

Farming Smarter hits pay dirt with government funding for projects

Tim Kalinowski
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Attendees listen as a session wraps during the Farming Smarter annual summer Plot Hop event Thursday afternoon east of the city. Herald photo by Ian Martens

Farming Smarter held its annual summer Plot Hop at its headquarters in Lethbridge County on Thursday.

While the well-attended event was held under overcast skies, nothing could diminish general manager Ken Coles' sunny feelings about the future of his locally based agricultural research NGO.

Earlier this year Coles announced that Farming Smarter, after a challenging 2018, had secured government funding for 11 out of 12 of its proposed research projects through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP), putting the organization on good footing for at least the next three or four years.

"The Alberta government, through the (CAP) bilateral agreement between all the provinces, put together a number of research opportunities for eligible organizations like ourselves," Coles explained. "Just before Christmas we put in 12 applications for funding, and in about March we heard 11 of them were funded. That's unheard of for us – we usually shoot at about a 20 per cent success rate on grant proposals."

Coles said it puts a lot on his organization's plate, but Farming Smarter is looking forward to the challenges ahead.

"Down in southern Alberta agriculture is very clearly our number-one industry," said Coles. "There are so many different types of research, and we play a particular role in that by specializing in applied, practical work. We play a bridger role between Ag Canada scientists and the actual farm level. We also play a strong role in education, and the transfer of technology among farmers. That's what's nice about these grants – they recognize (practical) research. What's the use in all different kinds of research if it doesn't get used on the farm?"

Coles is proud of what Farming Smarter has accomplished to date, and the positive role it plays in southern Alberta agriculture.

"We're very passionate about what we do," stated Coles. "There are so many little aspects to agriculture that are exciting, and we are excited to be able to make that difference. The fun part about this is we are really working for the people that want to work with us. And those are the leading-edge farmers and agronomists that are just eager to learn, and that just creates a great environment where people are sharing ideas and trying to better what they are doing out on the farm."