closely linked to other aspects of health. We need a holistic view. Women saw mental health as part of the health of the whole person. This idea is supported by the Medicine Wheel model where everything is in harmony.



- c. A good motto for mental health is, “**Everything in moderation, nothing to excess.**”
- d. Bridgepoint is a good example of **treatment with counseling and nutrition** as part of a more holistic solution.
- e. **Illnesses such as schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, etc., have several causes**, some genetic, some environmental, some of it due to the way people are treated. There are also nutritional effects on mental health. Pesticides also affect the nervous system.

- f. **How we produce our food** affects how we live our lives. Going organic is not the way for everyone. There needs to be a balance between having weeds, cultivation that may let the soil blow away, and responsible use of chemicals or technology. Education is needed around these issues and enforcement of pertinent regulations.
- g. **Women need to gain control over their bodies.** The role played by psychiatrists need to be examined. We also needs to consider the balance between the use of pharmaceuticals versus getting one's life in order or counseling. There should be caution because there are often side effects of pharmaceuticals, anti-depressants don't always work, and one can develop addictions to some prescription drugs.
- h. A **systemic change in advertising** is needed. People should be encouraged to check out the Dove website which has an agenda of challenging women's self image and the corporate/media concept of beauty.
- i. **More mental health workers are needed in rural areas,** including more psychiatric nurses, social workers, psychologists, and Registered Psychiatric Nurses. We should encourage staff with education and experience working in rural areas to stay – provide good salaries and make other efforts to reduce turnover. Rural people should be trained for mental health work in rural areas and offered bursaries. Mental health workers should also be encouraged to **work with** their clients rather than “imposing solutions”.
- j. **The community has a role** in providing positive peer pressure and support, such as Elders in native culture, mentoring, and grandmothers. Reading program in schools (read or listen) are important – this is supported by the Saskatchewan Literacy Network. Unfortunately SWI and other women's groups are no longer funded, but have been important in the past and can play a role in the future. To provide support we need to encourage people who need support groups to join, paying attention to how it can fit with their lives and the timing of meetings. We need to encourage other voices in our communities. There is especially a gap for rural youth aged 16 to 26 years.
- k. The farm stress line is an important service for rural Saskatchewan. We need to encourage Saskatchewan

Agriculture and Food to **promote the Farm Stress Line** as a tool for everyone, both farm and rural. About half of the callers are men, half are women. Access and waiting lists for mental health counseling in rural areas is a concern. Encourage local groups to listen and care, to talk things through.

1. **Implement the Kirby Report**, which is a national report but deserves support at the provincial level, and from the grassroots. Gender place analysis is needed for this report.

2. HEALTH INFORMATION AND PATIENT ADVOCATES

- a. **Understanding between health care providers and receivers.** There is a lack of understanding between health care service receivers (HCSR) and health care providers (HCP) and this goes both ways. Patients don't understand what HCP are saying and HCP don't understand what patients are saying. This could be addressed through a number of actions. HCSR could speak to training schools about issues and experiences from the patient perspective and what they need from the HCP. HCSR could make presentations to conferences, such as the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations. Community knowledge could be increased about patient rights and advocacy, using the Public Legal Education Association as a model. We could build capacity within HCP to assist HCSR in identifying what questions they need to ask their doctors. An important issue is language barriers with HCP - doctors and patients from different countries and cultural backgrounds may have trouble communicating with each other. Ensuring there are not medication spelling errors and unreadable prescriptions would be part of good communications by physicians. Pharmacists are doing an excellent job in explaining things to HCSR.
- b. One action to determine the need in this area would be to **conduct a focus group of Health Care Receivers** to ask for testimonials, and what they identify as their needs within the health care system. This focus group could inform the development of a kit that anyone could work with in their local community, including speaking notes and a power point presentation. It could be presented to: SAHO, universities, government, professional associations, health boards, Community Advisory Network Groups, and community consultations. A second package could be developed to present

to community groups to facilitate a discussion around community members communicating with HCP. Patients need to know their rights. The Public Legal Education Association is a group that might be interested in this project.

- c. **Information Access:** Farm Stress Line Connections Directory will connect you to whatever you need to know in Saskatchewan: services, service clubs, organizations. We need to lobby the Minister of Agriculture, to keep the Farm Stress Line Connections Directory in agriculture and to advertise its existence. Also, business cards could be distributed that have local services and numbers and describe the services.
- d. **Improve information links between hospitals & family physicians:** For example someone that was in the emergency room in the City was seen two weeks later by their family physician, who had not yet received the information about the patient's stay in hospital. There are a lot of problems around transportation and a need to coordinate appointments so fewer trips to the town or city are needed.

