

the nib

Winter 2015

The Newsletter of the Eastern Canada Farm Writers' Association

www.ecfwa.ca

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Prez says

By Christina Franc, ECFWA President

Hello Farm Writers,

One of the most challenging things in the dead of winter is just getting out of the house.

The snow's piled five feet high, you need to put on layers of clothes only to still be cold, and then just when you think you have it under control, you forgot you have to clean off your car and your brush broke off.

Well ECFWA is here to help you get out of the house by offering some great PD opportunities. In March, we are having a presentation about consumer marketing in Guelph, which will certainly be interesting. Then in late April we are planning another joint CAMA/ECFWA workshop – "Working Together: Media and Marketing. How to get out a clear and effective message." You can read about both in the Current Events section.

In this issue of the Nib we look back a little into farm writing history, with Lifetime ECFWA member Henry F. Heald contributing some words of wisdom gained from a long career as a freelancer. We also join in the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the SPARK program (Students Promoting Awareness of Research Knowledge) at the University of Guelph with a few contributions from current SPARK writers.

We're launching a photo contest (details below) and so the more events you go to, the better your chances are of taking that winning shot. There is also a report from Clare Wooding on her PD session last November as well as important Member News and Niblets.

Once again, I'd like to give a special thanks to our ECFWA board who continually works hard to come up with and organize new events and ideas to keep our network engaged and to our members for your contributions to the newsletter and your organization.

If ever you have any suggestions for professional development or special gatherings, please feel free to email me at president@ecfwa.ca or call me at 877-782-6456.

Christina

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Freelancing In The Service of a Responsible Agriculture

By Lifetime ECFWA member Henry F. Heald

What has an old man, who cashed his last freelance cheque more than ten years ago, have to say to today's generation of freelance journalists – or all journalists, for that matter?

"This above all, to thine own self be true." Is that Shakespeare? I can't remember. I just know it is an essential philosophy for anyone who sets out to write or broadcast anything for public consumption.

There are two main dangers faced by journalists. One is that you will be tempted to prostitute yourself to please whoever is paying your fee. The other is arrogance – that

you get so proud of seeing your stuff in print that you think you can do no wrong and you end up hurting people. I fell into both traps.

Thanks to a long debate in the seventies about “the white lilies and black lilies,” farm writers established that anyone who commented on the agriculture and food industry was eligible for full membership in the organizations. Whether you were the farm writer for a daily newspaper or an ad copywriter for a chemical company, you had equal status as a farm writer. And you were there on your own dime. If your employer wanted to pay your membership dues and your conference expenses that was up to him/her. The only person you represented was yourself.

The Canadian Press gave me the agriculture beat when I joined the cooperative in 1966 and I joined the ECFWA and the CFWF as soon as I became aware of their existence. At that time there were few freelancers – most of us worked for some employer. I and several others sold some freelance stuff on the side. My freelance career really started when The Ottawa Journal folded in 1980 and I was on my own.

As long as I was writing regularly I remained on line. When I aged and my energy levels declined I could no longer keep up with the advances in both the agriculture industry and the electronic telecommunications industry. So I gave up my Internet account and spared myself the drudgery of reading through all those e-mails. My wife and I keep our old cell phones so we can find each other when our medical appointments are over, but I have no understanding of the smart gadgets that my grandsons use with such ease and which are the major tools of the modern journalist.

Nevertheless, the key rules of journalism apply whether you are freelancing or are on the staff of the Globe and Mail – honesty, accuracy and balance, tell both sides of the story, respect your audience, check your sources. To thine own self be true.

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Communicating Corporate Giving in Agriculture

By Clare Wooding

As communicators, we help our stakeholders understand what the company stands for, and in doing so we hold an important role in managing our employers' reputation.

Sponsorships and donations offer a unique opportunity to demonstrate the company's business and social priorities when communicated well. They can offer a competitive advantage and help shape reputation.

According to Imagine Canada, “Companies doing good not only strengthens

communities, it also builds brand identity, enhances employee retention and recruitment, and improves public reputation. Community investment is no longer a sideline activity — today it is considered a key way of doing business.”

But when it comes to publicizing giving activity, we in the ag industry often shy away from being overly boastful. All too often, we rely on our sponsorship partner to take the lead on communicating our sponsorships.

Over the last two years, I’ve been working on a Masters in Communication Management capstone project exploring this area of sponsorship communication in Canadian agriculture. In November, the results were shared with ECFWA at the fall professional development session.

