

Using Public Relations To Attract New Farmers to Canada's Agricultural Landscape

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Abstract

The structure of Canada's agricultural landscape is undergoing significant changes characterized by an aging population and a reduced number of new farmers from both farm and non-farm backgrounds. This raises questions about the survival of agriculture and agribusiness in Canada. This study examines how public relations is used to attract new farmers to Canada's agricultural landscape. This study focuses on understanding the communication tools professionals are currently employing to attract new farmers into Canada's farming industries and how effective they are in reaching new farmers.

Key words: Canadian agriculture, agricultural communications, farming, new farmers, social media, media relations, user-generated content

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Introduction

Canadian agriculture is currently characterized, in part, by two intersecting trends. First, the average age of the Canadian farmer continues to edge up with the most recent census of Agriculture in Canada (2011) revealing the average age of Ontario's farmers was 54.5 years (Beaulieu, 2014). This continues a long-running trend of population aging in the provincial and national farm sector (Sethuratnam & Smithers, 2014) and marks the first census year where nearly half (48%) of farm operators in Canada were 55 years of age and older (Brklacich & Ngo, 2014). Second, there has been a decline in the number of young farmers. In 2006 the number of farm operators under the age of 40 was down 58% from 1991 (Sethuratnam & Smithers, 2014). This decline reflects the well documented high rates of rural to urban migration by young adults who no longer see (or who have been counselled by parents to abandon) a future in farming (Sethuratnam & Smithers, 2014)

Over the last two decades, the structure of Canadian agriculture has significantly changed as well with fewer but larger farms (Beaulieu, 2014). The 2011 Census of Agriculture records a decline of 74,439 farms since 1991 with the average farm area increasing from 598 to 778 acres (Beaulieu, 2014). The number of farm operators has also dropped 24.8% (Beaulieu, 2014). The trends of fewer operators and fewer farms show no signs of reversing and could indicate a significant turnover in farm assets in the future (Beaulieu, 2014).

This raises questions about the survival of agriculture and agribusiness in Canada. This study focuses on understanding the tools public relations professionals are currently employing to attract new entrants into Canada's farming industries and how effective are they in reaching these stakeholders.

Agricultural communicators working to bridge the gap between farmers and prospective entrants are facing new challenges as Canadians are increasingly removed geographically and generationally from farming communities. As a result, many urban-dwelling Canadians have a mediated understanding of agriculture and farming. At the same time, media power is shifting, and media environments are continually changing (Jenkins, 2008). It is typical for the mainstream media to overlook agricultural issues until economic health crises occur (Wang & Waters, 2012). Given its influence on how agricultural issues are perceived, the media's attention to agricultural issues is inadequate and continually dwindling (Pawlick, 2001; Wang & Waters, 2012). Further, literature maintains that when mainstream news outlets do cover agriculture, audiences see a slanted and distorted reality about the industry (Pawlick, 2001).

These challenges faced in today's media landscape mean agricultural communicators and agricultural organizations must change the way they strategically communicate with many different stakeholders, including new entrant farmers. This study serves multiple purposes: (1) advances an understanding of how agricultural communicators adapt their public relations strategies to a saturated and highly competitive media environment, (2) addresses how agricultural communicators find and engage with Canadians who are considering farming as a career, and (3) contributes to the lack of literature advancing an understanding of Canadian agricultural communication.

Research on this topic suggests there has been much research done in the areas of intergenerational farm succession, but none on how media engage with new farmers from non-farming backgrounds and publicize farm entry programs to new farmers. Therefore, this research will be of great interest to public relations practitioners working in Canada's agricultural industry, or whose clients include agricultural associations and farm organizations. They will be

mandated with, among other things, attracting, educating and engaging agriculture students and new farmers and will have an interest in how the agricultural communications industry is currently trending in Canada, as well as any emerging issues. This research will also be of interest to agriculture policy makers and governmental bodies who are concerned with how to reach new farmers who will help shape the future of food and agriculture in Canada. They will be mandated with, among other things, educating new farmers on policy issues, financial assistance, programs and services, business-related planning and regulations.

The agricultural and agri-food industry contribute over \$110 billion annually to Canada's gross domestic product (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2017), yet our young people are left uninformed about the importance of agricultural careers. I believe this is an important area of investigation because members of the public with a direct connection to agriculture continue to decline in numbers. As Irani and Doerfert (2013) explain, the future of agriculture depends on us as communicators to better communicate the importance and value of agriculture to non-agricultural audiences.

This topic is of particular interest to me as a lifelong resident of rural Ontario, one generation removed from family farming. As a former agribusiness professional, I have witnessed firsthand the impact of urbanization on farmers and the daunting challenges facing aspiring farmers in Ontario.

Research Question

The guiding research question for this thesis is: How is public relations used to attract new farmers to Canada's agricultural landscape?

This typology defines "new farmers" as all individuals from non-farm backgrounds who are not yet farming but are considering farming as a career.

This research project aims to add a modest amount of information about the efficacy of the communication tools professionals are currently employing to attract new farmers into Canada's farming industries, of which there is currently scant amounts.

