

## MWAF interview to Debra Hauer

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Debra Hauer, Manager of labour market information program (AgriLMI) at the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC). CAHRC is a national, non-profit organization that focuses on addressing human resource issues facing agricultural businesses in Canada

**Background:** Debra worked within the agricultural industry for her whole career. She grew up on mixed beef and grain farm in north-western Saskatchewan, acted as Executive Director of the Saskatchewan 4-H Council, obtained a degree in Agricultural Sciences from the Univ. of SK, a Master's degree in Education: aboriginal adult education and collaborative learning, taught Soil Management, Crop Production and Horticulture courses at Wascana Institute in Regina, and managed numerous agricultural projects. Debra has been in CAHRC for the last 10 years.

- 1. What are the main milestones of your career?** I grew up on family farm, went to the University of SK and obtained my degree in agriculture. I spent my formative years within 4-H where I rose through the ranks up to Provincial 4-H Supervisor. I worked with the Saskatchewan Indian Agriculture Program (SIAP) and taught at the Wascana Institute in Regina. Both positions involved much travelling across SK and learning. I moved on to ON where I worked for an aboriginal women organization called Equay-Wuk. After that I moved with my family to New Zealand, where lived for 5 years and worked at the Red Cross. At the end I came back to Canada, to Ottawa, and started working at CAHRC where I've been for 10 years.
- 2. What were the reasons of your milestones?** A consistent theme was my interest in agriculture, education and non-profits. I feel very strongly about 4-H and wanted to be part of it. Taking a position at CAHRC brought all my interests and skills together, i.e., an NGO, adult education, agriculture and using the research skills gained during my M.Sc.
- 3. What motivate you in good times and through road blocks?** Getting a job after graduation was not difficult because in the 70s there were more jobs than people. Also, the expectation was that the employer that hire you would provide the training. Now, all is different. I really didn't encounter obstacles in SK. However, things changed after I came from New Zealand because people didn't know who I was. I had to start all over again, develop my context and my network. That's when I went for my M.Sc. in aboriginal adult education and collaborative learning.  
  
What gets me through road blocks is that I decided to have a positive attitude and focus on what's working and what's positive. The results are positive results. I believe you can mindfully put on a positive lens in front of your eyes so that you can think up positive solutions and the way to move forward. When there are issues I think: "what can be done now?" and not worry about the future. I set it aside. If I feel paralyzed in action I think "what's the worst thing that can happen?" and always find that what can happen is not as bad as what you can make up in your mind.
- 4. Did you see yourself as a taking a leadership role in this field before?** I would say yes because of my experience in 4-H. Much of the program focuses on leadership development.

That's why in university I joined Saskatchewan 4-H Alumni where I fulfilled a variety of roles including president. I can say that 4-H shaped my mind to perform as leader.

5. **Why are you involved with gender issues in ag?** Partly because of gender issues in agriculture have been part of my life experiences and career. For instance, my mother at the farm did the book keeping. At some point, she wanted to take a course in farm accounting but was told no by an administrator because the courses were more appropriate for men. I didn't feel that there were barriers for me. In the university in the 70s, the women that enrolled 2-3 years before me, made things better for me. For instance, the class before me had 15 women, mine had 30, the one after me 45 and more thereafter. However, there were situations where I saw inequality. For instance, at that time we had to go an advisor and tell what we wanted to do after graduation. I did and said I wanted to go into dairy and food processing. My advisor told me to choose something else because women were not employed in that field. I chose then soil sciences. These experiences made me take an interest in gender issues.

6. **Please comment on what's been going on with women in ag? What's going on now? What do you see happening in the next short in this regard?** In the last 5 years there is been women spring up spontaneously across Canada and speaking up about women's issues. Generally, they are in their 20s and 30s and have the interest and energy to focus on gender issues. Examples of women are Iris Meck and her AWC, AWN. There were also women's groups in agriculture in the 70s but then the discussions died down. It has re-emerged now.

When you combine the emergence of women and groups of women in ag and the me-too movement, people talk about issues such as pay equity and sexual harassment at the work place. Right now, the main issues in ag are: 1) labour shortage, 2) who will be doing labour work? 3) Who will be the farm owners in the future? We need to encourage non-traditional sectors to enter agriculture and increase the capacity of women, new comers, indigenous people and move people from others sectors to ours. A big concern right now is "who will be working in ag in the future?" There are fewer farm families, the farms are changing, they are bigger and hence they need employees.

In the short-term future, I think men will become more involved in conversations. My hope is that men and women will move the issues forward together. For instance, some people think that there are no problems or barriers. If we can hold conversations about this, we can move forward.

7. **What are you doing now? Why?** At the personal level I like skiing in the winter and gardening and bicycling in the summer. At work I am involved on a labor market information project. It consists of surveys of farmers, farm businesses and labour. We want to know how many jobs remain unfilled, and hear their voices their issues and learn about barriers.

8. **What would you like to leave behind you after retirement?** I would be satisfied if I build something that continues on afterwards, for example, my work on the labour market information project.

9. **What do you think are the most important characteristic good leaders should have to advance the women's file in Canada?** Having 1) an open mind and heart, 2) ability to listen and communicate with people, and 3) be uncompromising with the vision and future they believe in.