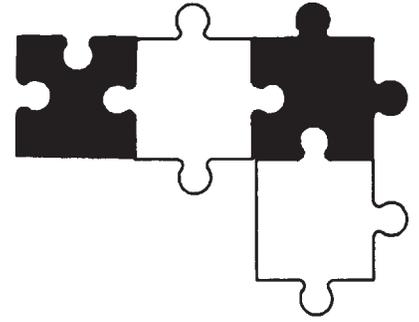




Activity 23

AGRICULTURE NEWS WATCH



STUDY QUESTION:

How to introduce agricultural issues and current events to students and provide avenues for individual student research, interest, and meaning into these areas?

THE ACTIVITY:

Students will undertake a series of assignments and exercises to acquaint themselves with current events and issues in agriculture. This framework is designed to give students a broader understanding of agriculture from a local to an international perspective.

CURRICULUM FIT:

GRADE SEVEN - LANGUAGE ARTS

NOTE: Lesson can also apply to other years of Language Arts curriculum; however, year seven is focused on primarily.

AGRICULTURE CONCEPTS:

The overall diversity of current agricultural issues and the subsequent relationship and impact on people.

PURPOSE:

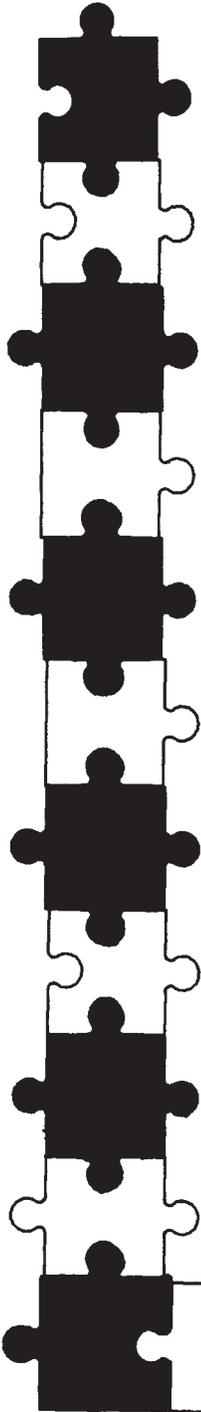
- To provide students with an exposure and an understanding of how agriculture directly and/or indirectly impacts their daily lives.

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

Video - In Balance with Nature - Alberta Agriculture
A series of current agriculture stories/issues. (See Teacher Resource Sheets for examples). Articles used for this lesson include: various stories from the July 5, 12, 19, 26 editions of the Alberta Wheat Pool Bulletin, Published by Alberta Pool, Calgary, Alberta, 1991.

TIME REQUIRED:

One 80-minute period.



BACKGROUND - For the Teacher

All types of media sources — newspapers, periodicals, television, and radio — include current agricultural issues. Much of this information is quite controversial and there are usually obvious repercussions to the public at large when significant agricultural issues surface because agriculture really does affect all of us.

Students must be made aware of how many of the issues affect them and they must learn about the wide range of agricultural issues that exist. For instance, one current agricultural issue may deal with a technological breakthrough that will allow increased food production. The next current agricultural issue may focus on the social issues of increased farm failures and movement of people away from rural areas.

PROCEDURE

Part 1

Preparation

1. Collect a series of articles about current agricultural issues that are reasonably brief and easy to understand.
2. Have an overhead transparency of one or two articles (the examples used in this lesson are from the Alberta Wheat Pool Bulletin).

Part 2 - approximately 20 minutes.

Introduction

3. Begin with a brief introduction explaining how agriculture is all around us. Explain that many agricultural sectors are required to sustain life and they allow for a better quality of life.
4. Brainstorm with students and create a list of agricultural industries. Decide how each industry affects people in one way or another.

Part 3 - approximately 45 minutes.

