

College, Farming Smarter teaming up to enhance area ag research

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By Greg Bobinec

The southern Alberta agriculture industry gained a powerful ally when two innovative organizations expanded their mutually beneficial collaboration.

Farming Smarter and Lethbridge College have worked collaboratively for a number of years on a wide range of projects. Now, they formalized and expanded their partnership as they signed a 15-year “memorandum of understanding (MOU).” The agreement allows the college and Farming Smarter to lead and transform agriculture research in southern Alberta.

“This is an exciting opportunity to really look at the strengths of both the college and Farming Smarter and how we can leverage those strengths into new opportunities,” says Paula Burns, Lethbridge College president and CEO. “Our two organizations have worked together in the past on innovative and important projects that support agricultural research, education and student success. We look forward to new opportunities that will be possible because of the agreement.”

The agreement means the two sides will actively pursue opportunities that will support the entire agriculture industry in Alberta. The MOU has three core pillars comprising of applied research and innovation; education, training and knowledge transfer; and communication and branding.

Farming Smarter’s focus is applied research that helps southern Alberta crop producers make informed choices around inputs, technology and management practices for their operations. Lethbridge College often collaborates on those research projects, and students and classes from the college visit the fields and operations for active learning experiences that help prepare them to enter the industry. In addition, Farming Smarter provides practicum placements and summer jobs to Lethbridge College students from several programs.

“The agriculture industry is a huge part of southern Alberta’s economy and employs a lot of people in the region,” says Ken Coles, Farming Smarter executive director. “Farming Smarter supports innovation, entrepreneurship and the practical application of science and technology in the industry and particularly on-farm. This partnership will keep farmers, ag business and graduates competitive, connected and thriving.”

The MOU will encourage and help clear pathways for further collaboration between the college and Farming Smarter, including the sharing of projects, equipment, technology and resources. Farming Smarter and Lethbridge College will work together to find mutual funding opportunities, co-host educational and networking events, and create research projects that can use the expertise of agricultural research scientists, educators and students from both organizations.