



For Immediate Release

Consumers trust and value accredited Professionals in Canada's food industry

Guelph, Ontario –April 5, 2016 –When it comes to food, more consumers are focusing on trust, credibility and value as top-of-mind considerations. Simply put, they want to know more about the origin of their food, particularly how it was produced and who produced it.

That sentiment was one of the focal points of the Ontario Institute of Agrologists' (OIA) 2016 Agri-Food Conference, held Thursday, March 31st in Guelph, Ontario. With the theme, "Responsibilities in a Demanding World", the day's proceedings highlighted the growing challenges and realities of food production in a world where, for the first time in history, more people live in cities than in rural areas. More importantly, there are fewer people involved in the production of food than at any other time, and farmers are being challenged to produce more on less land and yet are under ever-increasing scrutiny.

"Saying what you do, doing what you say –and proving it –are all part of what farmers do in conjunction with professional agrologists throughout the food chain," said Tony Morris, P.Ag., and chair of the conference.

Challenges and opportunities throughout the food chain were the primary subject of discussion at this year's conference. The accreditation of professionals in many business sectors has become the standard upon which the public has an expectation of provable competency. Now the demand is being placed on agriculture and the production of food, and that was the key message from many of the day's speakers.

Keynote speaker Dr. Colin Sage, a professor of geography at University College in Cork, Ireland, and author of "Environment and Food", challenged attendees to think longer term, and how profound changes in climate and global population in the next 20 years will affect agriculture. "The biggest multi-dimensional challenge is climate change, taking the world into new territory and requiring a completely new approach," said Dr. Sage, who then outlined some of the proposed measures in the European Union for the taxation of farm livestock. Meeting significant reductions in emissions will take "extraordinary effort and will include agriculture," he said. When it comes to agricultural systems, instead of talking about sustainability, he suggested we think of "resiliency", adding that there will be opportunities for farmers who are willing to adapt.

Andrew Campbell, owner of "FreshAir Media" and an advocate who's trying to bridge the gap between farmer and consumer via social media, challenged those in agriculture to share their positive and transparent messages about the industry. Consumers are curious, he said, and they want to be engaged in discussions about food and farming.

Naomi Leowith, a lawyer and investment manager with BenthamIMF, explained how professional designation from a recognised organization helps provide mitigation of risk. She used established legal precedents to emphasize how farmers and their suppliers have managed to avoid serious financial setback through their foresight in seeking advice from certified professionals.

When it comes to food, research has shown that consumers have the greatest level of trust in professionals and scientific institutions. Tim Faveri, vice president of sustainability and shared value with Maple Leaf Foods, explained how young people today –referred to as “aspirational” –are a receptive and engaged segment of the population. While they are prepared to pay more for what they trust and value, they also expect transparency and proven assurance.

Richard P. Ellis, senior vice president of communications, public affairs and corporate social responsibility with McDonald’s Restaurants of Canada Limited, capped the day’s proceedings as guest speaker at the evening banquet. With annual purchases that include 63 million pounds of beef and 290 million pounds of potatoes, millions of dozens of eggs and numerous other Canadian farm products, McDonald’s is committed to working with Canadian agriculture and is proud of its partnership with farmers across the country.

Mr. Ellis is also chair of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Canada, and to express their heart-felt appreciation, those in attendance held an auction of donated items with all funds raised given to further the valuable help to families through Ronald McDonald Houses. The sum of \$1,700 was raised and donated to the charity.

“The success of the 2016 conference was highlighted by the coming together of farmers, the input supply industry, food processing, retail and government,” said Drew Orosz, P. Ag., and president of OIA. “All of whom are interested in working together to manage risk, and ensure consumers have full confidence in the origin and production of their daily food.”

The vision of the Ontario Institute of Agrologists (OIA) is to lead the advancement of professional agrology practice in Ontario, to reflect the public’s growing interest in agricultural and environmental quality, resource stewardship, energy sustainability, reclamation, transparency and food quality. The OIA promotes the essential role accredited members play in contributing to rural Ontario’s economic growth by accountable and accredited practitioners serving the public interest. The institute also promotes the qualification assurance and the role of Agrologists & Agronomes, in branding the work of accountable and licensed professionals in agrology practice across Canada.

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For more information:

Terry Kingsmill, P. Ag.
Registrar
Ontario Institute of Agrologists
519 – 826 - 4226