Activity

5. Introduce the overall mindset of this unit by showing the video In Balance with Nature. This will give a general introduction and provide an example of the importance and significance of agricultural issues. Discuss student reactions to the video.
6. After identifying the major issues of this video, turn to the overhead transparency of the following two articles which are included in this lesson's Teacher Resource Sheets:
 - a) Soviet Heat Wave
 - b) Beef Import Duty

Note: You can also use the other articles included with this lesson or articles you have chosen yourself.

7. Give students an opportunity to read each one of the articles separately. Conduct a large group discussion to discuss the ramifications of each article.
 - a) How does the article affect me?
 - b) What is the article saying?
 - c) Does the article relate to one of the agricultural industries that were brainstormed?
 - d) Does this article affect local, provincial, national, or international farmers or a combination of them?
 - e) Is the information in the article positive or negative in relation to Albertan Canadian farmers?

8. Group Work - Break students into groups of four or five. Provide each group with a current agricultural issue(s) based on information from news articles. Provide large sheets of paper so each group will be able to answer the above questions and compare responses with other groups later. Group work activities need to be monitored to ensure participation of all members who each have the responsibility to take on a duty within the group.

Part 4 - approximately 14 minutes

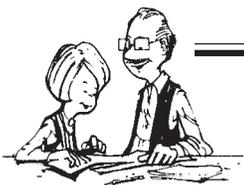
Conclusion

9. Review briefly the findings and concepts discussed during the class period.
10. Over the last few minutes, encourage students to go out and locate other interesting sources of agricultural issues.
11. Students can spend the remainder of the class writing their reactions to current agricultural issues in their journals.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

1. Continued exposure through media sources relating to agriculture issues.
2. Agriculture related field trips and guest speakers.

By Richard Ries



SHEET ONE --

TEACHER RESOURCE

AG MINISTERS PLAN FUTURE

Federal and Provincial Agriculture Ministers met in Kananaskis July 2-4 for a large scale policy review of agricultural programs.

The Ministers looked at everything from feed grain transport subsidies and changes in the marketing board system, to transportation and safety nets. A large number of committees were established to proceed with further review.

Among the issues requiring further study is grain transportation and the method of paying the Crow Benefit. The federal government will lead consultations with the provincial government and the agriculture industry to resolve the ongoing debate over grain transportation and the method of payment.

Provincial Agriculture Minister Ernie Isley says meetings will be set up with stakeholder groups across the country to discuss changes in the Western Grain Transportation Act. A decision on the issues is not likely to be reached until early 1992.

Of interest to farmers registered in the Gross Revenue Insurance Plan (GRIP) is the expectation of an early interim payment. Federal Agriculture Minister Bill McKnight said an agreement has been reached that will allow early payment as a way of enhancing farm income in 1991.

Alberta is still awaiting a decision on the other half of the safety net package - the Net Income Stabilization Account (NISA) - despite repeated appeals from farm groups like Alberta Pool to commit to the program. Isley said the province is still looking at the NISA program and its budget implications.

Under the NISA program, farmers contribute \$2 per unit of production and the federal and provincial governments contribute \$1 each. The money would be placed in an individual tax sheltered account in good years and could be drawn out in years when farm income drops significantly. The province has estimated the NISA program will cost them about \$18 to \$20 million annually.

SOVIET HEAT WAVE

A heat wave in the Soviet Union has resulted in drought and damage to grain crops in some parts of the country.

Temperatures as high as 40 degrees Celsius have been reported in the southern part of Russia and several important Soviet grain producing areas are suffering from drought. Forest fires are also raging out of control, further threatening crops.

The Soviet government has forecast this year's grain crop at 180 to 190 million tonnes, down considerably from last year's record production of 237 million tonnes. Earlier estimates of the 1991 Soviet grain crop were as high as 205 million tonnes.

U.S. FARMERS HIT HARD

Farmers in Washington state are expected to harvest the smallest winter wheat crop in 54 years as a result of a killing frost that hit the state in December.

