

2019 Future Influencers Reflect on their GrowCanada Experience

David MacTaggart from the University of Saskatchewan and Alexis David-Dandurand from McGill University were the 2019 selected CSTA Future Influencers. Below, read about their impressions of the conference and takeaways for their future careers in Canadian agriculture.

David MacTaggart:

GrowCanada 2020 was my second time attending the conference but the first time as a Future Influencer. This was an exciting opportunity to participate more actively in the conference by providing comments about the speakers for the audience. I find that GrowCanada is a great conference to network with leaders in the Canadian grain industry and be motivated by non-agricultural speakers to think differently.

At this stage in my life I am working to expand my network to understand the skills needed in the workforce once I graduate. During the conference, it was very informative to listen to commodity group representatives regarding their needs from research in the coming years. These thoughts are something I hope to apply during my Master's degree starting this May at the University of Saskatchewan. Beyond my schooling, I hope to maintain the connections I've made at GrowCanada to make sure I am always aware of the current challenges facing Canadian farmers and the Canadian seed industry.

During the conference, I was very impressed on how the speakers challenged my perspective regarding diverse topics from teamwork to Canada's role in global affairs. John Herdman started the conference strong by providing me with new ideas to better support my peers so we can achieve more as a team by being "pressure ready". Goldy Hyder then motivated me to work harder in my region to bring people together as Canadians as the start of the process to make Canada more desirable for business.

Already since the conference, I have been leveraging my connections to become more involved with Canadian agriculture and I look forward to future opportunities. Thanks once again to the Canadian Seed Trade Association for sponsoring me to attend GrowCanada 2020.

Alexis David-Dandurand:

I had the chance to attend the event, thanks to the Canadian Seed Trade Association who sponsors two Future Influencers of the Canadian agricultural community each year. This year's edition of GrowCanada covered a variety of subjects, including leadership, climate change and international trade. A variety of inspiring speakers got up on stage to share thoughtful presentations. Attending the conference gave me the chance to hear from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's assistant deputy minister, climate change experts and even Darby Allen, the fire chief from Fort McMurray during the fires of 2016.

The speakers were a big part of the conference, of course, but the event was also a great opportunity for a student like me to meet numerous stakeholders of the agricultural industry. The many networking sessions gave me the chance to exchange thoughts about the conferences, but also to make contact with managers from the seed, animal nutrition or marketing industries, as well as government organizations.

GrowCanada 2019 was also an occasion for participants from all around the country to discuss the priorities of the agricultural industry of each province. Bridging the diversity of opinion across the country is necessary for our agricultural industry as the current economic climate brings uncertainty for Canadian farmers who are facing a low security of expectations. For example, the rise of protectionism in several large economies calls for the exploration of new markets for Canadian agricultural products.

In fact, the recent trade barriers that have affected canola growers and hog producers were a major challenge for the industry. Events like Grow Canada address these concerns, but also permits discussion on those issues with people from the west to the east coast. As an undergraduate, those challenges make studying agricultural economics very exciting, because it stimulates me to think about innovative solutions to develop some agricultural sectors while protecting others.

What I retained the most from this experience is that Canadian agriculture is being offered a tremendous opportunity. In this dynamic world, where change is happening fast and decisions must be made rapidly not to miss openings, Canadian agriculture has the chance to become a world leader in sustainability. More mouths will have to be fed each day and sustainable and efficient ways of producing food are necessary to achieve the United Nations' objective of carbon emissions and poverty reduction. I believe it is time to rethink international commerce by not only considering the gains from trade, but also the externalities of trade, such as greenhouse gas emissions.

With technological advancement in crop science, precision agriculture, increasing efficiency of livestock production, Canadian farmers could not only offer quality agricultural commodities to global markets, but also export sustainability.

Although it is important to keep in mind that some agricultural sectors under supply management have been affected by recent trade deals while other ones do not yet withdraw the full benefits of those agreements. The Canadian agricultural industry being very diversified, evaluating the impacts on every farmer is important when changing current institutions, rules and regulations.

To conclude, I would not be able to name only one thing that I liked the most from my experience at GrowCanada 2019. Meeting and sharing thoughts with great people who all have agriculture as a common passion was certainly one of the highlights of the event. However, the speakers also addressed subjects and raised questions that I bring home with me for further thinking.