Research Methodology

The research and analysis for this study commenced February 27, 2018 and concluded April 11, 2018.

Secondary research materials were sourced primarily from Canada, the United States, Europe and Australia. These academic and non-academic sources were accessed through the Humber College library and its online business databases as well as websites like Google Scholar. Initial search terms did not produce results appropriately responding to the research question, however expanding the search through methods suggested by Humber's library research staff produced a few relevant articles. Six different search queries provided an assortment of articles broadly related to the research question. It was determined through much secondary research that little to no empirical research has been conducted on topics closely related to the research question.

Journals included were the Journal of Rural Studies, the Journal of Agriculture Systems and the Journal of Applied Communications. Due to difficulties in sourcing Canadian material, the search was modified to include international sources.

Due to time constraints, primary research was conducted solely in the form of one-on-one interviews to provide quantitative and qualitative data reflective of secondary research findings. Interviewees were chosen based on their experience in the field of agricultural communications in Canada: one communications strategist for a national agricultural term lender, one communications director for an international not-for-profit organization with rural roots, one

executive director for a Canadian not-for-profit which offers direct programs and services for new farmers, one liaison officer for a renowned agricultural college, and one director of global public relations for a full-service advertising agency dedicated to agriculture.

Interviews were organized based on each participant's availability, resulting in four one-on-one telephone interviews and one email interview. To conduct a comparative analysis, each participant was asked the same interview questions. The purpose of the interview was to determine the rationale and tactics used by agricultural communicators to attract new farmers and the efficacy of those targeted communications.

This primary research was structured per the Humber College Research Ethics Board (REB) guidelines and requirements.

A list of interview questions and transcripts can be found in Appendix I.

A sample information letter for interview participants can be found in Appendix II.

A sample consent form for interview participants can be found in Appendix III.

The student consent form for data disposal can be found in Appendix IV.

Literature Review

The secondary research on the role of public relations in attracting new farmers to Canada's agricultural landscape represents a balance of empirical research and reflective discussion organized by six themes: (1) family farming as the primary engine of Canada's rural economies, (2) intergenerational family farm transfer as a means of ensuring the sustained viability of individual family farms, (3) implications of the aging farmer workforce, (4) the emergence of a new generation of people interested in farming (5) farm entry programs addressing the needs of new farmers and (6) agricultural communications in Canada today.

This thesis weaves together six distinct bodies of literature to create a multi-faceted representation of the current issues and opportunities facing agricultural communicators in Canada.

Family Farming

The majority of farms and agribusiness in North America are family operations (Taylor, Norris & Howard, 1998). Kinship or marriage relate the principals, the business and family relationships overlap, and control of the business passes typically from one generation to another within the family (Taylor, Norris & Howard, 1998). The family farm implies a duality between a farm business and a farm household; hence, they are both economic and social units (Hill, 1993). The family farm is an enduring symbol of rurality in Canada, with many farmers able to trace their family's history back three or more generations (Conway, McDonagh, Farrell & Kinsella, 2017). In southern Ontario, as in many other regions, the histories of farming and rural communities are closely intertwined (Smithers & Johnson, 2004).

Family farming served as the primary engine of local rural economies and largely defined rural society for much of the twentieth century (Smithers & Johnson, 2004). Rural settlements

provided the social and economic infrastructure needed to support farm businesses and farm households. Farmers focused much of their economic and social life towards these places (Smithers & Johnson, 2004). Consequently, there existed not only a sense of shared progress but also a tangible interdependency that formed a foundation for many mutually supportive interactions (Smithers & Johnson, 2004).

Maintaining family farm control and ownership is therefore central to many farm households (Conway, McDonagh, Farrell & Kinsella, 2017), which results in an inherent rural ideology which places much importance the process of handing over the farm within the family (Conway, McDonagh, Farrell & Kinsella, 2017). Farmers have their farms because of the actions of their ancestors; therefore, believing in their responsibility to pass on what they inherited (2017). Indeed, Potter and Lobley (1996) consider farming to be the most hereditary of professions (Potter & Lobley, 1996, p. 286). Consequently, a significant proportion of farmers abstain from transferring the farm while alive. This results in significant economic and sociocultural barriers for the younger generation interested in pursuing a career in farming (Conway, McDonagh, Farrell & Kinsella, 2017).

The lack of correspondence between the older generation's readiness to step aside and the younger generation's inclination to take over is also seen as one of the reasons why the farming community consists of a farm population with a high age profile (Conway, McDonagh, Farrell & Kinsella, 2017). Considerable research is dedicated to trying to understand this fraught and complex issue, and how such issues can be prevented or resolved.

Farming differs from other types of family businesses in two essential ways. First, farming is more than an economic activity; it is a family lifestyle based on beliefs about living and working on the farm (Taylor, Norris & Howard, 1998). Second, children are apprenticed into

the occupation of farming with few people entering from the outside (Taylor, Norris & Howard, 1998). Consequently, a farm is five times more likely to be passed from generation to generation than a non-farm business, making succession critical to the economic viability of the farm business and the continuation of the family farm (R. Weigel, Weigel & Blundall, 1987).