A report of out Spokane, Washington puts that state's winter wheat harvest at 75,000 acres on comparison to the previous year's harvest of 1.45 million acres. According to state statistician Doug Hasslen, winter wheat crops grown in Eastern Washington are typically the most lucrative crops grown in the area with total wheat production in good years valued at \$500 million (U.S.).

The damaging storm caught young wheat plants across Eastern Washington with no protective snow cover. Many farmers were forced to replant fields with spring wheat, barley, canola or other crops that historically have yielded less money for producers in the state. As a result of the storm, barley acreage in Washington has jumped 45 per cent to 580,000 acres.

Nationwide, farmers are expected to harvest 39.6 million acres of winter wheat, a 21 per cent drop from last year.

TEACHER RESOURCE

SHEET TWO --



SALES DECLINE

Farm machinery sales continue to slide this year according to the Canadian Farm and Industrial Equipment Institute.

The institute's mid-year survey of major farm machinery manufacturers forecasts declines in Canadian sales of farm tractors, harvesting equipment and most other types of farm machinery and implements.

Sales of large two-wheel drive tractors, a market centered in Western Canada, are expected to be down 9.3 per cent.

ONTARIO FARMERS WANT HELP

Farm leaders in Ontario have declared a state of emergency in the province's grains and oilseeds sector and are calling on their members to make the problem known to members of Parliament and local politicians.

"If politicians, including ministers of agriculture, think this financial crisis for grain and oilseed producers is just going to go away, they had better think again," said Roger George, President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. "Farmers were extremely disappointed to find out that this crisis was not even on the official agenda at the agriculture minister's annual meeting in Kananaskis, Alberta, earlier this month."

The financial crisis in the Ontario grains and oilseeds sector is similar to the situation that exists on the prairies. Depressed market prices and the lack of financial assistance for farmers during the transition from ad hoc programs to the new safety net programs have left many farmers in a precarious position. In addition to these negative factors, Ontario's wheat crop this year is very small. Excessively wet weather last fall prevented little or no planting of wheat. Yields are 20 to 30 per cent below average and a rumored drop in Canadian Wheat Board initial prices will mean farmers harvesting wheat this summer will be getting even less for their crop this year.

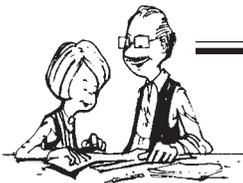
"The bills are piling up, and the return on crops will not cover them because of disastrously low prices. Turning a blind eye to the problem will only make matters worse," said Frank Anthony, President of the Ontario Corn Producers' Association.

As part of their lobbying efforts, farmers in Ontario are being encouraged to call, write or visit their federal and provincial members of parliament and local media to let them know just how serious the situation is and what the consequences of the crisis will be.

The move to have individual farmers launch a concerted lobbying effort comes after Ontario farm organizations received no response from letters sent to provincial and federal Agriculture Ministers. "In our letter of July 2, 1991 we offered a variety of possible measures to assist producers through the crisis. We've received no response," said Dave Alderman, Vice-Chairman of the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Boards. "We are now asking farmers to demand a response from their elected representatives."

Ontario farm leaders have called an interim Gross Revenue Insurance Program (GRIP) payment, an increase in the initial price for wheat, an Agricultural Stabilization Act top-up, export credits, increased provincial stabilization, equality on Net Income Stabilization Account (NISA) coverage and a continuation of advance payment benefits for all grain and oilseed producers.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) which represents over 35,000 Ontario farmers is hoping the shift from a group lobbying effort to an individual lobbying effort will be successful in producing some assistance for the province's farmers.



SHEET THREE --

TEACHER RESOURCE

BEEF IMPORT DUTY

Canadian beef farmers won a ruling July 22 that means their European counterparts must continue to pay an import duty on all beef exports entering Canada.

