



AGRICULTURE EDUCATION & AWARENESS

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to food and how it is produced, misinformation abounds. The share of voice and influence with certain consumer segments have driven which food news is shared broadly and embraced by the broader public. With little connections to farming, many individuals and groups have begun sharing their opinions of how farmers should operate, mainly through social media. National and international research has shown that the general trust in farmers, while still high, has somewhat declined. To build trust, those in the food system must demonstrate that while systems have changed and the use of technology has increased, the commitment to doing what is right has never been stronger.

Growing the community's understanding of agriculture in B.C. is very much a priority for the sector. BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) and its member organizations have resources for sharing information about how food and plants are grown and raised in B.C., reducing the communication gap between producers and consumers.

By offering a balanced and science-based perspective, BCAC can reach a broader segment of the public and ensure consumers are equipped with the facts when making decisions about how to feed themselves and their families. This can also help cultivate a collaborative environment, in which policies are developed and enacted that support the long-term viability of agriculture in B.C.

BACKGROUND

While consumer confidence affects the entire food chain, farmers are most directly impacted by policy or regulatory changes related to agriculture. As such, BCAC took a more leading role from 2017, communicating more broadly to the general public about how food and plants are grown and raised in B.C. as the voice of farmers.

Since then, the Council, in collaboration with its stakeholders, have implemented several initiatives to connect the public to agriculture, such as digital communications, farm tours, online cook-alongs, sharing farmer profiles, and much more.

THE ISSUE

The agriculture sector is under scrutiny like never before, and with so much global commentary about farming practices, it can be hard for consumers to separate fact from fiction. With little connections to farming, many individuals and groups are telling farmers how they should operate.

Farmers face increasing stresses from factors such as unpredictable climate events and mounting cost pressures. However, consumers also increasingly expect information from agricultural producers about how food is produced and farms are operated. This communications role is a new challenge for farmers and ranchers.

Canada has some of the highest food safety standards in the world. Codes of practice have been established for a variety of on-farm activities and these are consistently updated to maintain some of the strictest rules globally. It is important to share this information with the public.

Farmers and ranchers have also increasingly been subjected to online bullying and harassment, as well as the alarming problem of individuals coming on to privately owned farmland without permission. It is important to remember that a farm or a ranch is not just a workplace – it's a home and it's a place with children and grandparents. Trespassing on farms is an issue that has serious concerns related to biosecurity, animal welfare, and farm families' well-being.

KEY POINTS

- The safety and personal well-being of B.C. farmers and ranchers is of paramount importance.
- For the agriculture sector to be productive and for our food security to be maintained, farmers must be safe, healthy, and supported in their work.
- British Columbians have confidence in the province's agriculture production, have a basic understanding of how it functions, and support continued expansion.
- It is when the public does not believe B.C. farmers and ranchers are operating in the best interest of society that government must implement more regulations. However, the sector has always been dedicated to doing what's right.
- Ongoing communications efforts to ensure British Columbians support B.C. farmers and ranchers is critical to the long-term sustainability of our food system.
- To ensure that farmers are protected from harassment, bullying, and efforts to disrupt farm operations, more support is needed from policymakers, governments, and law enforcement.
- A farm or a ranch is not just a workplace – it's a home and it's a place with children and grandparents.
- Trespassing on farms is an issue that has serious concerns related to biosecurity, animal welfare, and farm families' well-being.
- No British Columbian should be made to feel unsafe or threatened at work or at home.

THE SOLUTION

Without the support of British Columbians, farmers and ranchers will continue to be challenged about their current farming practices. The investment in building consumer confidence in B.C.'s food system needs to be viewed as a long-term strategy, not a short-term public relations exercise.

The agriculture sector is seeking a coordinated approach from all levels of government and relevant stakeholders to raise public awareness of the positive, sustainable farming practices employed throughout B.C. Meaningful legislative and enforcement changes are also urgently needed to demonstrate that there is zero tolerance for physical interference with farm operations.



WHAT COULD GOVERNMENTS DO?

- Collaborate with BCAC to promote B.C. farmers and ranchers in conjunction with the marketing of B.C. agriculture.
- Introduce legislation and enforcement mechanisms that address the growing social problems of online harassment and bullying.
- Strengthen protections for farmland under the provincial Trespass Act and enhance the enforcement of existing offences under the Livestock Act.

WHAT IS BCAC DOING?

- BCAC continues to grow the public's understanding of how products in B.C. are grown and raised through its Agriculture Education and Awareness activities.
- Facilitating collaboration and communication between leaders of B.C.'s food system.
- BCAC continues to advocate for provisions under the provincial Trespass Act that protect farmers and all kinds of farmland.
- Coordinating tours for Ministers and Ministry staff to highlight successes and challenges in the B.C. agriculture sector.
- Established an Agriculture Education and Awareness Advisory Committee to coordinate industry input on relevant issues.
- Coordinating bi-annual meetings of food value chain stakeholders to identify issues and coordinate communications efforts.