

## Public perception of farmers in decline, hurting agricultural industry

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For the agricultural industry, loss of respect is no laughing matter. The public perception of agriculture is steadily eroding. In fact, only 14 per cent of Americans in a recent survey felt farming has a great deal of prestige. And 22 per cent of the respondents felt farming had no prestige at all.

Canadians seemed somewhat more pessimistic than optimistic about agriculture. Reasons included concerns about GMOs, factory farms, perceived unsustainable or environmentally damaging farming practices, and declining interest in the industry. The only good news is that participants expressed a real desire to learn more about agriculture and food.

Academics Review estimates the combined annual budgets of anti-GMO and anti-pesticide advocacy groups promoting organics at over \$2.5 billion. With this much money questioning the quality and safety of our food and industry, is it any wonder trust in agriculture is diminishing?

The ag industry is waking up to the fact that modern farming and food-processing practices are under attack. Industry is responding with some very effective programming including agricultural education programs in schools, documentaries and opportunities for farmers to engage directly with the public.

“Farmers are guilty of not arming themselves to talk about how they produce food,” says Robert Saik, founder and CEO of Agri-Trend.

Saik feels farmers do not know how to respond to criticism of the industry. Many farmers will simply ignore misinformation about farming and agriculture instead of responding to it. Instead, Saik says farmers need to use these moments as an opportunity to teach the person about farming. To do this, Saik says a farmer needs to correct misinformation rather than blowing up and explain why we use science in crop and livestock production.

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