A countervailing duty on European beef of \$1.85 a kilogram was imposed in 1986 by the Canadian Import Tribunal, a trade-monitoring agency, because the imports from Europe threatened Canadian producers. The tribunal's decision not to lift the duty means it will be extended for another five years.

Removing the duty would have opened the Canadian market to increased shipments of highly subsidized beef. These subsidized imports would mean lower prices for Canadian beef farmers, according to the Canadian Cattlemen's Association.

Trade Minister Michael Wilson, applauded the ruling saying, "Increasing use of export subsidies by EEC countries in recent years has caused serious damage to a wide range of Canada's agricultural products."

The tribunal said the EEC could be expected to ship 30 million to 40 million pounds of beef to Canada if the tariffs were allowed to expire.

GST

Changes and clarifications to the federal government's Goods and Services Tax were announced by Finance Minister Don Mazankowski on June 24.

The announced changes will have an impact on shares issued by cooperatives, livestock feedlots and transitional treatment of new residential properties.

The Income Tax Act will be amended to clarify that shares in cooperative corporations - other than shares in dining, recreational or sporting services - are exempt. This means Alberta Pool members will not pay the seven per cent GST on Alberta Pool reserves or any other cooperative association to which they may belong.

Mazankowski said the purpose of the amendment is to recognize the co-op shares are similar to other financial instruments which are exempt.

The change to feedlots provides all sales of livestock feed to be zero-rated or exempt from the GST. This puts feedlots on the same level as feedmills and other suppliers of zero-rated livestock feed.

BARLEY CUTS CHOLESTEROL

Research conducted by a group of Australian scientists has shown that eating barley can lower cholesterol levels in humans by up to 12 per cent.

The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization changed the wheat-based diets of 21 men aged 30 to 55 with high cholesterol levels to barley. After four weeks, their cholesterol levels had dropped an average of six per cent. The differences ranged from two to 12 per cent.

TEACHER RESOURCE

SHEET FOUR --



CAIRNS GROUP

The Cairns Group of 14 countries which includes Canada is calling for an end to disputes over farm subsidies that have stalled world trade talks.

The Group, formed to fight subsidies and unfair trading practices in farm products, is meeting in Brazil this week to develop a strategy to present to the G-7 meeting of leading industrialized countries set for the week of July 15.

The aim of the group is to continue to work towards a successful outcome of the GATT negotiations. According to a federal news release dated July 8, the Canadian government's objectives in the agricultural talks are to achieve substantial reductions in export subsidies, increase access to export markets and develop clear and fair GATT rules that apply equally to all countries.

Brazilian Agriculture Minister Antonio Cabrera opened the two day meeting by criticizing countries such as the U.S. and the EEC, claiming their \$300 billion U.S. in annual farm subsidies have forced down food prices and bankrupted growers in poor countries.

Canada is represented at the Cairns Group meeting by Canadian Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds Charlie Mayer. Mayer reportedly believes there has been some useful progress made since the Group last met in November.

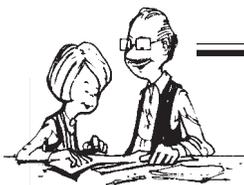
"The European Community is not the only group that needs to make accommodations. Japan and Korea must also be prepared to make adjustments and the U.S. and Cairns Group must respond positively to overtures from other exporting nations," Mayer said.

Prairie Pools Inc., the lobbying arm for the three Prairie Wheat Pools, has already voiced its opinion on putting an end to the trade war. PPI Chairman Alex Graham says the export subsidy programs of the U.S. and the EEC have significantly reduced farm income and time is running out for farmers who can't survive many more years of extremely low grain prices. In a letter addressed to Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Graham urged the federal government for strong representation at the upcoming G-7 meeting.

With the U.S. recently removing the limit of \$435 million that had been set for spending on agricultural subsidies and the EEC still not completely committed to the idea of slashing its support levels, Cairns Group members continue to express concern with the subsidy war. As one representative put it, "in any price or subsidy war, those that lose are the countries that are least able to pay subsidies. When elephants fight, it's the grass that loses."

