

DOING THE RIGHT THING (AND TELLING THE RIGHT STORY)

Sharing information on modern farming practices is key to building public trust in the quality, safety and sustainability of our food supply. Here's how APG is contributing.

When Alberta farm producers talk about issues that matter to their businesses, the concept of public trust is certain to be mentioned. Recent years have demonstrated the need to build understanding between the 2% of Albertans who farm and the 98% who don't.

Debra McLennan, Food and Nutrition Coordinator with Alberta Pulse Growers, is taking the lead on public trust initiatives within APG. She believes that many producers are keen to get the conversation started.

"Farmers I've worked with tell me how much they want to share their story about their farm," said McLennan, a Registered Dietitian. "It's about helping people who don't know anything about farming understand how farmers take care of the land and produce the healthiest, most nutritious food possible."

Teachers seek one-stop curriculum shopping

With funding from the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, APG is working with other crop- and livestock-related commissions to share agriculture's story in a clear and compelling way. This collaboration is essential, in McLennan's view, to avoid

having messages coming from many different sources.

This public trust work is taking place in two main streams: *Youth Agriculture Education* and *Public Agriculture Literacy*. Under *Youth Agriculture Education*, APG is teaming up with Alberta's barley, wheat and canola commissions. In an initial phase, focus groups helped determine how best to guide teachers in taking accurate ag information into the classroom.

"A number of teachers told us they wanted to talk about agriculture, but hesitated because they didn't know much about it," said McLennan. "That's an ideal opportunity if we pursue it the right way. Teachers were also clear they wanted one place to go for information and not to have different crop and livestock groups all with different resources."

The crop commissions are now working to develop – and secure funding for – three information modules that address knowledge gaps identified by the research phase.

Healthy and sustainable

The second public trust stream, *Public Agriculture Literacy*, brings together APG with provincial

commissions representing canola, pork and the supply-managed livestock sectors. Millennials (born 1981 to 1996) and Generation Z (born starting in the mid-1990s) are key targets under an initiative known as *Be Assured*. This work seeks to assure consumers that their food is nutritious, safe and sustainable in environmental terms. Befitting this young adult and teen demographic, tactics are mainly delivered through online and social media platforms. (You can sample the flavour of this initiative at tastealberta.ca).

"An older audience tends to be more interested in nutrition," McLennan said. "But as you engage with younger people, nutrition combines with sustainability. People feel, 'I want to eat healthy, I want to understand what our farmers do and I want to do something good for the planet'. We'll be rolling out new resources under *Be Assured* all through 2020."



Debra McLennan makes the link between field and food with a junior high class from central Alberta.