

Changing The Conversation Around Food And Farming

Published: Friday, 14 December 2018

Written by Jessica Giles



Horticulture Professor at the University of Florida, Kevin Folta, spoke at the Farming Smarter Conference in

A Horticulture Professor at the University of Florida says intellectual charity is how the agriculture industry is going to build consumer trust.

Kevin Folta, who's a well-known advocate for agriculture biotechnology, says when talking with skeptics it's important to listen to understand, not just to debate.

"If we listen to understand what somebody is saying, even if we disagree with them, we can show them I may disagree with you, but I understand how you're feeling and what you're thinking. That's where we build this basis of rapport where we can start having a better conversation."

Folta says, then you can use the "steel man argument" where you help create a strong argument against yourself, then knock it down.

"You help somebody create an argument, maybe against what you're going to say, that is so strong and reinforced that it demonstrates you have empathy towards their situation, and that you're willing to even argue against yourself to build a better argument. Then that way when you present your evidence that knocks it down, you're knocking down the strongest construct that you can."

Folta adds, you don't need to generate your own content to have a presence on the internet and help change the conversation around food and farming.

"It's one thing to create content on social media, and that takes time and energy, but amplifying the work of others is an easy way to be involved in the conversation. Identifying people who are good voices for agriculture, and sharing their information with your friends and family, especially the skeptics."

He says, people are spending too much time talking about issues within their own comfortable group of agriculture supporters and farmers, and on the other hand, people are also arguing with consumers who will never change their opinions about food.

"There's a vast, vast majority of people who just don't know what to believe, don't know who to trust, and they are the folks we need to be focusing on."

Folta was a keynote speaker at the Farming Smarter Conference in Lethbridge on Wednesday, December 12.