Farm Succession

Intergenerational family farm transfer remains the dominant method for farm succession (Ingram & Kirwan, 2011). Intergenerational succession is instrumental in ensuring the sustained viability of individual family farms (Ingram & Kirwan, 2011), in addition to shaping the future structure of rural communities and the broader agri-food sector (Gill, 2013). Planning effectively for succession is an integral part of managing a family farm business (Mishra & El-Osta, 2008). Nuthall and Old (2017) suggest that the process will ensure the farm is efficiently managed using new management with the assets not only being retained but also organized so that the extended family is content with what transpires (Nuthall & Old, 2017, p.40). Mishra and El-Osta (2008) state that agricultural law professionals believe that a sound farm succession plan involves a readiness to transfer some land into the personal ownership of the younger generation, sooner rather than later. This ensures the younger generation has the pride of ownership and motivation to work hard that land ownership brings.

A substantial body of literature with quantitative data about farm succession in North America exists. Both the difficulty of interpreting data from quantitative studies and first qualitative attempts have indicated, however, that farm succession is much more than just a technical process (Mann, 2007). There are a growing number of dimensions to succession planning which is often made more difficult by farming parents who actively dissuade farming children from pursuing a career in agriculture (Ball & Wiley, 2005). Family farm literature also

reports succession to be a period of significant turmoil, both financially and emotionally, for farm households (Gill, 2013). As well, older farmers usually reject the idea of giving up their farm even if they do not have a successor, and willingness to succeed is often seen as a matter of honour rather than as a question of utility maximization (Mann, 2007).

Mishra and El-Osta (2008) studied the impact of government farm policy and farm growth on both succession decisions and the likelihood of intra-family transfers of the farm business. Their results indicated that succession decisions are significantly influenced by government farm policy, farm wealth, age, and educational attainment of current farm operators (Mishra & El-Osta, 2008). Results show that off-farm work by operators and spouses and regional location are positively correlated with non-family farm succession decisions. On the other hand, farm ownership, educational attainment, and marital status of the operator increase the likelihood of family-based succession decisions.

Beyond the mere interest in the nature of contemporary family farming lies the question of sustainability and some uncertainty about where family farming fits in contemporary rural society and how it can benefit from, and contribute to, Canada's rural places (Mann, 2007). Mann's (2007) findings suggest that family farming comprises an increasingly diverse set of farm business trajectories. One possible interpretation, based on recent media reporting concerning contemporary farm change and its consequences, is that movement towards larger scale, more industrialized forms of farming has led to a decoupling of the farm and rural community sectors (Mann, 2007). However, there is also the prospect that many family farms remain critically dependent on communities for employment, for their growth and even their survival (Mann, 2007).

The Aging Farming Population

Traditionally, farms are passed on to children as farmers approach retirement age, but the difficulties of farming encourage farmers' children to pursue other careers (Ball & Wiley, 2005). Many aging farmers have no familial successors (Ball & Wiley, 2005). Without successors, farmers work well beyond traditional retirement age (Ball & Wiley, 2005), and without adequate succession plans, the future of their farms may be at risk (Hersey, 2014). Despite this, Conway, McDonagh, Farrell & Kinsella (2017) highlight that "the reluctance of older farmers to exit or retire from the farming sector to facilitate young farmers who have a desire to start up persists" (Conway, McDonagh, Farrell & Kinsella, 2017, p.166). The aging farming workforce is reported to have major implications for government policy (Rogers, Barr, O'Callaghan, Brumby & Warburton, 2013), raising concerns about the economic, social and environmental sustainability and viability of an aging farming population (Rogers, Barr, O'Callaghan, Brumby & Warburton, 2013).

Many farmers will need to sell their farms, but to whom and for how much? Those wanting to enter farming often struggle with high start-up costs and obtaining land, despite their willingness to enter the profession (Ingram & Kirwan, 2011) and often cannot purchase land at a price that enables financial security for retiring farmers (Ingram & Kirwan, 2011), thereby making farm transfers impracticable. Research that can help unpack the nuances of supporting more successful farm transfers is important to disrupt this trend (Conway, McDonagh, Farrell & Kinsella, 2017).

New Farmers

Hamilton (2011) points to an emergence of a new generation of people interested in farming. This is important to our nation for many reasons. It is a critical change in attitude to see

new people who want to farm, become landowners and even live in rural areas (Hamilton, 2011). These new farmers are helping to reverse trends regarding both the number of farmers and the rural population (Hamilton, 2011). New farmers bring a new range of skills, education, talents, and creativity to rural areas as well as entrepreneurial drive (Hamilton, 2011). They are savvy with new information technologies and have the marketing skills to open new economic opportunities (Hamilton, 2011). Many of them see their farms as food businesses, which can be the basis for other entrepreneurial activities (Hamilton, 2011). As well, there is a vast amount of research pointing to a positive correlation between young farmers and farm efficiency and innovation, such impediments can have adverse impacts on not only the development trajectory of a family farm but also the prosperity of the agricultural industry in general (Lobley, 2010). They are committed to the ideal of community and see themselves in relationships with their consumers, neighbouring farmers, the land, their animals, and the communities in which they live. One important component of the New Agrarian movement are older, second career people either returning to their home areas or moving to rural areas, who bring their employment experience and skills, as well as capital and other wealth to their farms, with the goal of retiring in the area.

