

The forgotten story of the Farmerettes – independent film *We Lend a Hand* plays at sold-out Norgan theatre

Documentary continues to draw large crowds as momentum grows throughout Canada

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PALMERSTON - The Norgan Theatre hosted a sold-out crowd for the 2025 film, *We Lend a Hand: The Forgotten Story of Ontario's Farmerettes*. The documentary, which had a spring release in April of this year, has been accumulating heaps of praise across Ontario, with showings popping up in community pockets all across Southwestern parts of the region.

The 'coming of age' film tells the story of the Farmerettes: 40,000 teenage girls who volunteered on Canadian farms to help supply food to soldiers overseas, communities on the home front as well as allied countries such as Great Britain, during the Second World War.

Through the success of the government-run agency 'The Ontario Farm Service Force', thousands of people were fed by Canadian farmers and young women who volunteered their time over the summer and gained exemption from exams in order to help with war efforts between 1941-1952.

The film depicts stories from 20 Farmerettes who individually shared their experiences of long ago. The documentary is partly narrated by the film's Historian Producer and co-author of the 2019 book, *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz: Memories of Ontario Farmerettes*.

The film-documentary unfolds as making viewers privy to a living diary – one side of the notebook holding a playful look into the fun and excitement had by a community of girls living away from home for the first time and encumbered in unique circumstances – allowing the viewer to acquire relatable glimpses into that which is the common thread of approaching adulthood, and blossoming into a young woman, as life moves through you and all around you.

True to the nature of things, the other side of the notebook holds the balance – stories of overcoming hardships in attuning to hard labour, standing up for equality and navigating homesickness.



Heather MacEwen photos

The Norgan Theatre in Palmerston was sold out for the viewing of the 2025 Film, *We Lend A Hand*. The 2025 film is based off the book *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz*, which was co-written by Exeter native Bonnie Sitter and produced by London Ontario Filmmaker Colin Field. The inspiring story of recognition has been making rounds across Canada and small towns in South-western Ontario region in particular. Many gathered on October 16, for two show times, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. After each show the audience was welcome to stay for a question and answer period with Sitter and Field.

Binding the book together by glue is strength; between the lines is the quiet unseen devotion to persevere; and making up the spine is bone hard strength that has held true for many of these women over their lifespan.

Through watching the film, the realization that time itself was perhaps awaiting the perfect timeline for the Farmerettes story to be discovered, brought about, opened up and uncovered was perhaps the higher plan all along. By releasing glimpses of historic light into new ages and spreading that to younger generations who can carry the cause and amplify the voices of those who lived the experiences – while honouring those who have passed and take the history with them when they go – requires definitive responsibility, one that many young women in farming are already carrying on today, whether aware of the Farmerettes' contributions or not. It is a great take-away from the documentary.

If a book reads from cover to cover, the film manages to mimic the way one's mind conjures up images, just as words are read on a page – Director Colin Field did a memorable job of creating onscreen images and vignettes in-time with memories spoken by Farmerettes who shared personal accounts of farm-camp life during their interview for the film.

Some of these stories and words are spoken by Farmerettes who have passed away since the time the film was released in April 2025, however Field shares that each woman featured in the film got the chance to view the documentary, even if it was he himself traveling to be bedside to accommodate a viewing in the hospital over their last weeks of life.

Silver hair on the silver screen

For a film that was figuratively 80 plus years in the making, wherein the "stars of the show" are women in their nineties, it

seems the impossible was achieved – especially when understanding each one hour interview was lovingly condensed and curated into an overall 50 minute historic tribute, all of which happened in just a few years.

Through the intuition of Bonnie Sitter and Field, they knew "time was of the essence" due to the nature of time casting its shadow across lives well lived up into their nineties.

The sands of time continue on and within them they will carry the story of the Farmerettes. The history preserved by Sitter and Field will march on as the Farmerettes book and documentary combined have turned into a movement in a matter of months, crossing small town and big cities alike, as well as stitching across provinces and even countries. With a number of awards already under its belt, including: *Best Film About Women at the Toronto International Women Film Festival*, *Best Documentary at the Niagara Canada International Film Festival*, *Best Canadian Documentary at the Toronto Independent Film Festival of Cift*, a showing in Alberta and being included in the *TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival) Film Circuit*, momentum continues to build on an already strong foundation.

Sitter announced news regarding the next leg of the Farmerettes movement:

"We are proud to announce that we've been invited to screen the film at the Juno Beach Centre in 2026. A new exhibit opens there in March and it stays until December 2029. Farmerette artifacts will be included such as a recruitment poster, a 1943 badge that says 'food for victory', and the enlarged commemorative stamp. Our dream is to screen the film at embassies and other museums in Europe and the UK, and are looking for financial support to make that tour possible."

For more on *We Lend a Hand*, *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz*, the Farmerettes and upcoming news, film showings and upcoming events visit: [s or We Lend a Hand on Facebook](http://www.welendahand.com).



Above: Author and film historian Bonnie Sitter (sitting) connects with one of many film attendees at the 'meet and greet' table before the documentary viewing. Below: A number of dignitaries were present for the Oct. 16 showing of 'We Lend a Hand' at the Norgan Theatre in Palmerston. Senator member, The Honourable Robert Black, (right) was instrumental in acquiring an official Canada Post stamp.



Above left: Film Producer, Director and Co-editor Colin Field and Author, Historical Director Bonnie Sitter shared sentimentalities from the making of *We Lend A Hand*. The idea for the book, now conceptualized into a documentary, all began with a small two-inch by 2.5-inch black and white photo (seen mounted on white and held up by Sitter). The back of the photo simply reads "Farmerettes 1946". Above right: Susan Carter, daughter of Miriam Edwards Carter (1926-2025) was proud to honour her mother's memory and share more of her personal story of being a Farmerette in 1944. Left: Present for the afternoon matinee showing of the film was Sandy Grant. The spry 99-year-old was "very emotional" she stated, as she watched the 50-minute film. Memories of her time came flooding back.

