

Technology adoption gives farmers the edge over herbicide resistant weeds

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The battle against weeds puts farmer against nature's innate ability to adapt and overcome. The advent of herbicides tipped the odds in farmers' favour for a time, but only until several weed species developed — and continue to develop — resistance.

Dr. Hugh Beckie, a former weed scientist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, is now the director of the Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative. He was at Lethbridge recently to speak at the Farming Smarter conference, and to share what Canadian farmers can learn from the Australian experience managing weed resistance.

Australia is known for many things: deadly spiders and snakes, blackleg in canola, and herbicide resistance. Farmers there have taken the issue of weed adaptation seriously and have been adopting new practices and developing new technology to overcome herbicide resistance.

“Weeds are very creative in terms of finding new ways to resist herbicides, some in ways we never thought possible 20 years ago,” Beckie says.

While Beckie says that North American farmers are highly aware of herbicide resistant weeds, Australian farmers have a slight edge on adopting new technology and tactics to keep resistance growth to relatively low levels.

From smart sprayers to harvest weed seed destruction, it's technology that gives farmers the edge over herbicide resistant weeds — not another herbicide, according to Beckie.