

Family Farm Tribute



DEVELOPED IN 1999-2000

History

It was the late-autumn of 1999. Dennis Mills, the Member of Parliament for Toronto-Danforth, colleagues from the Toronto area, policy aides from the Danforth office, and a number of concerned friends were discussing the news of the worst growing season in Canadian agriculture since the Great Depression.

What could be done to help alleviate such crises from arising in the future? How could urban Canada help? How could we energize Canadians-in the cities especially, where most of Canada's population resides-to embrace the importance of Canadian family farmers as a cornerstone of the safety and security of our national food supply?

CBC Radio: [MP Dennis Mills plans family farm tribute](#)

The idea emerged from that afternoon's roundtable to produce a national event, which would enlist the help of some of Canada's best musical talent, to be held in downtown Toronto that would bring the message, the joys and challenges, of rural Canadians and family farmers to urban Canadians. This

would not be an aid event or a benefit concert. This would be geared toward raising awareness of the importance of family farmers as the source of the food we eat.

[Western Producer, January 6, 2000: Toronto MP champions urban farm rally](#)

Dozens of caring and passionate sponsors, family farmers from throughout Canada, volunteers, parliamentary colleagues and musicians put their support behind the idea.

Approximately one month later, on Sunday January 16, 2000, so, too, did nearly 12,000 people who gathered in Toronto's Air Canada Centre for the Canada's first Family Farm Tribute (not to mention all those in Canada and in the United States who tuned in to CBC Newsworld's live television broadcast of the five-hour event).

The event featured 19 top Canadian musical acts spanning a variety of genres, a comprehensive family farm exhibit gallery, and educational video transmitted between performances through the Air Canada Centre's jumbotron system. The event was carried live to a national audience by CBC Newsworld, and by Standard Radio (The Mix and CFRB) and its affiliate stations throughout the country. The simultaneous webcast was by CBC Online and familyfarmtribute.com.

\$20,000 in proceeds from ticket sales were donated to the Prairie Farm Women's Crisis Fund, a national initiative administered by the Canadian Women's Foundation designed to assist women and children of farm families living in crisis situations.

Just days prior to this event, Honourable Lyle Van Clief, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, announced immediate measures for farm income assistance packages to Canada's family farmers.

Since that first event, Family Farm Tribute has organized several initiatives that promote the importance of Canada's family farmers and the safety and security of our national food supply.

Family Farm Food Fare – April 2000

On Saturday April 29th of that same year, Family Farm Tribute hosted the Family Farm Food Fare at the Holy Name Church on Danforth Avenue in Toronto.

The event featured live farm animals on the Church lawn, trucked in courtesy of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and two dedicated family farmers from Ontario's Peel Region, a vegetarian cooking demonstration by the catering division of Field to Table together with representatives from the Dieticians of Canada, and a keynote presentation by guest of honour, the Honourable Allan Rock, Canada's Minister of Health.

This event was designed to reinforce the message that we are what we eat — and the source of that safe and secure food most often comes from our very own family farmers.

The event was sponsored in part by Foodshare Toronto, a non-profit organization that receives, grows and delivers fresh food to thousands of lower-income families in the Toronto area.

Canadian Family Farm Food and Wine Celebration – February 2001

In January 2001, Ontario farmers Joe Hickson, John Doner, Bruce Pearse, John Holtrop, Dale Mountjoy, David Frew and Don Chapman visited Dennis Mills at Dennis' constituency office on The Danforth. They posed an interesting question: "How can we get elected MPs in the House of Commons to become as energized as those who attended the first Family Farm Tribute a year earlier?"

The idea that emerged from that afternoon's discussion developed into Canada's largest-ever gathering of family farmers, MPs, Senators, staffers and aides on Parliament Hill.

On the evening of Tuesday February 20, 2001, Family Farm Tribute hosted what was our second major event, the Canadian Family Farm Food and Wine Celebration, in Parliament's Hall of Honour in the Centre Block. Those who design the public policies and the laws of our land were treated to an evening of discussion, dialogue and education by those who grow the food for our nation. Our message was simple: come and taste and appreciate and the fruits of our national harvest and meet and understand those who grow it for you.

Perhaps one of the more memorable aspects of this event was the fact that this was the first time that nearly 300 family farmers were meeting with national officials from all parties inside Canada's Parliament, instead of demonstrating or protesting on the lawns outside the institution. Of course, the treat for everyone was the 32 buffet tables that featured a sampling of virtually every food grown in Canada by family farmers coast-to-coast. The variety of what is actually grown and produced in Canada amazed and surprised even some of the farmers themselves. Samplings included east coast cultivated shellfish, northern Ontario pickerel, Okanogan Valley apples, Saskatoon berries, Ontario lamb, Alberta beef, PEI potatoes, specialty pastas made from prairie wheat, wines from the Niagara Peninsula, dozens of speciality cheeses from Quebec, as well as many domestically-farmed game meats, hothouse-grown vegetables and Canadian-grown herbs and garnishes (such as sweet lemon grass, fiddleheads, rhubarb, and salad rye seed).

The event, attended by about 1,400 people (estimates from Parliament Hill Security), was held one week following and as a follow-up to the Emergency Debate on Agriculture, moved in the House of Commons by Rick Borotsik, MP for Brandon-Souris.

Family Farm Tribute – Live at the Danforth Music Hall January 12, 2002

Family Farm Tribute rolled into the historic Music Hall on Toronto's Danforth Avenue on January 12, 2002 for an amazing, rocking show. The fourth major event in the series, Live at the Danforth Music Hall continued its emphasis on bringing together national food awareness and family farmers from throughout the country, along with top Canadian musicians and live interactive educational material.

Live at the Danforth Music Hall featured live performances by:

The Jim Cuddy Band
Wave
Jason McCoy
Sarah Slean

Ray Materick
Murray McLauchlan
Faith Chorale
Catherine Durand
Comedian Paul Mussel

Host John Oakley, and guest hosts Steve Anthony and Kim Rossi, welcomed the fans, farmers and musicians into the venue that served as a live studio for the afternoon. This event was preceded by a caravan of hundreds of farmers driving farm equipment along Ontario's major highways, and finishing the route on Toronto's Danforth Avenue, a spectacle that was reported on by several national television stations and featured live helicopter coverage. A planned documentary of the event, in partnership with Country Music Television, saw the production of a preliminary "rough cut" video.

Live at the Danforth Music Hall was a production of The Mills Network and was made possible by:

Mix99.9 fm
Country Music Television (CMT)
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
The Western Producer
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