3. SELF CARE

- a. Written by a Forum participant who is a farm woman

Self-care is not separateness.

We can view our skin as a protection - doing a bit of a paradigm shift. We can see it as a connective tissue connecting us to the environment, other people etc, in a perfect world that would be health-enhancing, and include respect for diversity, loving and supportive relationships among people, races and the natural environment. I view women (and I speak from my experience with farm women) as having a strong intuitive sense that has been neglected and put down if voiced. There is much potential for healing of communities, our planet etc., if these intuitive selves found articulation.

Self-care, to me, means self-nurturing and expressions from that center. Women traditionally have sacrificed focusing on their own needs until children, animals, husbands, etc., have been looked after.

We live in a culture where the emphasis is on doing everything as soon as possible. Human relationships suffer from dominance of economic considerations. Our non-sustainable heavy footprints threaten the ecology of our planet. Much of our emphasis for change is directed at policy change and that is good! But we need to balance policy change with self-care.

Is there possibility for action on the other side of the coin with a focus on self-care? Of tuning in and recognizing our needs, physically emotionally and spiritually? For example, saying, "No; I need more time." "I need the power that comes from making decisions that affect my life". All these especially when challenged by technological and scientific propaganda which basically says, "This is progress, the change we propose is good. Let us look after you and Trust Us."

- b. *The Action in this area would be identifying infrastructure needs that would come from local peoples' interactions and with broader connections to people with expertise if wanted. I guess that I am looking for a balance between policy initiatives and local initiatives. Farm women could be key to local initiatives if their intuitiveness could surface and be supported. Agriculture could be transformed to a balance of economics, social and environmental infrastructures. It is important that what you do locally gets translated to global levels.*

WOMEN IN THE RURAL ECONOMY

Four topics were discussed that explored aspects of women in the rural economy. These included:

- an adequate return and income for farm families,
- recognition and money for work,
- food security and nutrition, and
- rural depopulation.

1. ADEQUATE RETURN AND INCOME FOR FARM FAMILIES

- a. **Compare the Share Document¹:** This is an excellent document that should be used to inform others. We could develop a distribution and communication strategy in conjunction with others, speak about it at organizations and meetings, send it out to decision-makers and ask for a response, do a media release, and circulate the report to libraries and credit unions. The report is useful for: food policy development, ammunition for farmers, and informing urban audiences. Working with the Compare the Share material, a media documentary could be made, with visuals such as: a

¹ Diane J. F. Martz, *The Farmer's Share: Compare the Share*, Update 2006, Centre for Rural Studies and Enrichment, St. Peter's College, Muenster, Saskatchewan, November, 2006. This document compares farm gate prices to consumer prices. <http://www.crse.ca/publications.html>

shopping cart with food versus non-food costs; highly processed food (rubber chicken); and present and past prices for consumers and farmers. The documentary could be played on W-5, CBC, Shaw Cable, SCN, and Farm Gate. Media students could help out and so could some university faculty, and the communications department in Agriculture and Food.

- b. **GDP and agriculture:** There needs to be a discussion about a survey of GDP based on agriculture where urban people thought the contribution of agriculture to GDP was higher than it is.
- c. Determine the feasibility of a **tax on food** given directly to farmers.
- d. **Question the benefits of value-added production for farmers.** Value-added production has a weak foundation unless primary producers are paid adequately. Value-added may be occurring on the backs of farmers.
- e. **Acknowledge that primary producers need to be in the equation.** Some good signs are that the Farm Leaders Advisory Group in Saskatchewan says primary producers are important, human capital was ranked as the #1 concern. Agrivision emphasizes economic and social capital.

2. RECOGNITION AND MONEY FOR WORK

- a. The Government of Canada should establish a **guaranteed annual income** for women's work and farm work instead of just "3 ½" wages (*3 meals a day and ½ a bed*).
- b. The Government of Canada should **recognize women and men as equal partners**.
- c. The Government of Canada should **change tax laws that keep farm women in poverty**. One example is that farmers can write off expenses on their farm, but only a portion on the house, consequently the house is left in disrepair. Another example is that when a farmer goes to town for lunch, he can claim it as an expense. If he eats at home he can't. Women's work is not recognized. How would the farm exist without meals?

