Two career lessons:

1. Lots of people have a defined career path (or at least a clear “next step”). Lots of people do not. If you are in that second camp, do not worry. You are not alone.

2. I have always had two career decision-making criteria: “Can I help?” and “Will I learn?” If the answer is yes, go for it.

As I’ve moved further along, I’ve recognized there is a third question. “Will I be spending time with people I admire and enjoy?

What are the agriculture policy folks talking about?

Two years ago, it was all about the economy. Much has happened since that time:

- We saw a huge emphasis on climate change …first in Ontario but now nationally as well.

- Great Lakes water quality has risen on people’s worry list. Ontario has passed the Great Lakes Protection Act, and signed international agreements to reduce phosphorus entering the lakes by 40 per cent.

- The Ontario government is in the midst of renewing its commitment to the Greenbelt, Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine.
Farmland preservation was front and centre in the consultations last summer.

- The interest in food and how it’s produced has only grown. Agriculture groups are spending more and more time (and money) trying to provide information, implement standards on farms and generally anticipate what’s coming next.

This is not to say the economic aspect has been static.

- Canada negotiated two significant trade deals in the past two years….Canada – European Union and Trans-Pacific Partnership. There are stories that China is very interested in signing a Free Trade Agreement.

- Ontario made a major investment into the agri-food sector with the creation of the Food and Beverage stream of the Jobs and Prosperity Fund:
  - $40m per year
  - 65per cent of primary production goes to local processing.

There are a couple of emerging areas we all need to be watching:

1. Equity is an emerging issue. Around the world, fewer and fewer people live in extreme poverty, but the gap between the richest and the poorest is growing larger. In Ontario, farm family incomes have been higher than the average family incomes for all of this century. The gap has been increasing.
   [http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/stats/economy/indicators.htm#rural](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/stats/economy/indicators.htm#rural) Is this good, bad or neither? I don’t know.

2. As food prices rise, food security is moving into the mainstream conversation. Foodbank usage took a huge leap during the 2008 recession and has never declined. Three hundred and seventy-five thousand Ontarians use a foodbank each month. (Ontario Association of Foodbanks [https://www.oafb.ca](https://www.oafb.ca))
What do I think we need more of from women and what can you do to help?

1. We need more women on boards and in senior positions in food and farm businesses. It’s often those people you send as your representatives to the policy discussions.

   This is a given; it’s not unique to food and agriculture.

   The Canadian Agriculture Human Resource Council has a three year project underway looking at women in leadership roles. http://www.cahrc-ccrha.ca/current-research/supporting-advancement-women-agriculture

   Their background research indicates that, within a group of 65 national or provincial agricultural associations, there are only eight with women serving as President or Chair. There were also eight in the “vice” position. Eight out of 65 is 12 per cent.

   Catalyst Organization has issued a challenge to corporations – to have 25% of board seats held by women by 2017. http://www.catalyst.org/

   According to Stats Canada, in 2011, just over 28 per cent of all operators were women. It seems to me that having 25 per cent of the seats at the farm leadership tables is something we should be able to achieve.

   I urge all of you to think about how you can contribute at the leadership level….within your community, for your sector, in your business. Also, when it comes time to join a farm organization, why not ask what their policies are around supporting women in leadership positions?

2. We need much diversity in the sector.
This one is not unique to women.

It seems to me that, those of us who do appear in the boardrooms, and corporate offices tend to be white, no obvious disabilities, heterosexual, and middle-aged (although it is changing).

We may think we are unique, and we are, but not unique enough to represent the customers of a global agri-food industry.

You can play a role here. Think about your network and encourage those who bring a diverse perspective to become involved. Be their champion. Consider being more open about the types of diversity you represent.

3. We need more input from women in agricultural policy development in general.

There was a paper published by National Farmers Union in 2006, funded by Status of Women Canada.

http://www.nfu.ca/sites/www.nfu.ca/files/Farm_Women_and_the_APF.pdf

The authors asked, “What would women see in an inclusive agricultural policy document?” At that time, the policy pillars were Business Risk Management, the Environment, Renewal, Food Safety and Innovation. Women participating had more inclusive goals including a domestic food policy, and social and community infrastructure.

4. We need more integration of agriculture into urban society, not separation. I think women have a huge role to play here.

Maybe it's just in Ontario, but the rural-urban "debate" doesn't seem to be a productive conversation. It can be very tricky to walk that line between celebrating your uniqueness and being so far out of the mainstream that you are ignored.

As Canada grows more and more urbanized, that risk becomes greater and greater.
I think women may be able to cross that bridge easier than men.

**Conclusion:**

So, in answer to the questions posed in the title…

When it comes to ag leadership and the female voice, 12 per cent are leading, another 10 per cent may be in the room and the rest are busy with other things.

It matters because a female viewpoint can be different from a male perspective.

The agriculture and food sector is a bright spot in the Canadian economy. There’s lot’s to be positive about and many other sectors would love to have such strong growth drivers. Many, many farm women around the world would love to have your life.

There are a few challenges as well. Things like climate change, acceptance of new technology, and food insecurity.

I have no doubt that the people in the food and agriculture system WILL meet them. It will be much easier if we use everyone’s talent. That means bringing more women into the conversations and decision-making roles.

Thank You.