

Forget Old McDonald, farmers must communicate consumer benefits of modern agriculture

Most farmers are reluctant to talk about modern agriculture. Our own industry advertisements promote the image of a farm with a faded red barn and a few chickens running about in a pastoral setting. That is not modern agriculture and we need to stop letting agriculture be portrayed this way.

It is not hard to understand why modern agriculture shies away from talking about what we do on the farm. Modern agriculture practices are regularly attacked by activists who want to return to the lost golden age of Old McDonald's farm.

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Today most agriculture production in Canada takes place on commercial farms that are thriving businesses. The equipment comprises combines, sprayers and tractors guided by satellites. The seeds, fertilizers and pesticides that are used are the result of years of intensive research. These tools are designed to have a minimal environmental footprint and to be safe for farmers and consumers.

I am told by professional communicators that talking about modern agriculture in this way does not effectively reach consumers and give them comfort in how their food is produced. Someone in a downtown urban center, shopping for their kids' lunch, does not care that much about eradicating rural poverty. They just want to know that they will be giving their kids a safe and nutritious lunch.

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