- d. The Government of Canada should create a process whereby **farm women have access to C.P.P. and disability**. Currently it is difficult for farm women to pay into CPP. Women also need to understand income splitting. Women need to be encouraged to apply to have their Canada Pension Plan adjusted for child raising years.
- e. **Training programs** that require members of the farm family to go elsewhere means that they are living off the farm, which leads to the destruction of the family farm network. When one partner is left working alone on the farm this becomes a safety issue.
- f. **Attitudes towards farmers** need to change. Federal and provincial governments could help. The change needs to occur through education. We need to change our language so that a farm housewife is called a farmer since her work is an essential part of the farm. Government documents (for subsidies) are very degrading to women, they assume that the male is the dominant partner in the farm. Cows and the grain in the bin get more recognition on the forms than the female spouse.

3. FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

- a. **Food is not just a commodity:** People need to eat but even in Canada they may not have the money. People need food security. To change the emphasis on food as a commodity, systemic issues need to be addressed locally and internationally.
- b. Federal policies in Canada do not support **maintaining farmers on the land**.
- c. We need to **produce food locally**. Importing a large percentage of our food leads to insecurity in the food system and a lack of sovereignty. For example, it could be a problem if food from United States was stopped at the border or if there was a trucking strike. In the current situation we have fewer markets for farm produce, less control over food quality, plus the environmental costs of transporting the produce. In many countries, farm produce is produced for international sale rather than for local consumption and this creates a problem where there is not enough food for local consumption in those countries. Local food produce could be requested by consumers. Local stores could supply local food and label the

origin of produce. We need to determine how to address the problem that large chains have large bulk buying contracts that can prevent them from buying locally.

- d. **A fair income for farm products** is needed. Commodity prices are low, input costs high. This needs to be dealt with by provincial and federal governments and internationally.
- e. **Grain used for fuel** – is it an economic opportunity or a waste of food resources? Farmers should not be forced into this diversification out of economic desperation. People need to know the facts on ethanol, think long term.
- f. **Good farming practices**: Mining of the land reduces food quality. Pesticides are a concern. We need good farming practices. With economically viable organic food production farmers will choose better options.
- g. **Organic food production needs to be defined**. There is confusion over what is organic, whether a product has had chemicals applied or whether it is a genetically modified product. Clear definitions are needed. Faster progress is needed on international community certification standards by governments, producers and involved organizations. Consumers need to become better informed. The federal government could be more proactive re organic produce in carrying the responsibility for labeling product regulations and some food inspection. Farmers can support the organic crop improvement association. Internationally the Via Campesina organization works on this issue. International organizations are working to develop standards for organic produce.
- h. **Public health regulations and food inspection processes** can restrict opportunities. Some food inspectors have restricted products at farmers markets, and fowl suppers, closing them down, preventing economic opportunities and community culture. There is inconsistency in enforcing regulations. We should continue to be able to have local sales of produce. The provincial government should review public health regulations to ensure they are reasonable and ensure regulations are enforced consistently.

Labeling requirements can reduce local opportunities. Don't have labeling standards too high and too costly. The government should review labeling and other standards for other items. Perhaps there could be different labeling rules for

items sold locally or we could have the requirements be based on based on the size/amount of produce sold by the producer.

- i. Funding cutbacks mean **fewer meat inspections are being done**, creating potential problems regarding the quality of food. In Ontario, some small abattoirs closed because inspection was not available. The federal government should reinstate funding for meat inspectors.
- j. There is **uncertainty over the quality of food from international sources**. Consumers and governments need to push for international standards.
- k. **Nutrition education**. Many do not know how to make nutritious food especially on a low budget. Compulsory Home Economics classes would help. Saskatchewan Learning should expand home economics classes. Nutrition education should be given to children in schools.
- l. **Community kitchens** could meet a need for good meals and community connections, build networks and share knowledge about nutrition through the generations. Farmers, dietitians and home economics teachers could organize community kitchens where parents and youth can meet together and prepare a main course dish to take home using locally produced food. This could be a family night in a town hall that would include activities for other family members.
- m. **Poor nutrition in schools**, bad lunches in lunch programs, pop and junk food machines. Parents can ask their local school boards to make changes, eliminate junk food machines, and provide better hot lunches.
- n. **Many choose bad (non-nutritious) foods** in grocery stores, rinks, and fast food restaurants. It would be better if there were good food choices available to enable people to choose to buy and eat good food. Make nutritious food available everywhere. Make efforts within families to emphasize nutrition. The system needs to be changed away from the emphasis on junk food based on gaining profit. The media could stress healthy foods.
- o. **Poor can't afford good food**. Adequate income is needed for the poor. Raise provincial welfare rates. Also, there are poor people in rural areas who may not receive assistance. (Farmers cannot get social assistance due to their assets. They may be

