

Good morning. I would like to thank the Honourable members of the Standing Committee for allowing me the opportunity to stand before you and discuss some of the issues regarding youth in Canadian Agriculture. I have had the opportunity over the past four years to be involved with two young farmers groups in Alberta which are the now defunct Alberta Young Farmers and the Future Agricultural Business Builders. I've also had the opportunity to be involved with the National Young Farmers organization, the Canadian Young Farmers Forum, over the same period.

There are a number of issues that current and potential young farmers face across Canada right now. In a recent report done by A.N. Scholz & Associates Inc. with APAS in Saskatchewan called "Strategies and Recommendations for New Entrant and Intergenerational Transfer Program Needs", they list Succession Planning, Business training, Mentoring and Apprenticeship Programs, Messaging and Image, Financial Tools, Immigration, and Coordination as their seven major focus areas. I would like to focus in on Mentoring and Apprenticeship Programs as well as Messaging and Image when it comes to youth and agriculture.

In Alberta, there is a great deal of discussion and exposure on our youth regarding their lack of knowledge on where the food they eat comes from and how agriculture has an influence on their life directly or indirectly. It's very unsettling when I hear people make light of a child saying that milk, meat, eggs, and bread come from Sobey's and not from Cows, Chickens, and Grains. While it may be amusing to hear the innocence in their voices when they say it, it reinforces the growing disconnect the next generation has with agriculture. As they progress through their schooling a lot of energy is directed towards educating children on the many things they can do with their lives in the form of a career. Very seldom is primary agriculture ever discussed or promoted as an option, and more often than not the educators don't take a student's interest in agriculture seriously and I've heard many a student tell me their educators ask them "Why would you want to do that?" with a negative tone. If you go to a career fair the number of booths dedicated to primary agriculture is limited when compared to other professions.

Alberta is fortunate to have the Green Certificate Program which is an approved complimentary program of study available to all Alberta high schools. Becoming a competent farm production technician (completing a Level I Green Certificate) requires taking three courses and upon completion, receiving 16 credits. I am a tester in this program for the Beekeeper production technician curriculum, and I believe that this program is a great tool available to all High School students in Alberta. The inherent problem with this program is that generally the only students to take it are those that are already active in some variety of agriculture as it has a tendency to be used for easy credits. That's not to say the course is poorly written as its content is very detailed and could definitely pose a challenge to students with and without an agricultural background. The problem I have seen with the course is that there are virtually no students from non-agricultural backgrounds taking part in the program. How do you change this? The people involved with creating, administering, and the testing of this program are an extremely dedicated group that work towards the advancement of a student's understanding of agriculture and the continued growth of these students once they finish high school and move on to post-secondary education or work on a farm. Outside of this program there is very little mentorship or leadership available to students, and that outside mentorship and leadership is what's needed to get

students with little to no agricultural background involved in the program. We need to look at programs that have been successful in accomplishing this mentorship and leadership from the USA, Australia, and even within our own country in Quebec and find ways to incorporate that foundation within our education system across Canada.

Another area of concern for agriculture and future generations is the image agriculture has among the general public, the media, and even within government itself. In his report, Mr. Scholz states that **“One of the top barriers the industry faces in attracting new entrants [youth in particular] is the messaging and image of agriculture and farming. Celebrating success of farms and farmers may be the easiest way to make a difference. Recognizing the efforts of individuals puts a tangible element to the message in a way the public can understand. Federal Government financial support to Bombardier, GM and Chrysler is rationalized and promoted as a critical stimulus to the national economy but support to agriculture often reported is a handout. Why? The agriculture and food sector is the largest employer in every province across Canada and is the real driver of the national economy. The Federal government has a vital role and responsibility in developing a positive and progressive image of farmers and the agricultural industry at large.”**

This is something that I’m sure we have all heard numerous times, now it’s up to us all to work on changing this image and making farming more socially acceptable and appealing for young people. Farmers generally have skill sets that cover a broad amount of areas due to the nature of the profession which is unique to agriculture, and it’s imperative that we use that to our advantage in drawing people to agriculture. It is also important to convey the message of what farmers contribute to society on a whole. There are provincial and national young farmer’s organizations out there that are available to draw on for this and I feel that government has a real opportunity to join with these groups and work together on these ideas. It is apparent to those currently within agriculture that this is something that our government takes seriously with the announcement of funding from the Government of Canada to the Canadian Young Farmers Forum and also with the announcement of discussions such as this one that are taking place across the country right now. But more needs to be done to spread that message and educate our youth as to the prospect of becoming a farmer.

In the 2006 Statistics Canada census it was found that only 9.1% of farmers in Canada are under the age of 35, and the average age of the Canadian farmer is 52. The same census also found that 80% of the Canadian population lives in urban centers and 20% live in rural areas. The final disturbing number is that less than 3% of our population farms. Even though our post-secondary education system is doing a commendable job in giving new entrants into farming the knowledge they need to become involved, more has to be done at an earlier age to prevent the results of the Statistics Canada census from getting worse.