

ecfwa

Eastern Canada Farm Writers' Association

January 2002

the nib

Winter blahs be gone

Get ready to get better at ECFWA seminars

We want to give you more! More ideas, more tools, more ways to do your job, even better.

Judging by the turnout of the series of three professional development seminars held last year – and hangers on for the group dinner after – we're doing it again.

The ECFWA "Get Better" Series is set. We've planned three seminars for 2002 – with a subject for everybody to get better at. All seminars will be held at the Ontario Government Building, One Stone Road in Guelph.

#1

Cheaper, better, faster:

A guide to getting into digital photography

Get all the goods from our panel of users, sellers and proponents.

Tuesday, February 12, 2002

One Stone Road, Guelph,

4-6 PM

(followed by pay-your-own-way dinner at local Guelph pub)

#2

What makes a great media event...other than free food?

We'll hear from hacks and flacks about what makes a winning event from both perspectives.

Wednesday, March 6, 2002

One Stone Road, Guelph,

4-6 PM *(pay-your-way pub dinner to follow)*

#3

Look who's NOT talking! Is ag communications being cheated by a shrinking source base?

Find out from our panel discussion representing farm media, national radio, government, industry and a farmer about how the source base has changed.

Tuesday, April 9, 2002

One Stone Road, Guelph

4-6 PM *(pay-your-way pub dinner to follow)*

We're keeping the prices the same as last year. Members: \$10/session or \$25 for the series when you pre-register. Non-members: \$15/session or \$40/series. Register today by contacting Karen Lewis by phone (905) 875-3070 x 243 or klewis@adculture.com

A breakfast they'll always remember



This group of ECFWA members will never forget where they were on the morning of September 11, 2001 – innocently enjoying a complimentary breakfast on opening day of Canada's Outdoor Farm Show while the world changed around them.

Photo: Jane Robinson

inside the nib

Prez Sez	2
Art Stirling wins CAMA honour	2
News release survey says	3
Niblets	4
CIPES luncheon speaker	4
From the CFWF archives	4

Prez Sez...

Andrew Douglas
ECFWA President



Art Stirling: 2001 Agri-Marketer of the Year

Long-time farm writer member and supporter Art Stirling of Pioneer Hi-Bred Limited has been named 2001 Agri-Marketer of the Year by the Canadian Agri-Marketing Association, at its annual awards ceremony held in November 2001.

Art's marketing innovation, exemplary leadership and impassioned involvement have touched the breadth of the agri-food industry. He joined Pioneer in 1985, and has risen through the organization to his current position as government and industry relations manager. Art is the chief liaison between the company and key government departments, trade organizations, regulatory agencies and industry groups.

Art has also taken on an integral role in helping Canadians reach a deeper understanding of modern agriculture and biotechnology. He represents Pioneer on the boards of directors of BIOTEC Canada, the Food Biotechnology Communications Network and the Canadian Food Information Council, and is active in the Canadian Seed Trade Association and CropLife Canada dealing with many of the issues this sector faces.

Art's marketing accomplishments have a decided educational bent too. He was instrumental in leading a campaign to enhance the University of Guelph's agricultural communication program, which encompasses the nationally recognized Students Promoting Awareness of Research Knowledge (SPARK) program.

Writing, meetings, more writing.

It's easy to forget to put your pen down and think about professional development – especially through the winter, one of the busiest times of year for ag communicators.

Never fear, for your ECFWA executive is looking out for you. We decided that providing more opportunities for professional development is one way ECFWA could become even more relevant to its members. So once again we've put together a lineup for the winter training seminars that address issues we're facing as farm writers.

Our first seminar addresses digital cameras – a tool that is starting to replace film in newsrooms across the country. Michael Raine, award-winning photojournalist from the *Western Producer*, will help demystify the subject on February 12.

With fewer farm journalists media events get harder to plan. It's a flack's worst nightmare to have a client reading from a news release to an empty room and a hack's frustration to attend a meeting that doesn't

produce copy. Our second event will feature ag journalists and PR professionals trading ideas on how to make a killer news event.

Our third seminar will answer a tricky question: Are we as ag communicators facing a shrinking source base? Certainly on the livestock side it's getting tougher to get large commercial operators to go on the record, especially when they've already been branded as factory farmers by urban media. Many of us end up quoting the same easy-to-use sources. Are there too few ag experts to go around?

Stay tuned for even more learning opportunities. We're working on putting together another must-attend event for our AGM on May 8. We're also planning to resurrect the popular summer bus tour – complete with overnight stay.

Now, get back to writing.

Andrew Douglas
Associate Editor
Country Guide Magazine

♦♦♦♦

Mark it in today...the 2002 annual meeting.

ECFWA Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, May 8, 2002

9 AM – 1:30 PM

Arboretum Centre, University of Guelph

Speaker details to come.

Don't just sit there, write a news release

Informal survey shows pick up is fantastic

by Owen Roberts

If you're debating whether to issue a release about something newsworthy you've done or are about to do, delay no more – especially if you're issuing your release electronically. In the ag media, news releases are getting lots of attention, and electronic releases are hot.

Just before Christmas, I informally polled a random selection of 10 editors across the country, for a communications workshop I was involved with at AgWest Biotech in Saskatoon.

I'm always extolling the virtues of news releases, but it occurred to me that in recent memory, no one had asked editors if they were using them.

Electronic releases hot

It turns out they are, in droves. Especially electronic ones.

And they're getting a tonne of them, too – provincial weekly or monthly newspapers and magazine editors I sampled are getting at least 25 news releases a day (electronic, fax and snail mail). A particularly active day at one of the weeklies will see that figure rise to about 80 releases.