eligible for the Saskatchewan employment supplement, but it is based on the previous year's income.)

- p. **Some farm families can't afford good food.** Farmers should not have to work off-farm to support their farms. A better income for farm products and an adequate return on investment is needed. Advocate for a guaranteed annual income for farm families.
- q. There is often **no time to prepare good food from scratch.** Families and employers need to balance work and family responsibilities so it is possible to take time to prepare food.
- r. After public events, leftovers must be thrown out and **food wasted.** Make it possible to take more good food to food banks or organizations that can use them. Provincial government public health regulations need to be examined.

4. RURAL DEPOPULATION

- a. **Immigration.** Is immigration a viable solution? Communities have to provide ESL and deal with cultural and gender issues to make immigration successful. Communities who have dealt with these issues could benefit others by sharing lessons learned.
- b. **Childcare.** Can the success of the St. Brieux Childcare be duplicated? Can it be publicized as a success story? Other good examples included a child care facility located in the school in one Saskatchewan community, with students receiving credits for time worked in the child care centre. This encouraged high school students with babies to continue their education, and provided parenting education while providing the child care needed in a community.
- c. **Women in non-traditional work.** Some examples of good programs are: Women Building Futures Program (Edmonton) and the Women in Trades and Technology Program (Saskatchewan). Program eligibility may be an issue for farm women who want to transition back to work, but are not eligible for EI. Employers need to be pressured to get women to move into apprenticeship programs.
- d. **How do we keep employees in rural areas?** Many young people come to rural areas for job experience and then move to urban areas. It is very difficult to keep them in rural jobs and

thus we have rapid turnover of employees. Will the incentives for health care workers to work 1-2 years in rural Saskatchewan contribute to rural repopulation? How do you attract young families who will stay?

- e. **Housing needs in rural communities.** No housing is available for young families. There are few incentives to build a house in a rural town - costs are the same as in the city, but you get better return on investment if you build in Saskatoon.
- f. **Re-vision your community.** How do we create a community that is attractive to young families? Promote what your community provides.
- g. **Women should be fairly compensated** for their work in childcare, eldercare, farm work etc.
- h. **Education on farms:** Promote farms as places for city kids to come as part of their education, for example children could study the biology curriculum in a live setting.
- i. **Enhanced education / community schools.** Approach the school division to establish community daycares integrated into schools in which kids get credit for working in the day care. We also need to connect with the public health nurse. Is there an opportunity to access federal childcare funds for an initiative like this? Schools could play a much greater role in the community, e.g. in one school music teachers are giving music lessons in the school during school hours on a piano bought by parents.
- j. **Involve unions in rural planning.** It is important to involve unions in planning team approaches in rural initiatives. Rural people need to be encouraged to be involved in unions.

RURAL WOMEN, LEADERSHIP AND NETWORKS

The discussion about rural women's leadership focused on:

- women's organizations and networks,
- leadership training, and
- culture and the media.

1. WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS

- a. **Funding for women's projects:** There is a serious need for a funding pool to fund women's projects. Core funding is critical so that organizations do not have to continue to adjust their identity to the project funding opportunities they find. We need to find out what is available to women. The Canadian Women's Foundation is Toronto based with a web based network and chooses yearly priorities for its funding grants.
- b. **Ensure accessibility for women to economic opportunities:** Advocate for family friendly policies. Find information on "*Balancing Work and Family Alliance*" part of this project is looking at rural areas. Approach the REDA's to explore what is available for women. Encourage REDA's to expand opportunities for women. Community Futures Groups are another possibility. Connect with Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan organization.
- c. **Things to do for the Rural Women's Issues Committee of Saskatchewan**
 - i) **Explore models of engaging rural women:** Home economists in Manitoba organize rural women's conferences with no expectation of commitment of the women. Explore how we can work more effectively with the Rural Team Saskatchewan (a committee that brings together federal and provincial government departments with an interest in rural issues along with academics and representatives of provincial NGO's). Learn more about Social Enterprise, non-profit groups with an entrepreneurial arm.
 - ii) **Keep the women who we have already connected to engaged.** The website needs to be worked on to ensure it is a valuable tool for women. Resources need to be committed.

