

**The Ontario Rural Council's  
January 2002 Forum**

**Forum Report**

***The Leadership Challenge:  
Is rural Ontario ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?***

**Guelph, Ontario  
Monday, January 28, 2002**

*Thank you to our platinum partners Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, through the Rural Secretariat,  
and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs  
for their ongoing support of the Council's activities.*

## January 2002 Forum Report

### **THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE: Is rural Ontario ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

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## The Ontario Rural Council's January 2002 Public Issue Forum

# ***The Leadership Challenge: Is rural Ontario ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?***

Monday, January 28, 2002  
1:00 to 4:30 p.m.  
Guelph, Ontario

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### **A. Welcome and Opening Remarks**

The Ontario Rural Council (TORC) brings together 40 organizations, private corporations and government representatives who share a commitment to building strong rural organizations and communities. The Council provides a unique and important opportunity for multi-sector co-operation within the rural community. Members identify issues, and collaborate to develop innovative solutions and strengthen rural voices. This forum is another way to share ideas and network with the rural sector.

On behalf of TORC members, staff and Management Team thanks was expressed to Mary Robertson, TORC's outgoing Executive Director. Mary Robertson was the founding General Manager of the Council. Mary will be remembered for her never-wavering enthusiasm, her energy, her commitment and dedication, her professionalism, and most importantly, her passion for rural Ontario. To honour Mary Robertson, the *Mary Robertson Rural Distinction Award* has been established. The award will be handed out on an annual basis to a rural leader who demonstrates the ability to act as a catalyst for collaboration and action.

A welcome was extended to TORC's new Executive Director Cathie Brown.

### **B. A Provincial Perspective:**

**Dr. Frank Ingratta, Deputy Minister,  
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs**

*In December, 1997, Frank Ingratta was appointed Deputy Minister of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). Over the last 25 years, Dr. Ingratta has held several senior positions within the ministry, most recently as Assistant Deputy Minister, Agriculture and Rural Division. He began his service to the agri-food industry as an Extension Horticulturalist with OMAFRA and subsequently held progressive positions with the Horticultural Research Institute of Ontario as Research Scientist, Acting Director, and Chief Research Scientist before being appointed Director, Plant Industry Branch in OMAFRA. He then served as Chief Executive Officer of the Crop Insurance Commission of Ontario. Dr. Ingratta holds a Master of Science degree from the University of Guelph and a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Toronto.*

Congratulations must be extended to TORC for acting as such an impressive mechanism for rural Ontario.

In recent years Ontario has experienced a changing landscape and a changing economy. These changes have forced us to focus on rural communities for sustainable growth. Leadership is key.

Leadership has been one of the top 10 challenges on the premier's task force. Leadership affects decision-making, and is a mechanism for involving community members and businesses. Without good leaders in the community, economic development cannot exist.

OMAFRA has been involved informally and formally in the efforts to increase rural leadership through support for the Advanced Agriculture Leadership Program and 4-H. We have learned that how we work with leaders who do not understand "rural", is just as important as working with rural leaders themselves.

What will OMAFRA do to ensure that rural Ontario will be ready to meet leadership challenges? OMAFRA will continue to support leadership development, will continue to create and distribute information, and will work with organizations to develop systematic leadership development plans.

If you took every rural organization in Ontario, and then took two members of each organization, there would not be a meeting room that could hold everyone. How can we sustain that number of organizations and how can you, as leaders, continue to develop leaders to sustain the organizations? The development of a 'succession planning template' to help organizations work through the demand for leaders is crucial. As leaders, we need to ensure that there is a succession plan in place to ensure that there are leaders in the future for organizations to be sustainable.

### **C. Understanding Rural Leadership Challenges: A panel presentation** **Facilitator: Doug Pletsch, University of Guelph**

A definition of leaders was provided. A leader is "any person who influences individuals and groups within an organization to help in establishing goals, and helps to achieve those goals, and helps them to make the goals more effective."

