

Students bring answers to agriculture industry

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The mission has one final task for Lethbridge College's AgENTs. Students from the Agriculture Entrepreneur in Residence (AgENT) program will pitch innovative solutions to industry-provided challenges at the AgENT Innovate Ag Competition on Saturday.

The event marks the culmination of the first year of the extracurricular AgENT program, which launched in September. Each week, approximately 30 students from across campus met to dig into issues affecting the agriculture sector. They will apply the innovation and entrepreneurship skills they've learned in a five-minute pitch to a panel of industry judges, with the goal of presenting an innovative idea in a way that would make someone implement their solutions.

"This is a chance for students to showcase their problem-solving skills and big ideas," says Megan Shapka, manager of Innovation and Entrepreneurship. "We have worked with them this year to instill the entrepreneurial mindset, giving them agency to create their own future as they prepare to enter a workforce that will require them to continually reinvent themselves."

Open to all students from across campus, the first year of AgENT saw students from six different programs opt-in. While students from the Agriculture Sciences and Agricultural Enterprise Management programs took part, it also attracted students from the Business Administration, Civil Engineering Technology, Computer Information Technology and Ecosystem Management programs, showing that the effects of agriculture are wide-ranging and require solutions from a variety of sectors.

The program thrives thanks to the involvement of 26 industry mentors who met with students four times throughout the academic year. The mentors helped students make connections and explore innovative solutions.

"Investing in our youth is essential to the sustainability of the agriculture industry," says Melody Garner-Skiba, executive director, Alberta Sugar Beet Growers and Vice President, Rocking Heart Ranch. "The AgENT program provides industry with an amazing way to connect and foster the next generation of agriculture entrepreneurs by encouraging innovation, diversity and knowledge development. It has been an honour to be a mentor this past year and see the incredible future of our industry first hand with the students in AgENT. I know the future of agriculture is in great hands."

The AgENT program is made possible thanks to a \$5-million gift in 2014 to Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge from Cor Van Raay, a leading Canadian cattle producer. The program meets his mandate to spur innovation in the local agriculture industry.

The judges for the AgENT Innovate Ag Competition are Western Tractor president Steven Dyck, Keith Jones of Rowland Farms and Farming Smarter assistant manager Jamie Puchinger. Pitches take place from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. on Saturday in Lethbridge College's Garden Court Restaurant. Guest speaker Jeff Bilow of Scotiabank will discuss agriculture over lunch. Awards will then be presented at 1 p.m.

There are cash prizes for the winners, including \$500 per team member for first place, \$350 per team member for second place and \$200 per team member for third place. There is also a people's choice award of \$50 per team member.



The winning team at Innovate Ag 2019 - (L to R): Grant Vossebelt, student; Cor Van Raay, AgENT donor; Mallory Adams, student; Evan Weir, student.

The winning teams are:

1. First place - "Full Circle Foods" - Grant Vossebelt, Mallory Adams and Evan Weir. This team's innovative idea tackled the issue of food waste. They also won the People's Choice award.
2. Second place – "Haskii Inc." - Stefanie Vandenberg and Anjo Van Driel. Their innovative idea diversified southern Alberta's agriculture with a high-value crop and value-added products.
3. Third place - "Ag Consultants" - Brody Wauters, Joshua Leith, Katy Van Garderen and Ryan Devisser. Their innovative idea addressed the industry-provided challenge of improving communication.