The research included a survey of farmers across Canada, asking how they view sponsorships from their input suppliers. While it is no surprise that everyone said that the quality of the product or service was top of mind in their purchase decision, a quarter of respondents thought that being community responsible was also important.

Farmers were passive when taking in the names of sponsors, noting the logos at events, news releases, and sponsor participation as ways they identify sponsors. What was interesting is that the most popular way farmers wanted to know about sponsorship activity was through traditional advertising in ag publications.

A content analysis of farm publications and rural newspapers in Canada found very little advertising of sponsorships, but did show that agriculture publications mentioned sponsors in their editorial content. This could show that our farm publication editors are attuned to the interests of their readers.

Agribusinesses involved in selling farm input products and services were also surveyed. The responses showed little investment into the communication or measurement of sponsorship activity. Most noted that farmers and employees were the main stakeholders for their sponsorship programs, however employee communication didn’t appear as a common outreach.

This could be a missed opportunity for communicators, because research has shown an advantage in the strategic outcome for corporate giving when employees were involved in the delivery. Using internal channels to share why the company is supporting an organization and how employees can get involved can be a practical way communicators can support ambassadorship.

Editor’s note: This PD session was held November 20, 2014 at the Syngenta office in Guelph, followed by a networking dinner at the Shakespeare Arms. Thank you to Syngenta for allowing us the use of your lunchroom for our meeting and to ECFWA Past President Clare Wooding for sharing the important results of her Masters Thesis

“A Capstone on Sponsorships in Canadian Agriculture”.

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SPARK News

Alumni Foundation Sponsors Aggie SPARK Writer

By Alexandra Sawatzky, SPARK writer

A new agreement between the Ontario Agricultural College Alumni Foundation and the University of Guelph’s Students Promoting Awareness of Research Knowledge (SPARK) program will see the foundation sponsor a writer wholly dedicated to agricultural research.

OAC student Kyra Lightburn was the successful candidate in a competition held in December for the first-time position. Kyra is a third-year organic agriculture major in the Ontario Agricultural College. She describes herself as being passionate about communicating agricultural knowledge through her writing, and views this new opportunity “with gratitude and enthusiasm.”

Kyra is working on stories related to the mathematical modeling of ruminant digestion, best herbicide practices to control field horsetail, and methods of diagnosis for viral infections causing nasal tumours in sheep and goats. These stories are destined for publications SPARK has partnered with, including Ontario Farmer, Ontario Grain Farmer magazine and Milk Producer magazine.

The OAC Alumni Foundation is an independent body dedicated to encouraging the pursuit of agricultural education and a well-informed, prosperous and sustainable Ontario agricultural community. It exists to help develop and support leadership talent that drives a prosperous, sustainable and leading edge agri-food system in Ontario.

“We chose to support the SPARK program at the University of Guelph because of its goals of professional development and education for students,” says foundation chair Mark Ostrowski. “This is a great fit with our mandate to develop future leaders by equipping student writers with new skills and by giving them access to research knowledge explained in the stories. We look forward to continue working with SPARK to extend the reach of its impact throughout the agri-food sector.”

The sponsorship coincides with SPARK’s 25th anniversary. SPARK is part of the research communications network at the University of Guelph, enabling students to gain essential writing, broadcasting and project management experience.

Guelph Students' Stories Featured on Farms.com

By Kyra Lightburn, SPARK writer

University of Guelph's agricultural communications students saw their by-line stories published on a major Canadian agriculture news site, Farms.com, over December.

The stories spanned a great range of interests, reflecting the diversity of the students who chose the topics in consultation with their instructor, Owen Roberts.

The overarching theme was innovation in Ontario agriculture.

"We were truly impressed with the calibre and thoughtfulness of the articles," said Farm.com's Denise Faguy, who spoke to the students at the start of their semester about writing online news. "The stories connected innovation to agriculture in a way that appeals to our primary readers."

Stories highlighting new technology and research were particularly popular. Animal science student Drew De Bruyn wrote about new European livestock trailers, complete with hydraulic lifting systems, coming to Ontario. David Jefferson, a crop, horticulture and turf grass science student, wrote about a recently developed LED light bulb that emits red spectrum light and boosts egg production. And plant science student Andrea Smith highlighted plant breeding research aimed at maximizing the quality of forage crops.

Newer headlines have emerged on the site, but the student stories can still be found on Farms.com's agricultural industry news archives. They originally ran December 16, 2014 to January 2, 2015.

