

Take a break and grab some agricultural learning

Summer's always busy but getting away from the farm for a day can really pay off



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Field schools offer expert advice, but the person standing next to you probably has some great tips, too. *Photo: File*

It's back-to-school season for farmers with a spate of field schools and workshops coming up following the end of seeding.

Here are three reasons to spend a day away from the farm and at school:

No. 1: It pays

Field days are not just about listening to the experts, they're also events where farmers are sharing their insights and experiences, said Ken Coles, general manager of Farming Smarter.

And that can be extremely valuable information.



Ken Coles photo:Supplied

“The people who come are there to learn — and they’re OK with sharing information,” he said. “The industry has become quite competitive and people are not engaging in that sharing of knowledge like they used to. This is an old-school opportunity to get back to the greater good.”

As well, producers can ask experts about the things they see on their farms, and tap into their knowledge, added Rick Taillieu, extension co-ordinator with the Alberta Canola Producers Commission.

No. 2: It improves research

Questions from farmers help scientists refine their research and better focus on producers’ needs, said Taillieu.

Scientists also enjoy learning from the producers and getting feedback on their research.

“They want to share their information,” he said. “They’re funded to do that research and part of doing the research is making sure people are aware of where they can make more money on their farm.”

“For me, it’s really important because the extension side is what drives our research,” added Coles. “When we get all these smart farmers and researchers out in the field together, talking the same language, we can often come up with really insightful thoughts about whether we’re on the right track or what we can do in the future.”

No. 3: It’s stimulating

There’s just no substitution for looking at live plants right there in front of you.

“Rather than a winter meeting, where you’re looking at pictures and trying to remember, you’ve got the plants, the bugs, and the disease systems right in front of you,” said Taillieu.

That’s all pretty obvious, but you might not fully appreciate how powerful that is until you’re driving back to the farm.

“In many cases, you may have come with ideas about one thing, but you go home thinking about other things that you should keep an eye on,” said Taillieu.

Ready to head out?

There are a number of field schools being held over the summer (keep an eye on [What’s Up](#) or visit ‘Events’ on the [Alberta Agriculture and Forestry](#) website).

This year, Farming Smarter’s field school in Lethbridge will be sharing results of its hemp research trials, a workshop on plant growth regulators, and CSI (crop scene investigation) where producers have to diagnose a number of agronomic mistakes in three different crops. It will also look at how to help crops recover from hail damage. The organization built a simulator to mimic the impacts of hail damage on a variety of crops at different stages. The session will examine agronomical solutions that can help crops recover from hail, such as micronutrient blends and fungicide. For more on the event (which runs on three separate days from June 23-25), see the [Farming Smarter website](#).

Alberta Canola Producers Commission and the Canola Council of Canada are hosting CanolaPALOOZA at the Lacombe Research Station on June 23 and PeacePALOOZA at the Beaverlodge Research Station on June 25. The event features learning stations staffed by researchers, agronomists, university professors, and featuring topics such as diagnosing sclerotinia, sprayer technology, drones, insect monitoring, identifying beneficial insects, nutrient management, diagnostics and setting up on-farm research plots. There will also be soil pits, so visitors can study the soil profile and see the effects of compaction. For more, see the Events section on the [Alberta Canola Producers Commission website](#).

The nine forage and applied research associations that make up the Agricultural Research and Extension Council of Alberta also host a number of field days, as well as workshops, during the summer months. See the Events section on the [ARECA website](#).