

# Activity 15



## THE FUTURE OF THE FAMILY FARM

- STUDY QUESTION:** Why do the cities get larger and small communities smaller? Why do people move?
- THE ACTIVITY:** Students role play a modern farm family dilemma.
- CURRICULUM FIT:**
- SOCIAL STUDIES**
- Alberta, Past, Present, Future: Change.
- LANGUAGE ARTS**
- Development of speaking skills - expressing orally - explanations, preferences, feelings, judgements, emotions, or predictions.
- MAJOR CONCEPT**
- The ability to express preferences, feelings, judgements, emotions and making predictions are important communication skills.
- LESSON CONCEPT**
- By assuming the role of another person, we can better understand his/her feelings.
- AGRICULTURE CONCEPTS:** Economic Importance  
Capital and Technology Intensive Nature of the Industry
- PURPOSE:**
- To show that different people feel differently about the same event.
  - To express feelings and preferences orally.
  - To improve decision making skills.
- MATERIALS REQUIRED:** Stage area (front of classroom).  
Entrance to the stage area.  
Table and chairs.  
Cups and tea service.  
Various other stage props such as drinks and costumes are optional to create an interesting farm setting.
- TIME REQUIRED:** 2 class periods.

# BACKGROUND - For the Teacher

This is a role playing activity where children are asked to portray a situation involving a family dilemma which must be resolved.

In the early years of Alberta's settlement, much of the population was rural. The homesteads began as parcels of land consisting of a quarter section (160 acres). These were developed mainly as family farms. Thriving farmers bought more land as it became available in the district. The community provided support and social opportunities for its members. The community activities were very important to farmers and their families.

Today most of Alberta's residents live in cities and towns. Many families have moved from the farm to take jobs in the cities. The farms are much larger than they were 50 - 80 years ago.

Some of the modern farms are owned by large corporations. Other farms are run on a cooperative basis. An example of a cooperative farm is a Hutterite Colony. This move towards larger farms and corporate holdings has resulted in sparse rural populations and reduced community activities. Many farming families are struggling to keep their communities alive during this transition.

Of course, there are a variety of opinions held regarding this shift from the small family farm to the larger operations. Often the people who are charged with making decisions find themselves in difficult positions. Many opinions are raised and quite a lot of pressure is applied by various interested parties.

## PROCEDURE

### Part 1

#### Preparation and Introduction

1. Introduce the lesson by discussing the transition from rural to urban living in Alberta.
  - a. What does this mean to farmers?
  - b. How would this affect a farming community?  
As the farms get larger, the neighbours become more distant and there are fewer people to share in the community.
  - c. Do any of the students have something in their homes that belonged to their grandparents?  
Usually these things are treasured by the family. These things become traditions. Things we treasure from the past are important and we resist change.
2. Explain to the students that they are going to share in the decisions of a modern farming family forced to sell the farm.
3. Read the background of the dilemma to the class.
4. Ask for student volunteers to act out the dilemma. There are 8 men and 5 women characters. The balance of the class will be the audience. Members of the audience will be asked to decide what they would do in the same circumstances.
5. Make copies of the roles and give each volunteer character his or her role. Ask them to study them for a few minutes. They may wish to ask questions in order to clarify their roles.
6. Review all of the roles with the entire class.
7. The non-participating students can arrange the stage for the drama. There should be some kind of door to enter the kitchen. They may decide to make some sets, but these are not essential.

Part 2  
The Dilemma

8. By the next class period, the stage should be ready.
9. Provide participants with a copy of the resource page which gives the order that the characters will arrive at the kitchen. If possible, have the characters wait outside the classroom so they will not be influenced by what happens before them. The characters should avoid discussing their views with each other before the role playing.
10. Invite the participants to begin the drama.

