

Communicating Through Criticism

by Ed White, MFWBA Executive Member

What's it like to try to tell a good story when your critics are constantly trying to put you on the defensive?

That's a challenge for a lot of communications professionals in agriculture, and was the focus of the first MFWBA luncheon of the 2005-06 crop year.

Peter Mah from Manitoba Pork Council and Trish Jordan from Monsanto talked about how their organizations attempt to both parry attacks upon them and promote what they do, without either appearing defensive or oblivious. Monsanto often has to deal with an array of critics who despise the company and see it as the champion of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), while Manitoba Pork has to counter the accusations made against the industry by hog barn opponents who see the industry as an environmental evil-doer. Jordan said her company has decided to be open and accessible to the media, through her as spokesperson, and always tries to be available to reply to accusations against it.

Jordan said she knows many of the critics will never be satisfied by any Monsanto response, but in

the fight for public opinion, the company wants to ensure its view is there to add balance.

She said that it often frustrates her to see stories about GM crops break down into simplistic opponent versus Monsanto stories, since the views of the opponents often represent the views of only a small number of uninformed people and GM science is supported by most in the scientific community.

And she said it is frustrating for her that Monsanto's openness means that reporters often call her to comment on stories that have nothing to do with Monsanto, but that merely involve GM products. Since other companies are often inaccessible or unwilling to speak with the media, Monsanto becomes the go-to source for many reporters.

Mah said the Manitoba Pork Council is always willing to talk about the industry so that it is not caricatured by its opponents. The council works hard through media releases, its own publications and when speaking with community groups to highlight its efforts in environmental stewardship and to portray itself as truly

committed to sustainable development.

Mah said the Council faces the same situation as Monsanto in facing dedicated enemies who will probably never be satisfied, but the council wants to ensure that there is always positive information about the industry available to reporters and communities so that attacks can be answered quickly and easily.

Mah said the Manitoba hog industry has aggressively embraced and promoted environmentally sustainable production and part of its communications strategy is to give prominence to this dedication in its communications with the public.

The lunch was well-attended, with more than two dozen members and non-members showing up for the event, which was held within the grand confines of the Millennium Centre on Main Street.

Over the winter, the MFWBA plans a number of lunchtime sessions like this, so please make sure to come out and join us all. We're also looking forward to our annual meeting in January.

Stay tuned!

MFWBA executive members

Barbara Adams
President
barbara_adams@cargill.com
947-6435

Crystal Jorgenson
Membership
c_jorgenson@umanitoba.ca
474-9435

Lenore Smaldon
Secretary-Treasurer
communications@kap.mb.ca
697-1140

Val Ominski
Event Coordinator
vominski@gov.mb.ca
945-2754

Helena Marak
Event Coordinator
hmarak@mrac.ca
982-4792

Ed White
Event Coordinator
ed.white
@producer.com
943-6294

MFWBA Welcomes New Exec Member

The MFWBA is pleased to welcome Helena Marak, Project Officer with the Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council, as its newest executive member. Helena will be adding her expertise on new and exciting developments in agriculture to the MFWBA program and events committee.

Helena Marak's agriculture experience traces back to her early years in the small Czech village of Krocehlavy where she helped her grandparents raise chickens and the traditional single pig.

Now, Helena is a project officer with the Manitoba Rural

Adaptation Council (MRAC), an NGO which delivers programs for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Working directly with industry associations, academia, and government agencies, she helps catalyze innovative projects to achieve economic, environmental and social sustainability in the agriculture and agri-food industry.

Helena came to MRAC from the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration where she assisted with the delivery of sustainable agricultural production programs

and water quality initiatives.

True to her roots, Helena strives to bring awareness of the economic and social benefits of the agriculture and agri-food sector to her urban counterparts.



Helena Marak

Manitoba Wins Big at '06 CFWF Meeting

Several Manitoba farm writers won awards at the 2006 CFWF Awards banquet held September 24 in Lloydminster.

Laura Rance, associate editor of the Farmers Independent Weekly, won two top awards at the Canadian Farm Writers Federation annual awards competition. Laura won gold for weekly press reporting (The Q.H. Martenson Award) for her story "Market Access Eludes Science-Based Rules." She won a second gold award in the press column category (The Frank Jacobs Award) for a piece titled "Deregu-

lation a Code for Re-Regulation" which appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press.

Linda Deger of the Canadian Wheat Board took top honours in the general periodical category (The Felix Schmaltz Award) for "All in a Day's Work: CWB's 2003-04 Annual Report." Maureen Fitzhenry of the CWB received the third-place bronze award in the same category for "Grain Matters."

Jay Whetter, editor of the Manitoba Co-operator, took a silver second prize in the press column category for his commen-

tary "Give Farmers an Extra Vote."

Roberta Rampton of Reuters in Winnipeg won silver for weekly press reporting with her story "Winnipeg Commodity Exchange Trading Floor Silenced." Roberta's piece appeared in the Farmers Independent Weekly.

Our Best Wishes...

To Roberta Rampton, who left Reuters in October in anticipation of a November baby. (Boy, girl, birthdate, weight - I'm counting on a MFWBA newshound to find out!) Congratulations from all of us here at the MFWBA.

Submit Your News Tips and Stories to the

MFWBA wire

Contact Lenore at communications@kap.mb.ca

Next issue: Winter '06