**"You don't get to the top of a mountain by being dropped there."**

Participants were encouraged to take note of their challenges throughout the panel presentations. These challenges would be discussed following the presentations during the roundtable discussions.

Each presenter was asked to explore the leadership challenges facing rural communities and organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and offer their ideas on whether or not rural Ontario will be ready to meet these challenges.

## **C.i. Phyllis Winnington-Ingram, Community planner / co-operative developer**

*Phyllis is a community planner and a co-operative developer from central Ontario. She formed 'Winnington-Ingram & Associates' approximately eight years ago, as a way of developing a variety of co-operative and non-co-operative structures that meet local community needs.*

*Since 1987, she has been involved with co-operatives, bringing a unique perspective to the evolution of the movement by developing innovative co-operative models that meet today's needs. Examples of her projects are the 'Ontario Energy Co-operative' and the 'Gravenhurst Farmer's Market Co-operative Inc.'. These projects have been rural-driven, and based on the identified needs of local community members and organizations.*

*Phyllis was recently awarded two provincial awards for her work; the "Co-operative Innovator Award" from CCA-Ontario and the "Award of Rural Excellence" for Formal Co-operative Models from the Foundation for Rural Living.*

### **Leadership Challenges Facing Rural Communities and Organizations:**

- Many small rural hamlets have been left out of the leadership process, which results in the inability to come together to meet their own needs.
- As organizations get bigger there are fewer leadership opportunities at the community level and the local individual finds it hard to find a voice.
- Amalgamations have resulted in apathy and anger. Post-amalgamation arrangements have left people feeling that avenues for them to be involved do not exist.
- The number of people migrating from urban areas to rural areas also poses a challenge to rural leadership. Often, these people do not want to be involved at the community level.

### **Is rural Ontario ready to meet leadership challenges?**

As long as there are opportunities to meet the challenges, Ontario will be ready. From the co-operative point of view, co-ops have a long-term history of working in rural communities. Generally, co-ops succeed as people come together to help themselves. There is strength and longevity in this process.

Currently there are plans to move the co-operative in my area to being more than “end-oriented”. The move would be toward the formation of an umbrella Community Co-op to cover all sectors. This is important as there would only be one board of directors, creating less ‘burn-out’ for community volunteers.

We need to look at the election process of co-operatives. In our model, anyone who is a member of the co-operative has their name placed on the election list. Members are then asked to select 7 people (they are asked to look at such things as gender, age and balance to be represented, when making their selection). The top 7 people are then asked if they will sit on the board. As a result, people are elected out of respect and hold their position for one year.

The umbrella Community Co-op model has been piloted in several areas and has been most successful in small hamlets. As an example, Honey Harbour boasts 400 residents, of which 90 are members of the co-op. A brochure was developed and is updated each year.

In order to meet the leadership challenge in rural Ontario, there is a need to support people in the small villages and hamlets.

## **C.ii. Jeff Wilson, AgCare**

*Jeff and his wife currently operate a fruit and vegetable farm at Birkbank Farms, Hillsburgh, Ontario, and also run a farm roadside market. Jeff also develops initiatives in collaboration with the University of Guelph and other organizations to bring the realities of modern food production to the public, including genetically modified foods, integrated pest management, food safety, nutrient management and organic food production. He is a graduate of the University of Guelph and the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program.*

*His involvement with the agri-food industry includes acting as a mentor with the Internship for Young Leaders (IYL) program with the University of Guelph and Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario. He has also served as president or vice-chair on numerous boards and councils.*

*Jeff has won awards such as the Volunteer Service Award, from the University of Guelph, and the "Award of Merit" from the Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers' Association.*

Many people have tried to analyze the term 'leadership' but I simply look at what goes on at my own farm. In order to drive something through to the end, one must have a piece of the issue. If you want something to happen, you have to become involved.