Cairns Group Members

- ✦ Canada
- ✦ Argentina
- ✦ Australia
- ✦ Chile
- ✦ Columbia
- ✦ New Zealand
- ✦ Thailand
- ✦ Philippines
- ✦ Malaysia
- ✦ Fiji
- ✦ Hungary
- ✦ Uruguay
- ✦ Indonesia
- ✦ Brazil



SHEET FIVE --

TEACHER RESOURCE

ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES FACE FARMERS

At Prairie Pools Inc.'s semi-annual meeting held in Red Deer, Alberta July 9-11, John Oliver of the Crop Protection Institute of Canada offered his insights on the difficulties of dealing with the increasing environmental pressure on agriculture.

Oliver believes that environmental pressures and the search for sustainability will have a large impact on the financial viability of the agricultural industry and will shape the future of farming in Canada.

"There is no doubt," says Oliver, "that it isn't easy being green and there are environmental pressures being brought to bear on farming. At the same time there are pressures to make farming more viable. The ultimate goal for farming is to achieve greater profitability while sustaining and enhancing the quality of the environment which we will pass on to our children and grandchildren."

In his review on the current state of agriculture, Oliver points out that global events and pressures are shaping the future of Canadian farming. Worldwide ecological events such as the rain forest cutting in Brazil, the possible impact of the greenhouse effect and the depletion of the ozone layer are prevalent issues in today's society. "Heightened awareness of environmental issues and fear of the consequences have become very personal to individuals because of the possible effects on them and their families," said Oliver.

These ecological issues will force major changes in the development of national policies according to Oliver and although the times are uncertain, the changes also have the ability to offer great technological opportunity.

Oliver outlines three key areas that the farming community should concentrate on when reacting to these new environmental pressures: stewardship, vigilance and action.

Oliver stresses stewardship because it is important for farmers to protect the land they live on. There have been numerous initiatives proposed over the last few years that could have a positive effect on the environment. Practices such as improved crop rotations, wind and water erosion control measures, better ways of recycling plastics and introducing more biodegradable materials in farming are just a few outlined by Oliver.

"The key thing, I believe, is that all of us in farming must consciously, every day, think about the environment," said Oliver. "We must question what we are doing. We must question whether our practices follow the principles of good stewardship."

Oliver also pointed out that it is important for agriculture to always have a positive, upbeat, strong stewardship image. "Efforts should be focused on doing everything possible to keep agriculture on the offense, not defending the things that we do," says Oliver.

The other key area of focus for the farming community is vigilance, or what Oliver describes as being "on your guard" or "on the watch." He outlines political opportunism, media sensationalism and corporate ignorance as powerful tools in the environmental arena.

Politicians and corporations are all hopping on the environmental bandwagon because of its high profile. All of a sudden mining companies are becoming green, banks are green, manufacturers are green. Unfortunately, some of these politicians and corporations do not take the time to seriously study the issues and find out if the facts they are relaying on environmental issues are correct says Oliver. The same scenario also holds true for media who are often looking for the sensational story to help increase readership.

Oliver's final point focuses on action. "We must get everyone in our organizations and in our farming communities thinking about environmental stewardship and really becoming involved with doing the right things," suggests Oliver. "A plan must be developed and the appropriate action taken to see that plan implemented."

Oliver also encourages farmers to get involved in social clubs, charitable organizations and political parties in order to speak up about agriculture. Being able to defend what you are doing in a positive manner and stepping forward or standing up for farming is vitally important to the future of agriculture says Oliver.

"It is only through our involvement and concerted action that we will be able to bring the kind of changes forward that will meet the twin goals of maintaining the quality and quantity of food production in Canada while sustaining and enhancing our environment for generations to come," concluded Oliver.