Faguy says she is pleased with the way the project turned out.

"This was a great experience," she said. "We look forward to extending the offer of publication to next year's agricultural communications students."

Agricultural communicators Denise Faguy and Kyra Lightburn discuss the Guelph students' stories project.

(photo by Alaina Osborne, SPARK)



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SPARK Turns 25!

By SPARK writer Alexandra Sawatzky

The 2014-2015 academic year marked the 25th anniversary of SPARK (Students Promoting Awareness of Research Knowledge) at the University of Guelph. SPARK participants write and broadcast about research activities and accomplishments at the agriculturally active university, to help enhance the understanding and uptake of research, particularly for external audiences such as Ontario farmers.

SPARK started in 1989-90, with two students. The program has grown over the years to include about 10 participants per year, but the basic premise is the same: to give students the opportunity to learn communication skills in the context of agricultural research.

Students work five to 20 hours a week and are paid an hourly wage for their work. Funding comes from internal and external sources, many of whom use SPARK-generated stories to communicate about research with their respective audiences. Participants come from a wide variety of academic backgrounds.

Over the years, SPARK members have been recognized often for their achievements, including several times by the Canadian Farm Writers' Federation. The most recent accolade is a Silver Award from the federation for the 2014 University of Guelph Research magazine, "What the World Needs Now."

Many of the program's past participants have gone on to successful careers in agricultural communications.

SPARK founder Owen Roberts says five main ingredients make SPARK succeed.

First, the program needs enthusiastic students, those with a passion to learn new communications skills.

Second is supportive faculty. Researchers' time is at a premium, so giving SPARK students an hour or more for an in-person interview, photo and perhaps even a short video is a significant commitment.

Third, administration must be behind the SPARK program. The University of Guelph is the only post-secondary education facility in Canada whose institutional research communications significantly involve students. SPARK has a significant presence in the University's Office of Research.

The fourth and fifth ingredients are external, involving media and sponsors. Media must be receptive to SPARK-written stories, and accept them as credible source of information, to bring the students' and faculty members' efforts to light. And sponsors and champions who believe in the SPARK concept are essential for their sectorial and financial support for SPARK.

"SPARK needs all these pieces to fit together to succeed," says Roberts. "It's gratifying to see how it's all come together over these past 25 years, and particularly, how the SPARK program has helped support the agri-food sector."

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ECFWA Coming Events

Join us on Twitter @ecfwa and Facebook so you don't miss any news!

ECFWA Winter PD Session

“Nothing Tastes as Good as Food Served with a Good Story”

When: March 12, 2015, 4:00pm

Where: Syngenta Boardroom, 140 Research Lane, Guelph.

Jo-Ann McArthur, President and Partner of Nourish Marketing will present a case study on turning a commodity into a brand, as well as highlight the latest food and consumer trends from North America that should be on your radar.

Registration starts at 4:00pm and the event will start at 4:30. Afterwards there will be a pay-your-own-way supper at the Shakespeare Arms, 35 Harvard Road, Guelph.

Free for members, \$10 for non-members.

Sign up now at <https://quanglo.wufoo.com/forms/xcoduyp0d2uxe2/>

Joint CAMA/ECFWA Event

“Working Together: Media and Marketing. How to get out a clear and effective message.”

Planning for this event continues to evolve, but ECFWA and CAMA members can look forward to a full-day workshop on **April 28, 2015** in Guelph. Please stay tuned for more details.

2015 ECFWA AGM

Wagons East!

For the majority of our members it will be an eastward journey, while for those in Eastern Ontario and Quebec it may be north and west? Wherever you come from, please join us as we explore agriculture in the Ottawa area with our fellow ECFWA members. Our 2015 ECFWA AGM will be held in Ottawa, **May 13 & 14**. We're planning on a bus from Guelph – the ultimate networking opportunity!

SAVE THE DATES! Details are being finalized by the AGM committee as we speak.

PHOTO CONTEST

Keep those cameras clicking! If you're at an ECFWA event or working an event with



other ECFWA members, get out your camera. We are looking for entries to our second photo contest showing *Farm Writers At Work*, either a single person or a group. However, one must understand the context by the environment or objects that appear in the image.

Two judges will critique entries and winners will be announced at the ECFWA AGM in Ottawa on May 7, 2015. Our sponsor, La Coop fédérée, will generously provide cash prizes.

Eligibility and conditions:

All members of the ECFWA are eligible to participate.

Each member may submit a maximum of three entries.