Barnett (2012) notes that many of the people interested in farming did not grow up in agriculture and did not receive the training and education that accompanies growing up on a family farm. This means many potential new farmers have a steep learning curve when it comes to food production (Barnett, 2012). This steep learning curve highlights the importance of programs that give prospective farmers opportunities for hands-on experience and the ability to determine their interest and desire to become farmers.

Farm Entry Programs

New kinds of farmers have been, and still are, faced with the challenge to acquire the much needed institutional and local support to exchange knowledge and build capacity for gaining access to suitable markets, capital, land tenure, hands-on training, and education that are necessary to develop and sustain food and farming activities (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010). Research out of the United States points to rapid growth of new farmer training and program development, and yet it is one of the most poorly understood areas of agriculture research (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010). These initiatives have formed as a response to an overwhelming concern regarding the steady decline in the number of people entering into farming (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010). Traditional education is not addressing the needs of new farmers, so practitioners, researchers and policymakers have worked together in new and varying ways to maintain the viability of new farms by building an alternative foundation for farmer knowledge, understanding that not all paths to farm ownership are similar (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010).

In Canada, according to Brklacich and Ngo (2014), advocates within certain food movements, like the Local Food Movement (LFM), hope “to leverage new consumer trends to renew [the] farm population by making a clear commitment to helping a new generation of farmers across Canada create successful family businesses”. Initiatives encouraging people with little to no rural or agricultural background to take up farming have begun to emerge and cater to an urban population interested in exploring the agrarian dream. These programs provide participants with fundamental agricultural production and business experiences as part of establishing an economically viable farm business (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010).

Across the country, these new farmer initiatives provide targeted programs for such groups as a general, new farmer audience, immigrants and refugees with farming experience,

new urban agriculturists, women in farming, mid-career changers, individuals interested in small-scale farming, exiting and entering farmers, farmers between the age of 18 and 35, and even farmers who are starting to explore the idea of farm startup (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010). These examples reflect a diversity of audiences and usually comprise a range of prospective, new, and semi-experienced farmers in a range of content areas (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010).

Policymakers and local leaders are extremely concerned about farmers and local agribusinesses. They believe the population retention and quality of life reflect opportunities and viability for many rural communities which depend on farming and rural population (Mishra & El-Osta, 2008). Agriculture policy through commodity program payments has encouraged the propagation of larger farms and may have slowed the rate of exits from the industry (Mishra & El-Osta, 2008). Government farm policy may be responsible for keeping farms in the business of farming and in the process, aiding having the payments capitalized into the farmland (Mishra & El-Osta, 2008). They argue that by reducing market risk, government farm programs create a disincentive for farmers to leave the industry. Increased farmland values and increased rental rates are impediments to entry and exit and give rise to absentee ownership. The presence of passive income sources for retiring parents would result in less incentive to transfer the farm within the family. This may create a competitive environment and perhaps less efficient farms will exit the industry. This may also provide an entry point for young and new farmers to enter the industry (Mishra & El-Osta, 2008).

Research surrounding the farming industry in the United Kingdom points to a failure to attract new blood into the industry, partly due to the poor rewards and partly due to entry barriers like high startup costs and a shortage of available land (Ingram & Kirwan, 2011). This tendency has led to concerns in policy circles that there is an urgent need to revitalize farming with new or

at least fresh blood, with the key rationale being that an aging population is less likely to be able to compete and remain viable within emerging twenty-first-century food supply chains (Ingram & Kirwan, 2011).

Agricultural Communications

Technological advancements in communications flourished in the 20th century, adding telephone, radio, television, computers, and the internet to our everyday means of communicating. As new technologies have emerged, the communications network among agricultural communicators has been enhanced, and the agribusiness sector has utilized these new innovations to improve production and marketing (Doerfert & Miller, 2006).

Telg and Irani (2012) define agricultural communication as “the exchange of information about the agricultural and natural resources industries through effective and efficient media, such as newspapers, magazines television, radio and the Web, to reach appropriate audiences”. Agricultural communication as an industry has evolved from agricultural magazines, journals, and rural weekly newspapers that feature farming news, to a complex, yet important integration of several media channels to provide agriculture-related messages to targeted audiences (Telg & Irani, 2012, p. 4).

Academic literature addressing agricultural communication is diverse in content, purpose, and methodology, reflecting the fact that agricultural communication is a complex social phenomenon seeking to address individual and group perceptions and behaviours toward farming, agriculture, and food production (Boone, Meisenbach, & Tucker, 2003). As the current agricultural landscape in Canada changes and members of the public with a direct connection to agriculture continue to decline in numbers, the role of strategic communications in agriculture is becoming increasingly more important, and the skill set of agricultural communications

practitioners has come to range from traditional journalistic writing and reporting to media production, print and web design, social media, public relations, advertising and marketing (Irani & Doerfert, 2013).

