

## Women in Leadership Positions in Canadian Agriculture

### JEANNINE MESSIER | AGRICULTRICES DU QUEBEC (WOMEN FARMERS OF QUEBEC) [MONTEREGIE, QUEBEC]

Jeannine Messier has been a farmer and entrepreneur in the Montérégie region of Quebec for the last 30 years. She has an active role in her family, her community, municipal government, and as an advocate for women in agriculture in Quebec. She is currently the president of the *Agricultrices du Québec* (Women Farmers of Quebec).

#### **Please tell us a bit about yourself and your career path.**

I am a mother, daughter, and wife of a farmer; I grow high bush blueberries, asparagus, and cash crops; I also have a “farm-to-table” restaurant on the farm.

I am an officer and a knight of the *Ordre national du mérite agricole du Québec* (National order of agricultural merit of Québec). For 28 years, I was a pork producer and cash crop farmer with my partner. In 2012, 2 of our sons (of our 4 children) joined their father in business, and I bought my own farm to bring to life my dream of offering country-style cooking on the farm. That same year, I earned a certification to prove that 50% of the menu offerings were grown on the farm.

Complimentary menu items from the region fill out the menu.

I am very involved in the agriculture industry in Quebec:

- I am involved in the UPA (Union of Agricultural Producers) as an administrator for the Montérégie East region.
- I have been president of my region since 2012 and was just recently elected as provincial president of the *Agricultrices du Québec* (Women Farmers of Québec).
- I sit on the committee for agricultural zoning development for the Maskoutins municipal region. I am the member for St.-Pie in the Maskoutin Valley union.
- I have sat on the Board of directors at Saint-Hyacinthe CEGEP (college) since 2015 as the economic sector representative.
- I am a mentor for a young female farmer in the “*Embarque*” project for the *Agricultrices*.
- I will be attending the Quebec Food Summit on November 17.
- I was also deeply involved in volunteering at the parish level when my children were school-aged.
- I received a professional cooking diploma from the Ministry of Education in 2008.

#### **Tell us about your role and what your "typical day" looks like.**

Now that I work alone, I fill all the roles for my business. That involves — depending on the season — managing personnel, tracking deliveries, billing and maintaining other documentation, crop planning (from seeding to pest scouting to meeting with agronomists), as well as meal planning, and ensuring the union agenda is followed. I always make time for various trainings, touring and trainings for agro-tourism purposes, and family time (or just baby-sitting) since I have 10 grandchildren.

#### **How do you define personal success? What steps do you take to get there?**

Success is a question of outlook, training, and perseverance. Continuing education is key. Being involved in a myriad of organizations is an education unto itself, and keeps you up to date on many issues. I also believe that each person is the key to his or her own success. Whether you are asking for financing or permission for a project, the first step is to believe in yourself and your project, if you ever hope for someone else to believe in it too.

#### **What's the biggest professional/personal challenge you've had to face? And what did you learn from that experience?**

The hardest thing for me has been to find my place in this male industry and then figure out how to keep it. But everyone evolves at their own pace, and I think being able to adapt, being a good listener and a touch of diplomacy can be very useful. Sometimes (doing) nothing at all is the right path – we must always be ready to move on to other things.

#### **Who is (or has been) your biggest influencer/mentor? What have you learned from them?**

My biggest inspiration has always been my family – mother, father, aunts, uncles and grandparents, but the best advice has always come from attending trainings. However, I would say that my personal career path and what I've learned along the way are the lessons that I pull from each day that allow me to stride forward.

#### **How has the role of women in agriculture changed throughout your career?**

I've had the good fortune to be able to be a farmer and to benefit from all the work done by the *Agricultrices* for the last 30 years. The work they've done includes allowing access to property, getting women recognized as independent operators, as well as providing access to parental leave. They have also managed to bring about establishment grants for all young people following an agricultural training program.

I think that now the challenges are different, and I am prepared to lead my team into battle: invisible work by women in agriculture is thought to be valued at more than 110 million dollars each year: and this work is unpaid! We also still need to get high-speed Internet access to all regions, as access to information and online training can break isolation.

#### **Learning from our mistakes is an important, but sometimes tough, part of life. In the spirit of these profiles helping others, are you willing to share a mistake you made but taught you something important?**

Get all your ducks in a row before starting a project, join networks, get involved, go out and find a mentor.

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**What's the most burning question for you right now in your career (that you think AWN members might be able to provide answers to or advice on)?**

I think what would be best is if all women communicated their needs. I would like to give all women a taste for mobilization.

**How do you define agriculture?**

Agriculture is the powerful economic motor for regions and for the country, because without agriculture, there is no food. Agriculture is also a way of life; it is the passionate people that live and breathe what they do.

It is also worth noting that agriculture is neglected by our governments. Women help drive the year-in-year-out nature of agriculture.

**What do you feel is a topic in agriculture and/or business that you feel isn't getting enough attention right now?**

For me there are many issues that fall into this category: economic fallout, the number of jobs being created, invisible work done by women, mental health, security, unusual hours (work-life balance).

**What solutions, tools or processes do you think could be put in place to help advance Canadian women and specifically Canadian women in agriculture?**

I think some possible solutions include mobilization (getting involved!), working together (networking), and taking action (achieving positions to make decisions for the good).

**Do you have a piece of advice for young women starting their career in agriculture?**

Young women need to get the training they need, join a network, and reach positions of power to be able to make decisions and bring about change.