Winners agree that their photos may be used on the website or other forms of social media administered by the ECFWA.

Evaluation criteria will include:

Relevance: respect of the theme;

The visual impact: the effect created;

Originality: the ability to make the subject with style;

Photographic processing: development, framing, contrast, values, etc.

Deadline for entries:

Photos must be sent no later than **May 1, 2015** in .jpg format. If photos are too large they can be sent by WeTransfer or DropBox. For more information or to submit entries contact ECFWA director Guylaine Gagnon at guylaine.gagnon@lacoop.coop

CFWF NEWS

The next **CFWF** Conference will be in Calgary, Alberta, September 24-27, 2015. Watch the CFWF Farm Journalist Newsletter for details.

The 2015 CFWF Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 10th at 3:00 pm EST by conference call (details to be sent closer to the date). All ECFWA members are encouraged to participate. Register by [clicking here](#).

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ECFWA Member News

WELCOME NEW AND RETURNING ECFWA MEMBERS:

Carol Carson, Canada's Outdoor Farm Show
Alexandra Sawatzky, SPARK Student
Kyra Lightburn, SPARK Student
Liz Snyder, SPARK Manager

HAVE YOU VISITED OUR NEW WEBSITE YET?

If you haven't visited our new website yet, please go have a look! It's still at ecfwa.ca but we're experimenting with a "do-it-yourself" template set-up service called Breederoo that has so far proven very easy to navigate and administrate.

From their website:

"Breederoo.com is a small company run by two people, Crystal and Chris, in Montreal Canada. Web designers for 10 years, we launched Breederoo.com in March 2004. Both of us are crazy dog lovers and deeply involved in animal rescue. (10% of our profits go to animal rescue and the service is free for shelters and rescues) The problem was, breeder websites need to be updated often with photos, events and news. This gets very expensive if you had to hire a web designer each time, or very time consuming if you try to learn how to do it yourself."

As someone that struggles at times with computers and not having consulting resources at my fingertips in my home office, so far it gets a 'thumbs up!' from me. There are no web design skills needed, no HTML hassles. Breederoo offers attractive standard templates. The entire set up took about 6 hours, easily inserting the content from our previous site and setting up tabs and contact information. Making changes to the layout is as simple and quick as logging in, and support services are readily available with personal responses within 24 hours.

Let us know what you think? Send your comments to Karen Dallimore, ECFWA Communications Co-ordinator, at communications@ecfwa.ca

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

USE WUFOO TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2015 – PAY ON-LINE - IT'S FAST AND EASY!

New members can enjoy an extended benefit – if you know anyone who would like to join us, tell them they can sign up now and receive up to 16 months of member benefits for the same low price as their annual membership. That's 16 months of networking and PD opportunities for new members only the same annual fee of \$50!

It's great value at only \$50 for a year, \$30 for full-time students. Memberships are due on April 30th. Visit www.ecfwa.com/membership to find out all the benefits of membership and sign up or contact our Secretary Treasurer, Andi McKillop at andi@amtelecom.net for more information.

LIFETIME MEMBER NOMINATIONS

Nominations are now open for Lifetime Members to honour the accomplishments of those who have contributed to farm communications and the ECFWA and CFWF over the course of their career.

Please look under the Lifetime Members tab at <http://www.ecfwa.ca/lifetime-members> on the website for selection criteria and nomination guidelines. Nominations should include a brief history of the nominee's accomplishments in farm communications, contributions to ECFWA and CFWF, and community leadership. For more information contact Andi McKillop, ECFWA Secretary Treasurer, at andi@amtelecom.net.

The deadline for nominations is March 13, 2015.

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Niblets

If you have any news items to share in the next Niblets, please e-mail them to communications@ecfwa.ca

Carol Carson has joined the team at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show (and now Ag in Motion) as communications co-ordinator. Carol was actively involved with the ECFWA in the 2000s while she was an account manager/writer with GJA communications. In recent years, she's been freelance medical writing, mostly in the areas of cardiovascular and women's health. She is happy to return to agriculture.

Effective February 9 **Rebecca Hannam** is leaving the Royal Bank and moving to the Rural Ontario Institute as Manager, Communications and Fund Development. Rebecca will be continuing her freelance business, AgInspire Communications part time in addition to ROI.

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The Nib is a distribution for members, by members of the
Eastern Canada Farm Writers' Association

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Newsletter comments or suggestions are welcome.

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The next edition of the Nib will be distributed in June 2015.

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