Traditionally, audiences for agricultural information were farmers or rural Canadians looking for information and informal education on techniques and technologies to improve production agriculture practices (Irani & Doerfert, 2013). Agricultural communications practitioners focused on tactical implementation of communications products such as newsletters, magazines, and pamphlets (Telg & Irani, 2012). The farm press contributed to this effort with publications and news shows aimed at producers, growers, and their vendors and suppliers (Telg & Irani, 2012).

Today, digital online media have not only changed the tools of communications practitioners; they have also facilitated the advent of the 24/7 news information cycle and the citizen journalism (Irani & Doerfert, 2013). News and information, both credible and not, are now freely available from a multitude of online channels. Consumers looking for agricultural information have more in the form of credible, science-based information, and advocacy and public opinion taking various sides on agricultural and natural resources issues and practices (Irani & Doerfert, 2013). Consumers also have less as a result of consolidation and convergence of news. There are fewer farm beat reporters, news outlets and, ultimately, trustworthy sources of unbiased information (Irani & Doerfert, 2013).

Doerfert and Miller (2006) also discuss the growing struggles of print and broadcast media caused by fewer agriculture advertising dollars and convergence activities within traditional communications segments. They identify three areas in which agricultural communicators struggle in relation to agricultural messaging today: (1) using key messages to

maintain the public's trust, (2) effectively relating to the growing "hobby" farmer customer base, and (c) effectively explaining the scientific and technological aspects of the field so they are easily understood (Doerfert & Miller, 2006).

Lundy, Ruth and Park (2007) suggest that a new model for reaching youth, who increasingly rely on entertainment media more than traditional news media, is necessary. However, there is a lack of substantive research in agricultural communication that addresses the portrayal of agriculture in entertainment media (Lundy, Ruth & Park, 2007). They suggest the agriculture industry may be well served by further exploration of the impact on entertainment media on the public's perceptions of agriculture.

Primary Research

Results of the primary research for this study are based on four one-on-one phone interviews and one email interview completed by participants currently working in the field of agricultural communications across Canada. All five participants answered the same set of 13 questions intended to elicit a variety of perspectives and opinions on the communication tools professionals are currently employing to attract new farmers into Canada's farming industries and how effective they are in reaching new farmers.

Participant Population

Participant A is a communications strategist for a national agricultural term lender whose responsibilities include media relations, reputation management, crisis communications and government relations. This participant has been working in the agricultural industry for about six years.

Participant B is a communications director for an international not-for-profit organization with rural roots whose responsibilities include overseeing the communications department,

taking care of public-facing issues, programs and digital publications, and media relations. This participant has been working in the agricultural industry for one year.

Participant C is a liaison officer for a renowned agricultural college whose responsibilities include promoting the school's academic programs and resources through experiential learning events, networking events, and social media. This participant has been working in the agricultural industry in both full and part-time capacities for four and a half years.

Participant D is an executive director for a not-for-profit offering direct programs and services for new farmers whose responsibilities involve leadership, management, and program delivery. This participant has been working in the agricultural industry for approximately 34 years.

Participant E is a director of global public relations for a full-service advertising agency dedicated to agriculture whose responsibilities include leadership, developing and executing public relations strategies, advocacy and awareness public relations. This participant has been working in the agricultural industry for ten years.

Findings

New farmer programs. Participants were asked about initiatives offered through their workplaces that are designed to assist a wide range of individuals aspiring, planning, and/or starting to farm. Participant A states that their organization has two such lending programs. The first, a loan program designed specifically for farmers and entrepreneurs under the age of 40. This program is designed to help this subset of people enter the agricultural industry in either a farming or entrepreneurial role by lending them the necessary capital they can't otherwise access. The second, a transition loan program designed to assist the subset of people exiting the

industry but looking to pass on their business to the next generation of farmer, be they a family member, new farmer, or otherwise.

Participant B states that all programs offered through their organization are explicitly designed for youth development and to reconnect Canada's youth to agriculture and farming. These programs teach participants, youth ages six to 25, about all aspects of the agricultural process with the goal of eventually connecting them to industry-specific scholarship, volunteer, or workplace opportunities.

Participant C could not speak to any new farmer programs or initiatives.

Participant D created their organization as a response to the extreme lack of educational programming available for young farmers over the age of 21. They recognized that these young people had a connection to agriculture and a desire to do work in which they could take pride. With this in mind, this participant's organization designed their programming to foster a feeling of optimism and pride in the industry by providing the essential learning tools these young people needed to succeed in the farming industry.

Participant E cites one specific program example out of many which is an online platform aimed at finding skilled manual talent to work in agriculture around the world.