Part 3  
Conclusion

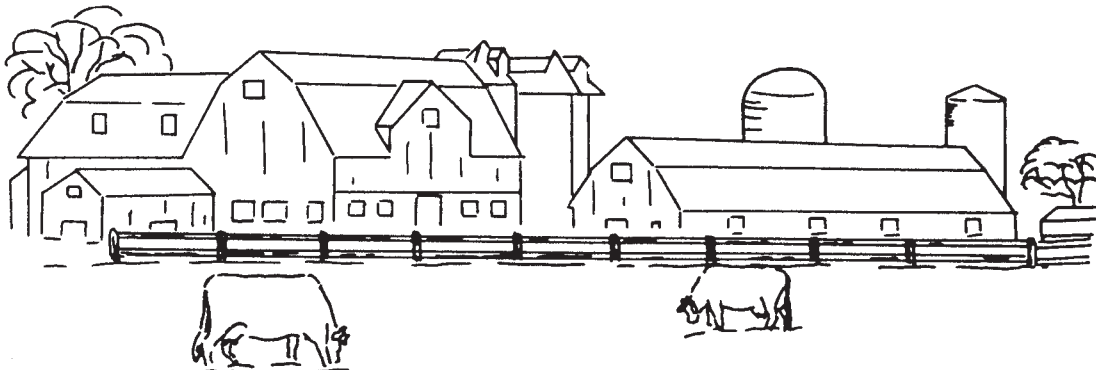
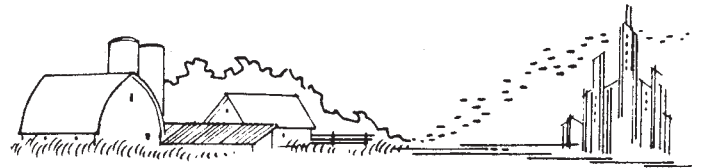
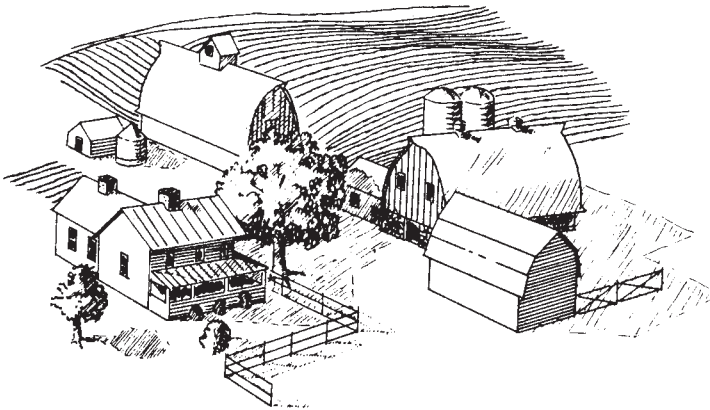
11. When Henry and Sally have made their decision, ask members of the audience to comment on their choice. How many would have made the same decision?

**FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Who presented the strongest argument?
2. What might happen if Henry and Sally decided to sell:
  - a. through an agent?
  - b. to the German Corporation?
  - c. to the Hutterites?

**RELATED ACTIVITIES**

1. Choose a farming area and look at the county map to see who owns the land and how it is divided.



# STUDENT RESOURCE

## The Dilemma



Henry and Sally Johnston are farmers who have been living in the Josephberg area all of their lives. Henry's parents came to Canada in 1911 and homesteaded on his farm. Henry and his father worked hard at their business and bought three more quarter sections of land. Henry and Sally now own 4 quarter sections (one section) and have a very successful grain farm. Henry and his wife Sally are very well loved by their neighbours. They have been very active in the community.

Henry and Sally are now ready to retire. Their son Bill, is a veterinarian and lives in town. Bill is a bachelor. He does not want to farm, but he understands that his father and mother should soon retire from the business. The family decides that they must sell the farm. This is a very difficult decision because it has been in the family for so long.

The problems do not end here. What Henry and Sally must decide is who to sell the farm to. Many groups are putting pressure on Henry and Sally since they have strong opinions as to what they would like to see happen to the farm.