Currently we are in the era of process. However, we need to look at the results. We need to ask the following questions:

- Is there a difference between rural and agriculture?
- Are we seeing the results of leadership on the ground or are we shaving dollars off of the budget?
- Are things different today than they were in the past?
- Are we attracting the best minds?
- Are we tapping the minds of those who can't spare the time to become involved as leaders?

### **Leadership Challenges Facing Rural Communities and Organizations:**

- Downloading is affecting many organizations and individuals as more responsibilities are given to fewer people.
- Lack of recognition for leaders. Do we ever say thanks to people who go out there on our behalf?
- People are involved to the point that they lose perspective of either what the issue is, or what the level of involvement should be.

### **Is Rural Ontario ready to meet leadership challenges?**

In order to meet leadership challenges, a combination of process and action is needed in order to move things toward a tangible end product.

### **C.iii. Dennis MacGillivray, Royal Bank**

*Dennis is the Regional Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, RBC Global Services U.S., Institutional & Investor Services. In this role, Dennis participates in the development of strategies to support the profitable growth of the RBC Global Services platform and increase opportunities to build revenues in the U.S. marketplace. Supporting the ongoing growth strategy, Dennis is identifying and pursuing potential acquisition and joint venture opportunities that complement the business.*

*His proven track record includes the implementation of global growth strategies, significant operations and business development successes and the successful management of strategic client relationships with several major corporations.*

*Dennis was raised on a farm in southwestern Ontario, and continues to actively support the development of rural leaders through organizations like 4-H.*

#### **Is rural Ontario ready to meet leadership challenges?**

Yes. It is simple but it is not easy. You are all leaders, and are training future leaders – we just need to make sure that there is a continual flowing stream of leaders.

Fundamentals of leaders:

1. Leaders must insist on a firm financial foundation. Many leaders need a better grip on costs, and revenue stream. A firm financial foundation is just as important to non-profit organizations as it is others. You need to be nimble enough to pull the right levers to stay financially sound.
2. Leaders must build a stream of opportunities. You do not have to be the one at the top of the mountain, but you have to learn how to pull those around you together – to coordinate. There is a need to foster resources. This is a challenge.

The imperative of leaders for the future is to simply develop a stream of leadership opportunities.

### **C.iv. Discussion Highlights**

- Volunteer burn-out is an issue. There is a need to coordinate and motivate volunteers. How do we fund this? There is a need to have someone at the county level – this is where people can see things on a larger scope.
- Horizontal projects: leaders are hard to find, but perhaps it is easier to be a leader within your discipline or in your group. How do we get leadership across the silos? Diversity in leadership is imperative – we need to draw from others that have different strengths if we want to be around in the future. Invite people to your next meeting. Silos are defined in the groups that we represent, and there is a need to get over this and realize that we are all people. We should focus on natural boundaries within which people work. By including multi-stakeholder representatives, we have people who are connected with their community so that information can be taken back to other community groups. Funding and resources from one program can be utilized and applies to others.

- There are a large number of rural organizations and the current financial situation may drive us toward co-operation. A tracking system to track people who follow up the ladder of organizations would be beneficial. Can rural organizations do a better job by working together to find economies of scale? It is hard to say if there are too many rural organizations as it is important to have rural issues brought to the forefront.
- There is concern with current leaders in rural Ontario. The values of the leaders have changed, times have changed and there will continue to be change in rural Ontario. Leadership does not necessarily come from a position but from actions that are taken. We look at people in leadership positions but all they are really doing are pushing policies. People do not often know where to go with their concerns and issues.
- Should there be a role for government in rural leadership development? Does government work well with good leadership or poor leadership? There needs to be leadership in order to function. The issues are out there and they are steered by the farm community. Perhaps the government has too much involvement in leadership. Leaders can naturally emerge, without program intervention – the key is to find them and nurture them. It may be a mistake to put these leaders in a position where they are looking for a handout to become a leader.

