

## Agriculture students descend on college

By Tim Kalinowski

entre for Applied Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CARIE) is hosting its McDalBridge challenge this weekend at Lethbridge College. Some of the best and brightest agriculture students from McGill University, Dalhousie University and Lethbridge College will be mulling one huge problem: the problem of food sustainability in a world which undergoing climate change and supply pressure challenges as Earth's human population is expected to hit 10 billion by the year 2050.

Over the course of the weekend, students will be exposed to ideas surrounding new and emerging technologies, social drivers and agronomic realities of producing crops in various systems, and will be asked to present their solutions to central problem of food sustainability.

The program is a great way to help frame the challenges the students will face as they move into a potential career in agriculture or a related field following their post-secondary studies.

"Agriculture is everything," says Megan Shapka, manager of innovation and entrepreneurship with CARIE Lethbridge College, "and Canada really does have an opportunity to help feed the world. I think just priming these students with the right mindset is really critical. We are trying to get the students to be innovative, entrepreneurial, and apply the skills that they are learning in their ag studies to some broad issues."

The 15 students at McDalBridge, five from each institution, are embracing and relishing the challenge, she said.

"They already get it," Shapka confirmed. "They are coming in knowing the world is changing, and they need to have these different skills."

"As I talk to older people about it, they don't see it quite as much – they don't see the implications of this technology that we have and the global citizenship required. I find the kids just get it."

According to the college, Farm Credit Canada has committed to McDalBridge as a two-year pilot project. Students will work in The Pivot, Lethbridge College's newly created student entrepreneurship and innovation incubator space within the Centre for Applied Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CARIE). Students will also take part in a "plot hop" organized by Farming Smarter, and tour the college's Aquaculture Centre of Excellence as part of their weekend here in Lethbridge.

Several local agriculture specialists from the private sector will also be mentoring the participants from McDalBridge, including local computing think-tank Inbridge.

Inbridge will be talking to students about blockchain and the internet-of-things, confirmed CEO Jefferson Gardner, and how technologies like that may be activated to assist them with solving the central food sustainability problem they are considering. He looked forward to seeing what the students would come up with.

These technologies, Gardner said, are an emerging force in many different industries, but have to be uniquely applied by those within agriculture to reap their full benefits for that industry.

"If we can take the knowledge of what emerging tech is, and give it to these students, they are obviously engrained within agriculture – they are going to come up with solutions and situations I never would have thought of because I am not as deeply engrained in agriculture as they are," he said.



*Herald photo by Ian Martens  
Students from McGill University, Dalhousie University and Lethbridge College take part in a training and competition event built on the Agriculture Entrepreneur in Training program Friday at Lethbridge College.*