

## Farmers threatened by activists on social media

BY KALINOWSKI, TIM DEC. 13, 2018.



*GMO advocate Kevin Folta, an agricultural geneticist from the University of Florida, speaks during the Farming Smarter conference Wednesday at Exhibition Park. Herald photo by Tim Kalinowski*

The annual Farming Smarter conference began Wednesday at Exhibition Park and will wrap up today.

The conference is an opportunity for some of the best local minds in the ag industry to meet with ag leaders, researchers and advocates from across Canada and the U.S.

“To get all these great minds together in one room is an opportunity to learn from the presenters, but we also learn a lot from each other,” said Farming Smarter general manager Ken Coles.

“A conference like this gives farmers new ideas and reinvigorates them for the challenges to come. I think if you are not continually trying new things, finding out what is going on out there, what other people are doing, you are in a stalemate. I think the folks that want to be in this business for the long term have to have that (experimental) attitude or value as part of their business.”

Coles said the diversity of the speakers at this year’s conference should give attendees plenty of food for thought, including on topics such as inter-cropping, pest control, sustainable agriculture and new opportunities in cannabis.

“Sometimes these new ideas fail and sometimes they are gamechangers,” he said. “You never know when you are going to come across something, that combination of little things, that make a big difference.”

Wednesday’s keynote speaker was controversial and acclaimed GMO advocate Kevin Folta, an agricultural geneticist from the University of Florida, who spoke about enlisting farmers in the social media wars to fight against activists opposed to conventional agriculture.

“My main message is getting farmers and other folks associated with agriculture excited about communicating the evidence of agriculture,” explained Folta. “To get them to realize the discussion which is happening with the average consumer is an asymmetrical discussion based on bad information, typically led by activist groups; and they are not telling the truth. I want farmers and others in agriculture to step up and tell the truth so that someone is out there giving that message.”

Folta pointed out how the European Union has banned certain GMO technologies from their agricultural imports and how Canada has recently banned some types of neonicotinoids as examples where activists have hurt the North American agriculture industry profoundly.

“The issue of neo-nics (in Canada) is just a canary in the coal mine,” he explained. “To see this type of insect control being challenged to the point where it’s not being used. When you have to resort to old-school chemistries which are much more impactful on bee populations and other insect populations, now you are going to see the same sort of lobbying applied to other herbicides and other agricultural inputs like fertilizers; maybe genetics. You are going to see the same strategies used over and over again and repackaged against a new perceived villain – there is a need to stop this stuff as fast as we can, starting now.

“We need to make sure farmers have (social) licence to use whatever they need to use on their farms,” he said.