- iii) **Reconnect with RWICS groups in the New Year.** Find out what their next steps have been. Keep women connected through Internet and mail to those who do not have the Internet. Consider talk mail.
- iv) **Find ways to initiate action at the local levels – e.g. “Action Southwest”**
- v) **Promote community advisory networks.** Find out how the Community Advisory Networks are working in each Health Region. Have a successful Community Advisory Network make a presentation to the Saskatoon Health Region CAN regarding how they work.
- vi) **Establish a women’s health advisory group** in Saskatchewan around issues of health – this is happening in Manitoba.

2. LEADERSHIP TRAINING

- a. **Boards and Commissions:** A key issue is how people get on Boards and Commissions for Agriculture. In some cases, the Minister asks organizations to send in a name. The organizations are asked to consider equity. Although women are encouraged, the Minister cannot demand that organizations send a woman. Women interested in serving on government appointed boards and commissions can submit a resume to the Special Advisor to Cabinet. They find people for positions on boards and commissions throughout the provincial government. The process in that office is that they receive applications, create a list of people interested, and match people to positions.

For other board selection processes, for example Councils, people are approached based on their expertise, in some cases with consideration of gender equity. Women need to encourage other women to let their names stand for these various positions.

What it means to be on a Board: The government pays mileage and honorariums. Most boards and commissions meet 4-5 times per year. Being involved is a good learning opportunity. Women need the support of employers to take time off.

An example is the Mental Health Advisory Council that would be involved in making action plans and advising the Minister of Health.

RWICS has prepared an information sheet on applying to sit on Boards and Commissions. RWICS can inform women about Boards and Commissions.

- b. **There is a lack of training opportunities for young farm women and women farmers.** Some organizations have training and workshops on lobbying and media training such as how to get points across in 30-second sound bites. Collaborations could be with AIMS (Agricultural Institute of Management Services), Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Credit Union System, the Regional Colleges, etc. Tasks would include: talking to people directly and getting them involved, working with employers, paying people to do training, making the training down-to-earth, promoting the training, being good role models for younger farmers, and building continuity in programs.
- c. **RWICS could offer leadership training / board basics.** Leadership, community building, school as community school with programs for whole area, invite First Nations elders and women.

Things to remember:

- Don't be afraid to be on a board with men.
- Do your homework, be prepared for meetings.
- Don't sit by yourself, pick someone and ask if you can sit with them.
- Be prepared to learn as you go.
- Ask questions because it clarifies things for everyone.
- Common sense goes a long way.
- Listen.
- Be willing to talk on the radio.

Mentorship:

- Look outside the box.
- Use women's voices.
- Mentor each other by sharing and reviewing each other's letters and briefs.
- Build teams - some people have ideas, others know spelling and grammar.
- Bounce ideas off each other.

- Look out for younger women to encourage and mentor as they bring new ideas.
 - Encourage young people to take on community leadership.
- d. **In any organization** we can learn and model co-operation, remember our history, and celebrate our achievements

3. CULTURE AND MEDIA

Rural issues and people are sometimes in the news (Country Canada, On the Road Again) but rural women are rarely in the news.

There is a need for more accurate portrayals of life for farm women. Most shows care about the big city and big money. Extreme situations are usually portrayed and the average family is not portrayed. The view of women often stresses the negative or seedy side, we need positive depictions. Some shows are alright.

What is the image portrayed in TV shows featuring rural or farm women such as Corner Gas, Green Acres, the Diviners, Little House on the Prairie? Fear on the Farm is one rural documentary about family violence. Women in the North are featured in My Life with Grey Owl, North of 60, Northern Exposure. There are also many authors in Saskatchewan who write about rural women, such as Thelma Poirier, Ann Slade, Doris Bircham, Sharon Butala, and many more.

In rural areas there are opportunities for women to be creative, such as writing workshops, quilting and sewing, art classes.