Industry shifts. When asked about the most significant change the Canadian agricultural industry has experienced over their time with the industry, Participant A sees a vibrant and robust industry compared to the 1980s when, as they explain, "All you heard about was doom and gloom and people on the verge of bankruptcy." They add, "If you compare the amount of food that you're able to produce per acre of land now to the 1980s, it's completely different." They go on to state that farming has become a very capital-intensive industry, but for the last several years it's been quite stable with high commodity prices and a significant increase in

productivity. Participant A states that farming has a more modern image and therefore, “The old image of the red barn on the prairies is outdated.” They add, “What we see now is a boom and bust cycle because there’s a lot of business savvy out there and people understand we’ve got a dynamic economy that’s constantly changing.”

With only one year spent in the industry, Participant B does not feel this question applies to them.

Participant C echoed the sentiments of Participant A and cited technological and automation advances as the most significant change to the Canadian agricultural industry in recent years. As well, they mention a decreasing level of “agricultural literacy” among school-aged youth in urban areas as another significant change. They add, “Unless they have had direct involvement with the industry, their agricultural literacy and interest in food and agriculture is lacking.” Similarly, Participant E believes that consumer awareness and consumer demands around food have “completely changed the industry.”

Participant D sees that fewer family farms than ever before comprise the industry. Adding to earlier sentiments about technological advancements, the complexities of farming today mean that farmers face a steep learning curve of new skills necessary to operate a farm. They add, “They’re larger farms, so management skills and employee supervision are new things people have to learn along the way.”

Participant D also sees that for the first time, Canada has two or three generations of farmers with different ways of communicating, learning, and sourcing out information.

They add:

We have a whole generation that's still looking at fliers, magazines, newspapers and radios. Then, look at the other generation that is completely connected to social media

and videos and always have their phone in their hand so they can check up on what they need. When you as an industry are trying to send out information and provide resources, you have to be aware of that, because one method of communication or even two methods of communication is not good enough to reach the entire industry.

Adapting to industry shifts. When asked how, as agricultural communicators, they are adapting to the industry shifts as mentioned above, Participant A that they took note of the new narrative and began to work to break the stereotypes of the farm practices. This participant cites explicitly a “young, vibrant and modern” industry-driven initiative created by their organization, designed to break the narrative of a struggling industry and show the “real face” of agriculture today.

As a communicator, Participant A also strives to ensure people speak positively about agriculture in Canada by connecting producers with consumers.

They add:

So many people in this day and age are so far removed from where their food is produced, and they have very little knowledge about how it's produced. It's becoming a situation where they're very susceptible to groups that want to tell a different narrative of agriculture. That it's industrial, very commercial, and does not care about what the consumer buys. It's very different. We still have farmers who want the consumer to know how their food is produced and that is with care and health and safety in mind.

Participant C also had to adapt to these industry changes, explaining that a more advanced agricultural industry means there is a far greater range of job opportunities for people looking to enter into the industry. They state, “If a student is interested in working with animals, often their perception is that the only option is to be a veterinarian.” They explain that a shift in

messaging and tactical output had to occur to communicate to students interested in veterinary medicine, for example, the broader array of career paths in animal sciences.

To fill the gaps for the younger generation, Participant D adapted how their organization presented information in their messaging. They altered their methods of communication and delivery to what they knew was going to work to reach their younger audiences.

Participant E believes the most significant change in agricultural communications, and for the industry as a whole, is engaging consumers in the broader conversation about agriculture in Canada, because, “ten or twenty years ago, no one in agriculture had to speak to consumers. Farmers had no obligation whatsoever to do that.” Today, consumers want to know where their food is coming from, and the story of it, they add.

Changing farmer demographics. The next area of questioning involved the changing demographics of farmer age and background and how this changes the way each participant develops communication plans or programs. Participant A recognizes that diversity breeds strength in all sectors but does not believe Canada’s agricultural industry is as diverse as it would like to be. To address the lack of diversity in the industry, this participant targets diverse audiences with the goal of changing attitudes about jobs in agriculture. Echoing sentiments expressed earlier by Participant C, Participant A explains, “I think most people think agriculture as the primary sector where people are simply farming, whereas there are a wide array of careers out there for people. That’s where diversity comes in to play.”

The majority of participants agree that the biggest challenge for their organizations is trying to build awareness among a new generation of kids and youths to encourage them to “grow into” a farming background. This participant notes the added challenge of appealing to a new, younger audience while still trying to appeal to their core base of older, experienced

volunteers. To show the value behind the organization, Participant B states that they made a strategic shift to include more digital communications and become more “grassroots organized” rather than using the “over-the-head messaging” that savvy social media users see right through.

As Participant E notes, the majority of conversations are now occurring digitally because the next generation of farmers and producers are much more social media savvy.

In working with agricultural organizations, Participant D supports them in creating content that will reach and engage their demographics of young and new farmers. They feel, however that the agricultural industry is falling behind on how to use new technology to attract the people they want in the industry.

Social media’s role in agricultural communications. When asked about the opportunities social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat) presents for agricultural communicators, Participant A, Participant B and Participant D note that it is one of the most effective ways to reach the public and especially rural audiences who are increasingly engaged online. Participant B adds that the visual element of social media is something more farming organizations could leverage to get their messages across more effectively.