## The Setting

### The Johnston Kitchen

Order of events:

1. John and Peter from the Hutterite colony come to visit to make their offer. (*exit*)
2. Bill comes to visit and brings Felix to discuss selling to the German corporation. (*exit*)
3. Norman, Lester and Fred drop in and suggest that Henry hire a real estate agent and try to sell to a family. (*exit*)
4. Nancy, Gwen, Lorna and Jane visit Sally to work on some sewing. They discuss the community and try to persuade Sally to ask Henry to hire an agent and sell to a family.
5. Henry, Sally and Bill have a meeting and decide the future of the farm.

Remember that the final decision will be made by Henry and Sally.

# STUDENT RESOURCE

## The Characters and Their Views



### Henry

the farmer - has decided he must sell his farm. He values his friends in the community and plans to move into the town of Josephberg where he and his wife can continue to take part in community activities. Henry really hates to leave the farm.

### Sally

the farm wife - has lived in the community all her life and has been an active participant in the farm business. She is very active in the community and belongs to an association to support farm families. She believes that farms are wonderful places for families to live and wants to find a family to buy the farm.

### Bill

the son - is a bachelor. He is very interested in agriculture and has become a veterinarian. He lives in town because his hours are so variable that he would find living in the country very difficult. Bill has a client in the area who manages a large corporate farm which is owned by a Count in Germany. He feels his family should sell their land to the corporate farm. The price is good and he feels it would also be good for his business.

### Felix

manager of the German corporate farm. Felix's boss has authorised him to offer to buy Henry's farm. He is offering a fair price and will buy the machinery as well. Felix wants an answer in the near future because his boss is coming for a visit from Germany in two months and the final arrangements could be made at that time.

He has asked Bill to talk to Henry and Sally on his behalf. He plans to pay them a visit even though he does not know them. He is not very active in the community.

### John and Peter

senior members of the local Hutterite colony. The colony

has been given the approval to expand. They are anxious to buy Henry's farm because they hold land next to it. The Hutterites are excellent farmers and will pay cash for the land. They have offered the best price for the land so far. The members of the Hutterite colony keep mostly to themselves. They do not participate in the community except to sell some of their produce at the local farmer's market.

### Nancy, Gwen, Lorna and Jane neighbours, and friends of Sally.

These ladies would like Sally to suggest to Henry that he hire a real estate agent. They are worried that the community will not be active if the farmland is all bought out by large business. These neighbours meet with Sally for coffee and share their concerns and ideas with their friend.

### Norman, Lester and Fred

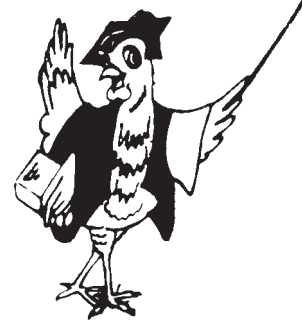
neighbours who own family farms in the district. Due to several difficult years, these neighbours are not able to buy the Johnston farm, but they hope that the farm will be sold to a family, not to the corporation or the colony. These farmers are like Henry and Sally. They believe that family farms are good. The neighbours want Henry to advertise his farm and sell it to a family which would help to keep the community active.

If Henry and Sally tried to sell their farm this way, they would have to hire a real estate agent and pay a fee.

# TEACHER RESOURCE

## Rural Population and Farm Sizes

(From Census Data)



	1976	1981	1986	1991
Total Population of province (thousands)	1,900	2,200	2,400	2,500
Population on farms (thousands)	219	195	N/A	184
Percentage rural	12	9	N/A	7
No. of farms (thousands)	61	58	58	57
Area farmed as a % of Alberta's total land area (159 million acres or 63.6 million hectares)	32	32	32	32
Average area per farm (ha)	331	348	358	364
Average area per farm (acres)	817	860	883	898



Some large farming operations are owned by corporations.



A family farm is a good place to live.