

DIANNE MARGARET HARKIN (1934 –)

Dianne Harkin has made significant contributions to the Ontario and Canadian agriculture and food sector. There are three broad categories where she has had a great influence:

1. The official recognition of the contributions of women to Ontario agriculture.
2. The systemic acknowledgement of the importance of sustainable agricultural systems and the role of agricultural extension in the promotion of sustainability.
3. The growing awareness of governments and consumers of the importance of the Ontario agriculture and food sector.

In the pursuit of these broad objectives, Dianne accomplished a number of things. In 1975, she established the organization “Women for the Survival of Agriculture” which has ultimately morphed into the current “Ag Women’s Network”. A key result was the amending of the Canadian Income Tax Act and the Canada Pension Plan to enable farm women to claim a salary for their work on-farm. They were then able to apply for loans and to purchase farms as independent farm operators. This represented a major step forward in raising the social economic status of women in agriculture. The work continues to encourage and assist women to assume major roles throughout the sector.

As a member of the Ontario Institute of Agrology’s study team on “Directions for Sustainable Agriculture” (1986), and as a Director for the Canadian Senate’s “Soil Conservation Canada”, Dianne Harkin was instrumental in promoting agricultural sustainability across the province.

She was Chair of the OFA’s Public Relations Committee and led the organizing of the first National AgriFood Week, which has continued since 1998 as Ontario Agriculture Week acknowledging the value of agriculture. This effort, as well as her role as a well-known media commentator on agricultural issues, as the Editor of “Farm Women News” and her cross-country speaking engagements, all combined to promote the agriculture and food industry to governments, industry and consumers.

Because of her unique insights into Ontario agriculture and the people working within it and her ability to challenge the status quo and promote change, Dianne Harkin is a most valuable inductee into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame.

2020 Nominated by: Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA)