When it comes to telling the “true story” of agriculture, both Participant A and Participant B also agree that social media is a more effective platform on which to share that story as a means to connect with consumers. Participant A explains, “No longer is it the case where agriculture sits back and doesn't have a voice. Now the industry does have a voice and a channel to tell their story. Among the others who are trying to tell it for them.” They add that social media has enabled agricultural communicators to, “take over their own narrative to tell the story of what’s really happening on the farm.” Participant A describes working side-by-side with

their social media team, working to leverage other voices in the industry to tell the story of agriculture.

Similarly, Participant D is a strong advocate for using digital platforms for storytelling and leveraging user-generated content, citing a viral campaign by their organization to connect the public to the farmer and promote the industry to attract new talent.

When it comes to engaging with youth, Participant B believes the traditional ways don't function anymore. They put most of their efforts into social media and note that while radio and print advertising still works, agricultural communicators must think differently to reach audiences today. This participant believes it's important for their organization to stay engaged online, meeting people at "their level." Participant C also sees social media as an effective way to communicate with young adults.

Participant E feels that social media has become an automatic part of every piece of communications, but communicators can no longer assume that just by posting content on social media that producers or consumers will see that information. This participant believes that for agricultural communicators, social media should be about reaching the "right five people rather than aiming for 500 likes." This participant cites the importance of social media analytics and being able to measure and analyze the data.

The challenge of media relations. When asked about the challenges working with traditional journalists and mass media present for agricultural communicators, Participant A recognizes that media has evolved quickly and so to have the rules of engagement. They explain, "For years you had clearer rules of engagement and traditional media would generally follow that. They would follow the structure of fair and balanced reporting." Adding that now, "You get situations where you've got media, that don't respect the rules of journalism, that are coming at

you with a specific perspective, a bias, or political agenda. As a consequence, you get distorted reporting.”

Participant A explains that as more and more newsrooms across Canada employ generalists, there is increasingly fewer agricultural “beat reporters.” This is a challenge for agricultural communicators who can no longer ensure that these journalists understand the history and context of agriculture in Canada. This participant admits they still have not figured out how to deal with unbalanced reporting and journalists with no agricultural background reporting on agriculture.

Though Canada’s agricultural industry brings in billions of dollars for the country, Participant B and Participant E note that agricultural news is often not “news that leads.” While their organizations get significant, positive local and rural attention, it is a struggle to get attention from the national media, in fact, it often doesn’t happen.

Participant D echoes these statements and adds that the only way agriculture has the opportunity to change perceptions is to tell the story itself.

Participant E feels that agricultural media is quite strong regarding loyalty to industry publications. However, they note that there are fewer people working in media with a skill set or interest in covering the agriculture niche, despite an abundance of job opportunities.

The influence of bloggers and online influencers. The majority of participants agree that traditional media still carries credibility in the public. However, when asked if bloggers and other online influencers have more of an influence over their target audiences than traditional media, all participants felt that yes, online influencers were the largest source of information for younger audiences. Influencer marketing is something that both Participant B and Participant C are actively trying to promote. Participant B uses influencers as ambassadors and “shining

examples,” promoting and championing the programs their organization offers for kids and youths. “That’s how I see my communications efforts paying off in the end. Making these sorts of connections with people who can do some of the work for you,” they add. Participant C also uses thought leaders as often as possible due to their effectiveness at engaging with young people but notes that reaching broader audiences is still a challenge.

Participant D feels that audiences feel a connection to bloggers. They add, “Journalists are seen as looking for the story, looking for something that's going to attract. Bloggers are seen as on the journey and experiencing it right beside you, and I think that's the difference between them.”

Communication goals and objectives. Participants were asked what some of their goals and objectives are when developing communication plans and programs targeted to new and beginner farmers. Participant A and Participant D admit that in their organizations, they are still in the process of developing over-arching communication goals. Ultimately, what influences their communications is the industry’s need for business savvy, highly educated people with a broad outlook. Participant A notes that wherever they can, they describe agriculture as a “dynamic and growing industry in Canada.” They admit, “This narrative is fairly recent. In the last five years, or so.” Adding, before that, “it was simply looked at as a profession that people could get in to and make a living. But now we’re saying its full of opportunities and young people are who we need to keep the sector strong and vibrant.”

Participant D adds that their goals are constantly changing. Initially, their overarching goal was to connect and build a community of young farmers in Canada in the space they were already occupying - the internet. There they would be able to network and share stories. They add, “Young farmers don't go to the coffee shops where the farmers all gather, so where do you

find your next young farmer? Maybe was miles away, or you wouldn't even come across them unless they all went to a conference.”

Effective public relations strategies. Participants were then asked about the public relations strategies they develop to communicate agricultural issues effectively to new and beginning farmers. Participant A states their strategies are broad because it's difficult to determine a coherent strategy in today's agricultural climate. However, they believe that the key to a good program is engaging all stakeholders, across multiple channels of communication, in the larger conversation about agriculture. “For years we let other groups tell the story about agriculture, and now we're telling the story of agriculture,” they explain. “Authenticity makes good communications, and this is what social media has opened the door to,” they add.

