

### The Importance of Telling Our Story

Transparency in agriculture is critical for the industry to be successful in this modern world. Many years ago, farming and raising livestock was a way of life for a lot of people, in fact, was commonly the only way of living for most. Today with society congregating in urban settings, people are far removed from the farm. American statistics say people are at least three generations removed from the farm and the same can be said for Saskatchewan<sup>1</sup>. People take for granted how food gets into their fridge. It is so imperative for farmers to tell their story for those that want to understand how their food is produced. Consumers need to be educated in the right manner to know how much effort is put into getting them the safe and healthy food they consume. Transparency in agriculture requires producers to be effective, honest, and open when it comes to the food they are putting on consumers' plates, and how their food is produced.

I am very fortunate to have grown up on my family's farm to see many different aspects of agriculture firsthand. I want people to be educated as much as I want to educate others. Various agricultural shows that I attend, such as Canadian Western Agribition, Crop Production, and Ag in Motion, are great ways for growers and non-growers to go and explore the world that helps feed them. Canadian Western Agribition is the largest livestock show in Canada, with exhibitors from all over the country, several states, and attendees from all over the world. By attending this show, people have a great opportunity to ask questions and learn about operations that help make the industry so great. When asked, farmers and ranchers are excited to educate and explain how their operation works. This interaction is key to bridging the gap between farm to plate.

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Educating youth with organizations such as *Ag in The Classroom* is very beneficial to the agricultural industry. Giving young kids the opportunity to explore how their food is grown and raised is an important way for the industry to be transparent. In 2016, the census counted 193,492 farms across<sup>2</sup> Canada, 34,523 of those being in Saskatchewan<sup>3</sup>. Showing kids around the province that there is more to farming than just the wheat, canola, and cows they may see on their way to school is critical to a broader understanding of agriculture. Some of *Ag in The Classroom*'s vision is to inspire students to care about their food and the people producing it, it helps kids build trust in agriculture and what they are eating, and to provide accurate, balanced, current and science-based information<sup>4</sup>. With organizations like this, incredible stories are shared about how food is produced and who is producing it. Hands-on opportunities like Food Farms and community/school gardens create memorable and fun experiences that kids otherwise might not get to have. I feel that is exactly what modern agriculture needs to help build a positive connection with future consumers.

Transparency is shown when growers and producers share their story. This day in age, we are connected globally through the internet and social media. Information is at our fingertips. Unfortunately it is not always correct or valid to every situation. Negative comments, experiences, and stories become viral overnight. Social media can become a platform for fear-based rants and raves. One extremely important way to help improve transparency between the world and growers is for producers to share their story. Posting agriculture stories on different social media platforms can be an effective way to get your agriculture message out by being honest, open, and authentic. From posting about how you may feed your livestock to how you spray your crops, you never know who that post might reach and how it might help them influence their opinion of the food industry. Ag producers must be diligent to display their operations in a positive way. The Real Dirt on Farming website is a great example of this, with articles on many different aspects of the industry, it gives a great understanding of how things

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are done and offers a great outlook on what is put into growing food for the world. With statements such as “Our food has a story and it starts with Canadian farms” Real Dirt on Farming gives in depth understanding and real stories for people to see what is truly put into it<sup>5</sup>.

Of course there are many steps from the farm gate to the consumer. There are many processes within food production, and it is important for everyone along the food chain to be upfront about their roles. Companies and products have a story too that must be told. Educating non-growers on products used on the farm, how the products work and why they are used is a critical factor in building trust. Glyphosate is a great example of a product used by nearly all growers that is mis-understood by most non-growers<sup>6</sup>. Educating everyone on the proper and responsible use of one of the most used chemicals in agriculture and for domestic use is critical for everyone to feel the trust in corporations. Organizations such as the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef<sup>7</sup> and the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Crops<sup>8</sup> are formed by stakeholders based on consumer demand for sustainably raised food. From growers to retailers, environmental groups and industry, the credibility of the whole chain is bolstered by the certified assurances and third-party verification.

Farmers need to produce food in a way that is responsible to the environment and to the consumers. People are interested in where their food comes from and if it was grown in a sustainable manner. The more transparent farmers can be about their part, how they operate on their farms and tell the story behind food production, the better the support of consumers will be. Being socially responsible is not a short-term undertaking. It is the way to ensure our agricultural food system is viable in the long run.

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