



# FOCUS ON WOMEN

2018 is shaping up to be the year women get put on the forefront

It might be safe to say 2018 is shaping up to be the “year of the woman,” specifically for women in business or agriculture, or both. When the federal government tabled its 2018-19 budget on Feb. 28, there was a marked focus on improving gender equality with regard to pay equity, increasing participation of women in the workforce, and helping improve the lives of women and girls in Canada and around the world.

What wasn't covered as much in the media hype surrounding the budget announcement is the federal government's commitment toward supporting women entrepreneurs in agriculture. The budget revealed \$1.4 billion to be available over a three-year period to help female entrepreneurs access capital funding through lending institutions, such as the Business Development Bank of Canada and Farm Credit Canada (FCC). The government says it intends to launch a new lending program in 2018-19 designed specifically for women entrepreneurs through FCC. In addition, FCC will continue to offer advisory services, learning events and knowledge initiatives aimed at women entrepreneurs in the agriculture and agri-food sectors.

And for women interested in pursuing a career in research and science, the government is investing \$100 million toward agricultural science, research and innovation, and soil and water conservation. Other initiatives included under the government's new Gender Results Framework include improving diversity in the research community through investments in granting councils, data collection initiatives, early-career researchers and new gender equality planning, helping women entrepreneurs grow their businesses through the new Women Entrepreneurship Strategy, and supporting the advancement of women in senior positions by publicly recognizing corporations committed to promoting women leaders.

Throughout the ag sector, organizations are stepping up to help women achieve their full potential, both on and off the farm. For

instance, if you haven't been before, I strongly encourage you to attend the Advancing Women in Agriculture Conference, held yearly in Eastern and Western Canada. The conference is geared toward women from all walks of life who want to enhance their careers, family lives, communities and industries. The next conference takes place in Calgary, Alta., later this month.

Coincidentally, March 8 also marks International Women's Day (IWD), which has a strong call-to-action to progress gender parity. The United Nations (UN), which runs UN Women, an organization dedicated to gender equality and empowering women, says this year's IWD will draw attention to the rights and activism of rural women, who make up more than a quarter of the world population and are often left behind in every measure of development. Back at home, the Liberal government has committed to supporting women and girls overseas by dedicating \$2 billion over five years to be administered through its feminist international development policy.

It seems the list of programs and services aimed at helping women succeed in agriculture and business is growing yearly, and now with the government's renewed focus on helping women do even more and attain new heights in their careers and personal pursuits, there will be no limit to what future generations of women will be able to achieve.



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