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I attended the second International Conference on Women in Agriculture, held June 28 through July 2 at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. The conference drew more than 1,000 women from 50 countries and featured addresses and informational sessions from international presenters on a variety of agricultural topics.

Tipper Gore, wife of U.S. Vice President Al Gore, delivered a keynote address at the Salute From Australia hand over luncheon on June 29. Other speakers included U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, Canada Secretary of State for Agriculture and Agri-Food and for Fisheries and Oceans Gilbert Normand, First Lady of El Salvador Elizabeth Aguirre de Calderon, Mexico Senator Beatriz Paredes, Argentina Under Secretary for Women's Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Relations Teresa Sola, Australian Ambassador to the U.S. Andrew Peacock, and U.S. Representatives Eva Clayton (North Carolina) and Marcy Kaptur (Ohio). I also attended informational sessions convened by women from Iran, Africa, South America, Australia, U.S.A. on subjects ranging from Community Marketing to Concentrated Marketing, Empowering Youth Vitalizing Rural Communities to Holistic Business Management and Sustainable Agriculture and many more.

Travelling to Washington to participate in the conference was a very exciting and powerful experience for me. I had a number of areas that interested me, including recognising the knowledge, skills and experience of the other delegates and to build on this because these networks are a very significant aspect of rural women:/ to increase the value of exports (possibly live) in targeted niche markets:/ to look at improving the profitability of our industry and processors with a much more strategic use of the primary product:/ to make our industry aware of international trends and also build confidence in industry from the community – and many more. I enjoyed the opportunity to discuss shared experiences and views on rural issues with other women from around the world. There is really no substitute for speaking face to face in order to reach common solutions to issues we each face in our day to day lives.

The conference was sponsored by President Clinton's Interagency Council on Women and hosted the U.S. Department of Agriculture. "This conference was a very good opportunity for governmental organisations, nonprofits and individual farm women to talk to one another about agricultural issues, from running family farms and co-ops to strengthening rural communities". said Jill Long Thompson, Agriculture under secretary for Rural Development and International Conference on Women in Agriculture conference chair. "USDA and the President's Interagency Council were proud to have hosted such a diverse gathering of women in agriculture from around the world".

The second day of the conference was a "Salute from Australia" and this was a great hit with everyone.

The Master of Ceremonies was the Australian Ambassador to the U.S. H.E. The Hon. Andrew Peacock. The keynote speaker was Kerry Sanderson Director of the Australian Wheat Board and Kerry spoke on "A Unique Global Grain Marketer"

During the luncheon a video was launched called Gathering Strength: A Salute to Australia's Agricultural Women. Fishing did get a mention, and I would hope to show this video at a later meeting of WIN.

A magnificent luncheon was served which did Australia proud: Aussie Beef Salad, Fresh Australian Rack of Lamb, and Aussie-American Apple Crisp all served with Australian Wines which were the only wines served for the whole of the conference.

We had many, many compliments regarding the luncheon, the presentation and our Australian delegation organisation in general. Our Australian scarves were much sort after and the South Australian delegation wore Arkubra hats with our South Australian scarves around the bands. These created much interest and helped us to easily find each other.

The South Australian Primary Industries Department, the Office of the Status of Women and the Fisheries Research and Development Council and the Women's Industry Network working with the South Australian Fishing Industry made my attendance at the conference possible. It was an exciting opportunity and I can assure you that I will make the most of the knowledge that I have gained.

Women in Primary Production need to link together to be heard on issues such as food systems, sustainable rural communities, and environmental integrity so as to be able to promote sustainable production and importantly their rural community structures.

Women's Industry Networks need to strive to help others in rural communities learn more about the political process, to be possible candidates or to effectively lobby at regional state or federal levels, to work with other organisations in an effort to build coalitions that will work to better the primary industries, both in this country and around the world, to education the public about the benefits of sustainable fishing and farming, to teach children about where their food and fibre come from and to achieve a positive image for primary industry.

Many women are scared to run for board positions because they think they do not have the knowledge they need to serve on boards, but you don't gain that knowledge until after you acquire the position, just as men do. The number one job of a board member is communicating back to the members you represent, the people whose livelihoods depend on the decisions. Listen to members, be flexible, anticipate and meet all challenges.

By networking rural women can be a strong force and make important contributions to the stability and prosperity of their industries, their communities and to the economy of their country.

Australian women are doing this and from the conference in Washington I learnt that we need to talk up our product, talk up our industry, talk up our state and talk up our nation.

There is no room for complacency but I learnt that we are using world's best practices here and we must be more positive about ourselves.

Through our Women's Industry Networks we can provide opportunities for better education on providing a holistic view on primary production. We can create further networks to support our producers, the consumers, the workers and others that strive for sustainability. We can inform people how to effectively access and use existing resources, and also engage them in experimental learning while always being respectful of the spirituality of our land and people.

We must acknowledge the fundamental contribution to meal security by women, particularly in rural areas of developing countries and the need to ensure equality between men and women particular in developing countries. Globally women are the food producers and they must accept and support their ability to initiate change. Women food producers in the global economy must support every countries right to

- 1 Fair price
- 2 Food Quality
- 3 Security of local food production, culture and the environment by rural women and their families.

We need to be aware and be prepared to challenge the globalization of economies, the cultures of domination, the destruction of landscapes, and oppressive conceptual frameworks.

Many economists continue to stubbornly insist market concentration leads to efficiency and better competitive positions in the world market. However, bits and pieces of market surveys are beginning to yield evidence suggesting the opposite may be true. Just as biodiversity is crucial in the environment, so is market diversity critical to a healthy free enterprise. Market concentration hurts producers and consumers through inflexible pricing and narrow supply options.

Creation of viable new and improved businesses and possibly cooperatives in rural Australia should be a top priority. Rural Australians have a right to the same quality of life as is enjoyed by people who live in suburban and city areas.

It is very worrying all around the world to see the disappearance of the small and medium size farms, the depopulation of the rural areas, and the loss of the culture that relates to food. It is obvious that the emphasis on large-scale farming and concentrated marketing is having a negative effective on the rural areas around the world.

Market concentration and family farm or fishery decline are not inevitable, nor do they relate from "economies of size".

Government policies need to be designed to allow small producers access to fair markets and redirect some programs skewed toward serving the interest of large agribusiness. Primary industries suppliers must be allowed to have say in the National Competition Policy processes. Commodity prices must not be cut so low as to not give the producer a fair price. Below cost marketing is no good for anyone especially rural communities.

We need to look to the strengths of small producers, provide fair, competitive and open markets, establish future generation of small producers, emphasise sustainable production and provide good rural working and living conditions. Improvements can always be made to the availability of training, information services and programs.

Trade in primary industries is full of opportunities for women. It is a dynamic and challenging industry with huge opportunities for value adding.  
We need to optimise the role of women as decision-makers and leaders in their field.

The conference resolved that the role and rights of women in agriculture must be respected and supported by the nations and the societies that they serve; that women involved in agriculture, whether by choice or by need, shall be valued and consulted as equal partners in the production and trade of agricultural goods, and that women in agriculture shall be valued and consulted as well in the best practicable methods of agricultural production to sustain human health, international prosperity, and the global environment.

I hope that there will be additional opportunities in the future to share our achievements and challenges of rural women, and that women will always be valued and consulted as equal partners in the production and trade of primary industries as we sustain human health, international prosperity and the global environment.

We need to piece together all the information into successful strategies to add value to our industries and I will leave you with this "Be part of the solution not part of the problem".

Gloria Jones.