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# Smith warns of pressure by environmentalists

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“First they came for foresters. Then they came for the oil sands. Then they came for the cattle producers. Now they’re coming for you.”

Danielle Smith gave this ominous message to farmers who attended the Dec. 11-12 Farming Smarter conference in Lethbridge.

The talk radio host and former leader of Alberta's Wildrose political party said farmers are not immune to attacks from environmental activists who have targeted other sectors and they should prepare to defend themselves.

"I think at the moment the crop producers might be feeling like they've got some allies in the environmental community because the allies are picking on beef right now and saying that everybody should become a vegan," Smith said in a later interview.

"But the vision that they have of veganism is a veganism where you're growing your food locally. You're not doing industrial food production. You don't need fertilizers or chemicals. And I think that's going to bump right against reality."

In her speech, Smith said activist-led calls to halt the use of natural gas, once lauded as the cleanest-burning fuel, is a threat to the farm sector because, if successful, it would curtail fertilizer production. Beyond that, the "demonization" of that fuel is part of a far larger campaign to halt the use of all fossil fuels, with some saying that should happen by 2050.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change last year said a 45 percent reduction in net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide by 2030 would limit global warming to 1.5 C. Many environmental groups have since made that a goal.

Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, named Time Magazine's 2019 Person of the Year, has demanded that Sweden's government cut emissions by 15 percent per year and has become the face of a global movement designed to halt human-caused climate change.

Farming without fossil fuels — drying grain, running farm equipment and getting product to market — will be impossible to achieve in 10 years and maybe never, Smith said in her talk.

"You realize it's not going to work. It can't work. It was never designed to work. So why are we pretending that that is the solution?"

Smith outlined environmental activists' successful attack on the forest industry, followed by the attack on Alberta's oil sands. Then came the attack on the beef production industry because of greenhouse gas emissions, embodied in the EAT Lancet report calling for lower meat consumption.

The beef industry has successfully fought back against the latter campaign, said Smith, but the forestry and particularly the oil and gas industry failed to react when initially and then laboriously targeted.

“I’ve talked to energy industry executives and I’ve asked them, ‘why didn’t you fight back against this campaign that started in 2008?’ And they said ‘we didn’t think we had to. We thought everybody knew how important energy was to their lives. We thought they knew how important it was to have a cheap supply of gasoline. And they didn’t.’

“And that really took them by surprise,” said Smith. “I think that food producers are very much the same.”

Farmers know they provide all the food for people in urban centres as well as elsewhere, but the disconnect between farmers and the bigger number of urban dwellers is a major one, Smith said.

“I think that understanding how to communicate to an urban audience needs to be their next goal. Because at farm conferences I think (farmers) get energized talking to each other about all the great work that they’re doing. They get the agricultural press talking about all the great work that they’re doing and then the urban consumer doesn’t hear any of that. The urban consumer is getting a steady diet of extremist stories from the environmental lobby saying that the world is coming to an end.”

Smith wondered aloud why farmers aren’t more vocal about attacks on natural gas and about carbon taxes, given that her calculations put carbon tax costs, based on a tax of \$50 per tonne of carbon emitted, at about \$6 per acre. That is a cost none of their competitors must pay.

“Is that not a big deal? Or is it a big deal,” she asked. Given that some factions say \$50 per tonne is insufficient, higher rates could dramatically increase farm costs as well as the cost of food for consumers.

Smith encouraged farmers to better explain the impact that carbon taxes and criticism of natural gas will have on their livelihoods and by extension, consumers’ food costs and quality of life. Farmers’ ability to produce food on less land than before, capture carbon in soil, plant trees on marginal lands and potentially operate net zero farms is a vision that would resonate with the public.

“I don’t see that there’s any reason why your industry can’t come out ahead, except for the fact that we have natural gas in the eyesights of the environmentalists. They want to stop it. They want to stop fracking. I think there needs to be a positive message in order to be able to counter that.”