



# WOMEN IN THE EGG INDUSTRY

Canada's egg industry continues to grow and evolve and with that comes unique opportunities for inclusion and diversity. Our industry relies on the determination and hard work of our farmers, and now more than ever, we are finding opportunities to strengthen the presence of women and the next generation of agricultural leaders. Women have always been central to the production and promotion of eggs, and while the nature and meaning of their contributions changed over time, there is an ongoing move toward creating a more accessible agricultural sector for all.

A 2017 study documented the history of women's involvement in egg farming and sought to understand the underrepresentation of female egg farmers in leadership positions within our industry. The study noted that women have historical contributions to egg farming by fostering collaboration among producers, championing the system of supply management and educating consumers about farmers' stories.

## About the study

The two-part study explored women's evolution in egg farming in Canada and analyzed the historical and modern-day barriers that hinder women's participation in leadership roles. Thirty-six women who were directly engaged in egg production or who served in a managerial or advisory role for an egg farming business were interviewed and surveyed. The study also identified strategies to encourage women to secure leadership positions within our sector.





This photograph of Mrs. Christie with her winning White Orpington at the Hamilton Exhibition appeared with the article "Show Your Birds in Show Condition," Canadian Poultry Journal (July 1926).

## Through the ages

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was customary for women to raise and care for poultry. Although this work contributed significantly to farm household economies, it was often considered supplementary to other work done on the mixed farms of the period.

An interesting shift of women's role in egg production occurred during the Second World War when food rationing was emphasized as a critical war effort. Despite essential contributions to food provisioning during wartime, women were still considered farm wives rather than farmers.

With the increased industrialization of farming operations in the postwar period came dramatic changes on egg and poultry farms in Canada. A move toward fewer,

larger farms with increased use of mechanization and technological innovation are among a few factors that contributed to the declining importance of women's role in production. Across the agricultural sector, farming women's legal rights to property were insubstantial and their ability to exert influence as decision-makers was not legally protected. The inability for more than one family member to claim title as farm operator in the Canadian Census of Agriculture limited women's ability to claim full partnership on the farm, reinforcing social conventions and gendered assumptions about women as helpers rather than farmers.

**"MORE EGGS" -  
our contribution to victory!**

"It's a small contribution to Victory, we know. But every little helps. Britain and the home front need eggs—so it's up to us to do our part." Everywhere the women on Canada's farms are doing this important war job . . . providing more eggs for the people of Britain . . . preparing more poultry for the home market. These are their jobs for Victory. . . . Canada's farm women are today numbered among our foremost war workers. With an eye to the future they are setting a high standard for Canadian products while they concentrate on helping to send more and more food to our boys overseas. Every farm woman in Canada can contribute to our war effort through helping to boost our farm production. Like all our war workers, their motto at this time is "carry on"—their extra labour lightened by their knowledge of the contribution they can make, today and every day, for the balance of this war.

**AGRICULTURAL SUPPLIES BOARD**  
Dominion Department of Agriculture, Ottawa.  
Honourable James G. Gardiner, Minister

*There's a War Job on every Canadian Farm*

**FOOD FOR VICTORY**

The Agricultural Supplies Board congratulated women for their wartime agricultural efforts; Agricultural Supplies Board, "More Eggs" - our contribution to victory!" [advertisement] Canada Poultryman (December 1942).



## Second wave of feminism

When the *Farm Products Marketing Agency Act* was passed in January 1972 and the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency (CEMA) was formed the following December, the landscape of egg farming changed. More women were taking on leadership roles in the industry. In 1975, Linda Boxall was elected by producers to the Saskatchewan Commercial Egg Producers Marketing Board as the first female marketing board member in Canada. Five years later, the first National Farm Women's Conference was held, and it connected and empowered a diverse group of farming women from across Canada. Although the process was sometimes slow and uneven, over the course of the following decades women in the poultry industry increasingly occupied important leadership positions.

## Changes to the Canadian Census of Agriculture

Changes made to the Canadian Census of Agriculture in 1991 allowed more than one member of the family to claim title as farm operator meaning women who had previously been ineligible were finally able to identify themselves as a farm operator. This recognition for farm responsibilities and the growing number of women holding office in agricultural organizations also influenced a generation of women to push for more leadership opportunities. In 1998, egg farmer Monique Lecours was named Agricultural Woman of the Year by la Fédération des agricultrices du Québec in recognition of her long-time contributions in production and her efforts in helping women be recognized as farm partners rather than simply farm wives. In 2002, Carolynne Griffith became the first female Chair of Egg Farmers of Ontario. In the past two decades, women have held important roles in the industry, including the highest office on egg boards.



## Modern challenges

The progress made by female egg farmers in the past has increased equality within our industry. Yet, like other sectors, there are still barriers in attaining leadership positions at all levels. According to the women interviewed and surveyed in the study, these include limited time for activities other than farm work, primary caregiving responsibilities and gender biases within the Canadian agricultural landscape.

The strategies identified within the study for increasing women's prevalence in leadership roles in egg farming include building confidence by improving public speaking and growing industry knowledge, increasing access to peer mentorship, creating larger industry networks, allowing opportunities to participate in meetings remotely and fostering more inclusive environments that embrace women's participation.

## Conclusion

The evolution of women in egg farming is a deeply woven history that reflects the contributions, losses and successes of women in the industry and provides a broader commentary on the agricultural landscape in Canada. While the contributions of female egg farmers is impressive, more attention to the benefits of gender diversity throughout the industry will help strengthen the industry in the future.

The outcome of this research study was one of the main catalysts in launching Egg Farmers of Canada's Women in the Egg Industry Program in 2019.

## About the researcher

**Dr. Jodey Nurse** is a L. R. Wilson Assistant Professor at the Wilson Institute for Canadian History at McMaster University.

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