## **D. Roundtable Discussions**

The round table discussion focused on understanding the leadership challenges and developing solutions to prepare rural Ontario to meet the challenges. Each table was encouraged to discuss a leadership challenge facing rural Ontario. Examples of potential challenges included:

1. Developing multi-functional leaders
2. Succession planning
3. How can organizations effectively work together?
4. Maintenance of, and preference for, ‘Community Wisdom’
5. Role of Government in Leadership Development

Participants considered the following questions in relation to each leadership challenge.

- A. Why is the issue a challenge?
- B. What are the solutions to deal with the challenge?
- C. What is needed to make this solution happen?
- D. Who might play a role in implementing your strategy?

### **D.i. Roundtable Discussions – Report Back**

Each roundtable was encouraged to report discussion highlights during the plenary session.

Two challenges that were present in each of the discussions were the lack of youth involvement and the levels and processes of accountability. Solutions focused on the importance of building programs from ‘best practices’, networking, and increasing access to seed money, as well as funding for the sustainability of leadership programs. The results of the plenary session have been summarized in Table 1: A Summary of Roundtable Discussion and Plenary Session Outcomes.



**Table 1: A Summary of Roundtable Discussions and Plenary Session Outcomes**

	<b>A Why is this a challenge?</b>	<b>B Solutions to deal with the challenge</b>	<b>C What is needed to make the solution happen?</b>	<b>D Potential players in implementing a strategy</b>
<b>1. Developing Multi-Functional Leaders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leaders and organizations are too narrowly focused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program</li> <li>More strategic alliances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural organizations and commodities</li> <li>The Ontario Rural Council</li> </ul>
<b>2. Succession planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reluctance to take on things that are too time committing</li> <li>Leader burn-out</li> <li>Reluctance to change</li> <li>Number of years for terms are discouraging</li> <li>Demographics: outward migration, brain drain (have to follow jobs), urban/rural shift, bigger farms result in fewer farmers, smaller families</li> <li>Closed communities</li> <li>Lack of youth involvement</li> <li>Fragmentation of communities</li> <li>Leaders are seen as managers while youth role is that of an employee</li> <li>Changing values at the ground level</li> <li>Loss of creativity</li> <li>Downloading</li> <li>Volunteers want to be task specific, not filling out funding proposals</li> <li>Groups are trying to fit programs to funding instead of funding to programs</li> <li>Securing funding takes time away from programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize and respect people who really are busy</li> <li>Show people what is in it for them</li> <li>Opportunities to “de-volunteerize” with dignity</li> <li>Mentoring; mentorships</li> <li>Provide organization’s relevance</li> <li>Use advisory think tanks</li> <li>Remove tokenism of youth involvement and provide valuable opportunities</li> <li>Immigration provides many people who are highly qualified</li> <li>Commitment from those who are impacted</li> <li>Provide non-threatening environment to share ideas</li> <li>Get ‘outsiders’ to facilitate/coach</li> <li>Communities need to determine the issues and priorities</li> <li>Diversity in leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cohesive NGO’s</li> <li>Share thoughts – communicate!</li> <li>Make use of telecommunications</li> <li>Reinstate family values</li> <li>Give families more responsibility to teach values</li> <li>Need to create buy-in</li> <li>Build confidence in members’ abilities</li> <li>Dollars to daycare</li> <li>Internship opportunities</li> <li>Formalize shorter terms of office</li> <li>Understand that ‘one individual is not a leader’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer Action Centres</li> <li>Rural Associations</li> <li>Professional Associations</li> <li>Umbrella organizations for non-profits</li> <li>Ministry of Citizenship</li> <li>Mentors</li> <li>Families</li> <li>All levels of government</li> <li>Present leaders of organizations</li> <li>Those with the time and energy to do it</li> </ul>