- a. **Community art projects** could involve women and others in the arts, attract tourists, and make communities more attractive. Some examples are: community quilting projects, Dickens Week in Carlyle, wall murals, Dancing Sky Theatre, community landscape gardens, Pull of the Land, Paper Wheat, music festivals – classical and others. Sharing culture can be done through ethnic potlucks, Slow-Cook Potlucks (sharing stories about the background of ethnic foods.) Activities in the arts should involve all ages including youth.
- b. **Finding funding for women's arts** could involve organizing or finding a government or business fund to that would support rural women. Women could lobby for

interest classes to be reinstated at the Regional College rather than the cost recovery basis that now exists.

- c. **Promoting events honouring rural women** can include Rural Women's Month, held in March in Saskatchewan. There is also International Women's Day – the Saskatchewan Status of Women Office provides grants.
- d. **Using the media effectively** can include: using events or policy statements to get media attention (visuals are good), press releases, lists of people to be interviewed for newspapers, provincial and local radio, keeping in touch with media people interested in your issues, writing articles for weeklies, writing letters to the editor.

PRIORITIES

At the end of the workshop the group discussed future directions for the RWICS project.

The action areas were grouped under five headings. Although all topics were important for rural women, the headings were prioritized for what should be the current actions by RWICS within its mandate.

Top Priority	Leadership, Power and Networking
Second	Farming Community Health
Third Priority	Environment (or include as part of Community)

Leadership, Power and Networking was chosen as an area that RWICS could uniquely contribute to, and which is a foundation for work in other areas. The importance of linking with other rural and farm women's organizations was stressed by all participants, as well as linking with other women's organizations and general organizations concerned with rural issues.

FORUM EVALUATIONS

Fewer women from the previous RWICS workshops attended the provincial forum than the organizers had hoped for. This was due to extreme winter weather, the many responsibilities of women and the distances women had to travel to the Forum. However, the women that were able to attend were enthusiastic and well informed about the concerns and visions of rural women.

At the conclusion of the Forum, participants were asked to fill in a response to the following statements on their evaluation form: “I didn’t get a chance to say; I would like to know more about; I will follow up this session with/by; The most significant thing I heard someone say today; My comments on the day; This is what I want to make sure is heard by and shared with others ...”.

The setting and food at St. Peter’s College was appreciated. The evening entertainment of poetry and a Ragging Grannies style sing-a-long were popular with participants.

In the sessions the participants were asked to look at information from previous workshops, expressed in a chart. The intention was that participants could build on the previous work and prioritize activities. The creativity of the previous workshops had resulted in a wealth of information and ideas for action. However, the number of recommendations from previous workshops was very large and participants found the format and volume of this information difficult to absorb. It was especially difficult for participants who had not attended previous workshops.

In their evaluations women indicated they would like to know more about the rural economy, farm women, rural poverty, good examples of their success such as day care in schools and regional development, and opportunities for working with other rural women’s organizations such as SWI. One woman commented, “Hearing a wide range of opinions on how to revitalize Saskatchewan’s population was very thought provoking.” “[We] need to share the success stories, when things have worked and can be done in other communities. Keep and promote the good things such as the Farm Stress Line so that we don’t lose them.”

There was more than one statement about the difficulty of trying to talk about rural women, when there was so much diversity within rural women. Some stressed the need to talk about farm women's problems as a separate topic. "Rural issues keep turning back to urban issues rather than farm issues. If farms are not healthy rural towns won't be either." On the other hand, a participant commented, "...farm women and small town, even Humboldt "city" women are sisters and share common concerns and can support one another."

Some individual follow-up actions were identified at the Forum and participants hoped to carry out their plans. One stated, "Decide on actions that challenge systemic issues. [We] Can burn ourselves out by going from crisis to crisis issue." There was enthusiasm for having a rural women's group, linked with other existing groups, but recognition that core funding would be needed to sustain such an organization. As to the future, one woman said, "Women's organizations need to be formed. Lots of work to be done."

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The results of this Forum and the other RWICS Rural Women's Action Workshops will be available on the RWICS and PWHCE websites and distributed to participants. The RWICS steering committee will follow-up on the actions prioritized at the Forum and connect with participants in the workshops concerning their visions and actions.

The group that met in Muenster may not meet again formally, but participants are encouraged to carry out the individual actions they identified and to contact RWICS via email, telephone or Canada Post as they make progress on their research and action items. Participants will be kept informed via newsletters, email and the RWICS website and will be invited to future events by RWICS.