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SUPPORTING THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: CASE STUDY – BRENDA LAMMENS

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Supporting the Advancement of Women in Agriculture (SAWA)

Case Study – Impact of One Woman

1.0 Background

Brenda Lammens was a strong advocate for agriculture, volunteering with a number of agriculture boards and associations in addition to being a co-owner/operator of Spearit Farms with her husband. Her love for the asparagus industry was evident in her role as director and chair of the Asparagus Farmers of Ontario Board (2000-2013). Brenda was the chair of this board from 2007-2010. She also wore her 'Asparagus pin' all over the world letting everyone know she was a farmer/grower and proud of it. The role she played as an asparagus producer helped her springboard into other important roles in the broader agriculture industry including holding roles such as Director, The Agricultural Adaptation Council, Chair/Past Chair of the Agri-Food Management Institute (AMI). Brenda served on the Board of Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association for seven years and in 2007 became the second woman ever to Chair the Board. She was the Chair/Past Chair on the Ontario Agricultural Commodity Council.

Through this work, Brenda noticed that there were not enough women at the table with her. She often dealt with comments such as "oh it's a skirt that made that comment"¹ As a strong leader, Brenda knew that she could help mentor other women so they would also get involved in these roles. She also had the respect of her male colleagues.

2.0 Problem Statement

There was a lack of female representation in leadership roles in agriculture associations in Ontario and Canada.

3.0 Case Study Objective

The overall objective of the case study is to analyze the impact Brenda Lammens had on the role of women in agriculture in Canada. Brenda was a trail blazer for women in the industry. More specifically, the case study will look at the impact her work had on raising awareness of opportunities for women in agriculture.

4.0 Situational Analysis

Brenda's experience was not unique. The preliminary research conducted as part of the *Supporting the Advancement of Women in Agriculture (SAWA)* project provided insights into the number of women in leadership roles in agriculture – both employed in corporations and industry associations and in volunteer roles on Boards.

¹ <http://london.ctvnews.ca/more-women-getting-involved-in-farming-1.1531127>
SAWA Case Study – The Impact of One Woman

Interviews with female senior managers or Board Directors found that in many cases they are still the only females on their senior leadership team or Board. The SAWA survey results painted a more positive picture with 34.8% reporting that the key decision maker in their organization was female. However, when asked about the gender of the Board Chair, 21% responded the Chair was female. It should be noted that these higher numbers from the survey may be influenced by the fact that 87% of survey respondents were women and of these women 76.9% self-identified as a supervisor, manager or owner/operator in one or more organization.

Data from Statistics Canada's 2011 National Household Survey supports the claim that men dominate the leadership roles in the agriculture industry. Women accounted for 25% of managers of agriculture. The research also shows that it is not that women do not aspire to fill these roles. Seventy-three percent of female respondents to the SAWA survey reported aspiring to advance their careers. Looking at leadership programs, 60% of 4-H leadership participants are girls and this is the same average for recent female participation in the Advance Agriculture Leadership Program. Another interesting point, however, is that only 18% of female survey respondents reported applying for jobs to advance their careers. Sixty percent reported trying to move up in their careers by taking more education and networking.

5.0 Action Taken

Many would look at this situation and think they have no control, as one person, to make change happen. In fact, many would walk away instead of work for positive change. There have been women, however, that have looked at the situation and made it a personal mission to change things. This case study looks at the impact one of these women had on the role of women in leadership.

Even though Brenda Lammens was aware there were not many women colleagues at the table with her in her roles in agricultural and rural association Boards she did not step away. In fact, not only did she continue her work on these Boards, she began work specifically focused on getting more women involved with her. Brenda worked to advocate for the increase of women in leadership roles in agriculture. She served as a role model to many women who had not seen themselves at the table in the past. Brenda took the time to mentor many other women as well.

Just over ten years ago, Brenda was introduced to the American Agri Women (AAW) through her work with the Canadian consulate in Minnesota. She became involved in this group and identified the opportunity to work with AAW to bridge connections between women in agriculture in Canada and the USA. One way Brenda worked toward bridging these connections was to present at the AAW Annual Meeting regarding current issues and challenges facing Ontario and Canadian agriculture. This included organizing Canada Day as part of the AAW's annual convention that attracted 250 women from both countries. She also attended Syngenta's "Leadership at its Best" as a guest of AAW. Brenda's work was recognized by receiving the Vision Award from AAW for her commitment to strengthening the relationship between the two countries. Her work also involved the consulate involving other Canadian women in these events.

When the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) reached out to Brenda to ask her to join the SAWA Advisory Committee she did not hesitate to again volunteer her time towards this mission

of increasing the number of women in leadership roles in agriculture. As part of the SAWA research several women interviewed noted Brenda's leadership as a reason they too were involved in agriculture, continuing to work towards increased representation of women in leadership roles in the industry.

Along with all the volunteer time Brenda contributed to the industry, she also worked along side her husband as co-owner/operator of their family farm. Brenda did not stop her work as a leader in agriculture overall. She served two years as Chair and then as Past Chair of the Agri-food Management Institute (AMI). She was a Director on the Agricultural Adaptation Council representing horticulture. In 2017 Brenda's work with the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, the organization she chaired from 2007 to 2010, was recognized with the Industry Award of Merit.

Brenda's impact on women did not just stop at women working in agriculture. She was a role model for the next generation of women coming into the industry and the workforce as a whole. As a coach for her daughter's ringette team from 1996 to 2006 not only did she teach the girls about sport, she instilled in them her life skills for these girls to take forward into their own careers.

6.0 Case Summary

There is still work to be done to increase the representation of women in agricultural leadership roles in Ontario and in Canada. However, the strides made by one woman – Brenda Lammens – has left a legacy of work for others to follow in her footsteps. She was a role model and mentor to many women – and men. Brenda proved that one woman could make significant change.