	<b>A Why is this a challenge?</b>	<b>B Solutions to deal with the challenge</b>	<b>C What is needed to make the solution happen?</b>	<b>D Potential players in implementing a strategy</b>
3. How Can Organizations Effectively Work Together?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Define leadership</li> <li>▪ Organizational structures need to see the vision</li> <li>▪ Develop leadership center to consolidate activities, share resources and provide a one-stop shopping center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify stakeholders with commonalities</li> <li>▪ Organizations need to know what they will share or give up to create real value</li> <li>▪ Organization representatives need support from the organizations they represent</li> <li>▪ Market and sell the vision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ People with passion</li> <li>▪ Unexpected contacts</li> <li>▪ Government (in a sustaining, but not controlling role)</li> <li>▪ Partners who can bring something to the table (local organizations, education, government, private sector, service clubs, agencies, banks)</li> </ul>
4. Maintenance of, and Preference for, 'Community Wisdom'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of willingness in community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Project incubator: take inventory of assets in your community and match to the needs of the project - this would overcome politics - identify by function and need</li> </ul>		
5. Role of Government in Leadership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Many programs are given seed money without help to make sure that the programs are sustainable</li> <li>▪ A lot of organizations do not exist just to raise funds – but spend a lot of time focusing on this</li> <li>▪ Fundamental issue of social democracy versus capitalist approach to leadership development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mobilize stakeholders in a co-op approach</li> <li>▪ Provide resources (not necessarily just money)</li> <li>▪ Include leadership component to highschool curriculum</li> <li>▪ Anchor volunteer programs with youth to look at components of youth leadership</li> <li>▪ Local government can provide meaningful experiences to youth</li> <li>▪ Get rural youth to visit other countries to see other experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Share best practices</li> <li>▪ Seed funding at all levels</li> <li>▪ Clear accountability process and measurability of programs</li> <li>▪ Leaders need to be given tools</li> <li>▪ Ministries need to look at current and past models of OMAFRA</li> <li>▪ Increase trust when funds are given – instead of a bookkeeping nightmare</li> <li>▪ Local governments take things forward at a National level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All levels of government</li> </ul>

## **E. Rural Leadership Taskforce Update: Current Projects** **Ann Gordon, Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program**

*Ann has been involved with the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program since 1989, first as a graduate of Class 2, and then as a leadership workshop facilitator for the program. In May 1997, she became Executive Director.*

*Ann grew up on a farm in Elgin County. She has worked and studied in the field of leadership and rural development for over 20 years. This has involved holding a variety of positions across the province in government and through international development work.*

*She is a graduate of the University of Western Ontario; Initiator of the "10 Steps to Community Action Program"; past Board Director and Secretary of the International Community Development Society; member of the Ontario Institute of Agrologists and the Kitchener-Waterloo Philharmonic Choir. Ann and her husband live in Cambridge, Ontario.*

### **Background, Activities, Profiles of The Rural Leadership Taskforce:**

Today's forum is the result of the collaboration of the Rural Leadership Task Force. The organizations involved in the taskforce have rural leadership development as core businesses/activities. Stakeholders were approached and a series of focus groups, and a planning session with Boards of Directors of rural organizations were held to determine a model of collaboration. As a group we saw that all had small separate staffs, a reliance on common funding providers, and that we offered programming across a spectrum. A common challenge that we all face is the need for sustainability funding – funding is currently program focused and not operational focused.

Future sustainability of these organizations depends on:

- Building on our strengths (international recognition of programs, value for leadership) and getting ahead of change through collaboration
- Working together – working (with caution) towards partnership model
- Strengthening recruitment and marketing through collaboration
- Doing more with more

Current Actions of the Rural Leadership Taskforce:

- In the process of mapping out a governance and organizational structure for strategic alliances (need to maintain our autonomy and identity)
- Seed money from the University of Guelph to conduct a gap analysis in leadership programming
- Submission to Odyssey group
- Joint venture of 4-H and AALP sharing a funding developer
- OATI and AALP have started to collaborate on a rural leadership training program
- Agricultural Leadership Trust is in the process of incorporating into a Center for Rural Leadership

We are trying to meet the leadership challenge in rural Ontario. The development of the task force is on the right track.