Faxed releases, once the rage, are losing their lustre. More and more releases are arriving electronically, ranging from a high of "almost all" at one western weekly and 90 per cent at a western monthly, to just 10 per cent at an eastern weekly. But the latter was an anomaly; most editors said they

receive 25 to 50 per cent of their news releases electronically, and those numbers are on the rise.

But for me, the eye-opening response was the pick-up rate. One

One weekly editor said as much as 50 per cent of the news in his paper originated with news releases.

weekly editor said as much as 50 per cent of the news in his paper originated with news releases. That was the high; the low was 10 per cent, the norm was 25 to 30 per cent. It seemed some of this uptake could be attributed to electronic releases, which two editors told me they liked because they were "easy to download directly into the publication".

How's that for an opportunity for editorial input?

Sharpen writing skills

Forget about the 50 per cent figure for a minute. I'd say even the norm is incentive enough for news providers (e.g., agencies, universities, companies, farm organizations, commodity groups, you name it) to make sure their news-release writing skills are sharp.

These figures also support the suggestion that professional communicators have a direct role to play in the media, too, as well as a weighty responsibility – if media is trusting news providers to contribute so significantly to their publications and news programs,

news providers have an obligation to provide the straight goods.

Whether news release uptake equates to media influence is questionable. But influence has become

worrisome to our counterparts in the US. In November, the Agricultural Communications Documentation Centre out of the University of

Wisconsin pointed to a study in the Journal of Applied Communications that said US agricultural writers feel they're facing increasing advertiser influence on editorial matters (a 10-year study).

Advertisers are reportedly becoming more aggressive in requesting editorial space – and writers are seeing agricultural publications increasingly catering to advertisers.

Stick to the news

Likewise, hints of exploitation were the most irksome point among the editors I talked to.

"If you're sending new product information, the release should not be an ad and should not be written as such," said one editor. Another was more emphatic. "If you want to announce a product," she said, "buy an ad." From the west came this advice: "If it's clearly promotional, we are leery. The word 'exciting' or 'excited' is generally the kiss of death." And the final word goes to an editor from Ontario: "Growers want to know how your news helps their business. Show them."

...Niblets...

John Muggeridge is making government speeches a lot easier to listen to as Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's latest speech writer. John is working from his home office in Waterloo. John can be reached at muggeridgej@em.agr.ca

~

And more congrats in order, to **Paul Mahon** promoted to Editor-in-Chief of *Ontario Farmer*.

~

Let's try that again. Plan your Maritime vacation for 2002 to coincide with the **CFWF annual conference** - Sept. 13-16, 2002 in Fredericton, NB.

~

Owen Roberts has landed a "Survivor"-style writing workshop, in Kenya. He'll spend February and part of March teaching communications to 70 Canadian university students on a field studies program there, where the topics include agroforestry and plant agriculture. He'd be happy to file a story or two from there!

~

Lifetime member **Murray Gaunt** has retired as chairman of the Ontario Broiler Hatching Egg and Chick Commission after nearly 17 years as commission chair. Murray is replaced by poultry producer Jim Rickard.

~

From the archives

The early years of farm writing

Excerpt from:

The Story of Canada's Farm Writers 1955-1978 by Jack McPherson

Farm writers have long considered themselves a breed apart. For many years, they had met informally at major agricultural events and growled about the facilities and material made available to them. Occasionally one or more of them would take action by making suggestions, some of which were sometimes acted upon by the organization concerned.

First concrete action for an organization for farm writers came at the annual meeting of the Agricultural Institute of Canada held in Edmonton on June 20, 1955. T.A. (Tom) Leach, then CBC Farm and Fisheries Producer for CBC Vancouver; R.V. (Dick) Beamish then with the *Western Producer* in Saskatoon; Jack Cram, Western Editor of the *Family Herald* in Winnipeg; Frank Jacobs, Editor, *Canadian Cattleman*, Calgary, and Don Baron, Western Editor of *Country Guide*, got together for a bull session and ended up deciding to try to start a Canadian Farm Writers' Association (Western Section) with the hope their counterparts in Eastern Canada would follow suit.

Speaker set for media luncheon at Toronto Farm Show

ECFWA members are invited to attend the media reception and luncheon at the 2002 Canadian International Farm Equipment Show on Tuesday, February 5, 2002. By now, you should have received more details as well as your media pass. If not, contact Sally Stewart at 1-800-607-1100 x 252.

Guest speaker, Brian Hauff, president & CEO of Agronix, Inc. Nutrient Recovery System, will present: *From Urgent Environmental Threat to Globally Marketable Products*.

Agronix, Inc. is a biotechnology company that has developed processes and specialized equipment to convert organic residues, such as animal manures, sewer sludge and other organics, into value-added products, including alternative fuels, for agriculture and industry.

CIFES runs February 5-8, 2002, at the International Centre Toronto (Mississauga) Ontario.

the nib is published up to four times a year for members of the Eastern Canada Farm Writers' Association. Please submit information to the editor:

Jane Robinson
Phone (519) 763-3293 ~ Fax (519) 763-2615
E-mail: writers@mgl.ca

Check out the CFWF website at www.cfwf.ca

ECFWA 2001/2002 Executive

President • Andrew Douglas
Past President • Elizabeth McClung
1st Vice-President • Bernard Tobin
2nd Vice-President • Terry Boland
Secretary-Treasurer • Karen Lewis
Newsletter Editor • Jane Robinson
Directors • Gary Lannin, Barry MacCormack, Doug Peebles, Heather Rand, Owen Roberts