



**December 15, 2009**

**Meeting Report: Grow Canada Conference**

**Background:**

CropLife Canada President Lorne Hepworth invited me, and sponsored my registration, to the GrowCanada Conference 09 December 1-3 in Calgary.

**Key Messages:**

**James Bolger**, former Prime Minister of New Zealand:

- Romantic attachment to peasant agriculture damages commercial farming – we can't feed the world on peasant agriculture
- Bans on GMO's are delaying advancements in food production
- When agricultural land is preserved through various policies, farmers are taking a hit
- Arable land is valuable but people have to live somewhere so it's a balance – use what we have more wisely
- Food versus fuel – priority must be to use land for food production
- Water allocation will be a key issue – the status quo is not an option
- Greenwashing – lots of product branding, but choice is important
- We produce healthy and nutritional food in a sustainable manner – organic is not better than conventional
- Need to market nutrition and wellness and not negate organic

**Bruce Anderson**, Senior VP, Harris Decima – on Food Perception and Politics

- An aging population is concerned with health – technology has fuelled a flood of wellness marketing
- Global food crisis severity is poorly understood – low food prices and obesity send signals that food is plentiful
- Retail push in organics reinforces the notion that what we have been doing is unhealthy
- Not enough people support the need for crop science, both chemicals and GMO's
- Need to alter perceptions - can't fight consumer trends to organic/natural foods; can't make "natural" bad – don't challenge choice

- Don't use messages supporting pesticide and GMO use like:
  - fighting starvation
  - industry has economic importance
  - we have complex safe handling rules
- Options to rebrand/reposition
  - Nutricrops enhance wellness/expand nutrition
  - Pest control expands availability of food
  - Lighter environmental impacts

**Adam Werbach**, Past President, Sierra Club

- Discussed a strategy for sustainability versus environmental
- Blue consumers beyond green – massive growth in these who are driving changes
- Transparency is critical – strong growth in consumer demand for information – greenwashing will lead to backlash from consumers
- Engage in sustainability and long term profitability

**Philippa Guest**, Managing Director, Agronomica Ltd.

- There is a broad agreement that we need a more sustainable approach in agriculture – a “perfect storm” links challenges in food production with global challenges like climate change.
- In Europe, sustainable agriculture driven by food scandals – consumers lost confidence. Now safety assurance and traceability is a priority driver followed by environmentally friendly, then ethical (fair trade).
- Global G.A.P. (good agricultural practices) is an international group that sets voluntary standards for the certification of ag products and is mostly concerned with food safety. Some retailers want more environmental criteria in the certification – can be a problem for farmers as an extra cost they can't recoup from the marketplace. Canada has an equivalent scheme that is recognized by GlobalGAP.
- There is also the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI) platform with 20 international members so far – intention is to create a common platform for ag practices worldwide.

**Sarah Stokes Alexander** – Keystone Centre

- Field-to-Market – the Keystone Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture (US) represents growers, conservation organizations and food supply chain companies.
- They are developing outcomes based on metrics for things like water quality, biodiversity and socioeconomic indicators.
- No standard for sustainability but rather continuous improvement.
- Concerned with the lack of premiums returned to growers from sustainability efforts so looking at how to support grower efforts.

**Neil Downey**, Ducks Unlimited Canada, discussed advancing sustainability through partnerships.

**Josee Van Lent**, Assoc. Dean, Agriculture and Envir. Sciences, Lakeland College is involved through the Alberta Conservation Tillage Society, with greenhouse gas sequestration and offsets and ecosystem services policy development. She suggested that ecosystem services that farmers provide should be stackable credits rather than sold as single services.

**Preston Manning** discussed strengthening communications between the agriculture sector and governments.

**Prem Warrior** (Gates Foundation) discussed global food supply and the need to improve agricultural productivity for the small-holder farmers in the poorer parts of the world to help ensure food security in the future.

**Mayo Schmidt** (Viterra) discussed Viterra's involvement in carbon offset markets as one of the largest aggregators of credit. He also discussed the challenges of moving food from areas of abundance to areas of need around the world.

**General Rick Hillier** spoke about the need for strong leadership in all sectors.