

# Farmers need to spread the word

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Farm advocate Cherilyn Jolly-Nagel of the Farm and Food Care made a stop at the Farming Smarter compound in Lethbridge County on Monday to encourage local farmers to speak up for Canadian agriculture.

“We have done a pretty piss-poor job of trying to be pro-active and try to tell the positive stories around agriculture,” said Jolly-Nagel, a fourth generation farmer from Mossbank, Sask. “We always tend to be in crisis mode when an industry story breaks out.”

Unlike previous generations, Jolly-Nagel said a crucial consideration of the farming industry today is the issue of social licence. Canadians’ food values are changing and they are demanding more accountability from farmers, she said.

“Did anyone go into agriculture because they really loved people and wanted to talk with them a lot?” Jolly-Nagel asked. “If I asked my dad or grandpa why they became a farmer, they would never say because they like to do media interviews. It wasn’t part of our industry. It wasn’t part of our job; so we are all learning about how to have those conversations.

“Like most farmers, I thought I did not have to waste my precious time answering questions about pesticides, because the answer was so obvious. I didn’t want to answer questions about GMOs, because the answer was so obvious. I thought: ‘I don’t have time for this.’ The more I ignored those issues, the more they just kept coming back to me.”

Jolly-Nagel said over the years she has learned to engage Canadians in conversations about agriculture instead of just resenting the questions being asked.

“I realize now it was a big mistake on my part to ignore those issues,” she stated. “I grossly underestimated the importance of building relationships with our consumers, and answering their questions.

“The truth is we have really good answers to all of their questions. If we just would have taken the time to answer them, rather than always being in crisis mode when the latest crisis story hits the media; so I am here today to emphasize the importance of providing those answers. I am here today because I didn’t do this 15 years ago.”

If any farmer or farm advocate out there once took it for granted social licence would be issued to the agriculture industry, said Jolly-Nagel, they need only look to Europe and other places where massive regulation burdens around use of common farm chemicals or other technologies have made farming nearly impossible to carry out in some cases.

Canadian farmers by comparison have a high degree of support from Canadians, she said, but over the past decade that support has been steadily slipping. Farmers need to step from behind the scenes to speak directly to Canadians confidently and patiently to explain why the tools and technologies of modern agriculture are important for the long term viability of the Canadian ag sector, stated Jolly-Nagel.

“I am worried I will not have a farm to pass on to the fifth generation if we don’t protect the privilege of having these modern agricultural tools we have today,” she said. “Right now, nothing is off the table. We believe by connecting to consumers through shared values and factual information on food production, we can do a better job telling our story.”



Herald photo by Ian Martens  
Facilitator Cherilyn Jolly-Nagel with Farm and Food Care speaks during a Real Dirt on Farming Campaign workshop hosted Monday by Farming Smarter.