Participant A believes that user-generated content is another effective strategy, because, “There's nothing more interesting to people than a day in the life on a farm.”

They add:

When a farmer goes out to a field with his iPhone and does a short video on how his crops are coming along or shows himself hooking up the milking machine to a dairy cow, that wakes people up to the fact that the industry has changed. It's coming right from the farmer. You see the care that goes into producing food on a daily basis when it comes from the producer. The most effective form of communications, I think, is utilizing the people who are in the industry.

Government relations is a new focus for Participant B, who admits their communications budget is not large enough to warrant any significant public relations strategies. This participant credits much of their event exposure to politician attendance.

Participant D doesn't use traditional media in any capacity. Instead, with their demographic of young farmers in mind, they focus all of their efforts online - with great success. They cite the cost-effective nature of digital communications as a benefit to targeting, delivering and modifying messaging to their target audiences. They test content using a "split A/B testing method" to observe and analyze audience member's responses, and from there, they move forward or modify messages.

Key messages. When asked about the key messages the agricultural industry is communicating to new and beginner farmers today, Participant A and Participant B both agree that it centres around job opportunities and diversity in careers. Participant A explains that because of the ageing farmer population, the industry needs people fast. Communicators want to show aspiring and new farmers that primary production isn't the only way to get into agriculture. Participant A adds, "There are many doors open and lots of opportunities. You can be a machinist; you can be an engineer; you can be a veterinarian." Participant B adds that these are the aspects of the industry that appeal to job searching millennials who could be the next generation of farmers in Canada.

Communications that highlight an innovative and cutting-edge industry are another priority in messaging according to Participant B. "Agriculture is the future. Feeding the world into 2030 is part of the United Nation's agenda. If you want to be at the cutting edge of science and technology - agriculture is it." they add.

Participant E sees a push in messaging targeting toward "newer demographics" like women in the role of farming, agriculture, science, technology, and new Canadians that may have come here and to see agriculture as a viable career option.

Gaps in the communication process. When asked if they saw any gaps in the communication process that prevented their target audiences from receiving their key messages, Participant A, Participant B and Participant C felt there were more barriers than gaps. Participant A and Participant C cite the negative portrayal of the agricultural industry by special interest groups as a significant barrier to communication. Participant C feels they spend more time reactively communicating in an attempt to correct misinformation than they do proactively communicating their key messages. They explain, “A lot of the general public’s information is sourced from unreliable, extremist sources. Therefore, having a balanced conversation about contentious issues like genetically modified organisms, animal welfare, pesticides, etc., can be challenging.”

As referenced earlier, Participant B sees breaking the barrier and getting their organization’s messages into the national conversation as their biggest challenge. They also cite a more practical barrier to reaching new communities comprised of new Canadians as another significant challenge. “New Canadians are one of our focuses,” Participant B states. They add, “I think that the biggest barrier is getting across to them. It’s hard to get new communities jazzed because getting a foot in there is hard. Especially with new Canadians in urban centres, because they don’t have a connection [to agriculture]”.

Participant D sees a gap in communication between the consumer and the agricultural industry. They see the industry as splintered.

They explain:

Let’s take beef, for example, there are all the different breeds, plus there are national beef and provincial beef organizations. Instead of them all collaborating to deliver the same message to the general public, they all try to do it on their own. I think that’s a really

difficult thing to overcome, because they're all trying to survive as organizations, and all feel like they have a lot to offer. But they're not seeing that collaboration and delivering as single message, because quite frankly, the public doesn't care how many beef organizations there are, and they don't even care who they are.

Participant D goes on to explain that there are so many things about agriculture that don't end up being a part of communications because collaboration is not a normal thing in the agricultural industry.

Similarly, Participant E states that historically, agriculture has not done a great job of promoting itself. They add, "We really haven't promoted the amazing amount of education that most farmers have. There are not many farmers working today that don't have one, probably two degrees. They have to be business managers and scientists and environmentalists".

Participant E adds that another significant gap is in Canada's education system. They explain that most kids go through the entire education system with little to no connection to agriculture, which was once a core element of the curriculum.

Results and Discussion

Though the subject of agriculture is increasing in importance in contemporary society due to the significant social and demographic changes, the topic of the role of public relations in attracting new farmers to Canada's agricultural landscape has generated scant amounts of research. Attention to this topic is scarce with Tracy Irani and David Doerfert being only two of a few scholars to empirically study public relations in the agricultural sector. These studies form an important and valuable contribution to our knowledge about agricultural communications and its varying roles.

The changing agricultural landscape

A review of the literature suggests that Canadian agriculture is currently characterized, in part, by an increasingly aging farming population and a decreasing number of farm operators under the age of 40 (Beaulieu, 2014, Sethuratnam & Smithers, 2014). Primary research is congruent with findings from Sethuratnam and Smithers (2014) that suggest this decline reflects the well documented high rates of rural to urban migration by young adults who no longer see (or who have been counselled by parents to abandon) a future in farming.

The literature indicates that while Canada's agricultural industry is currently seeing a period of great prosperity with advances in agricultural science occurring more rapidly than ever, these advances have moved beyond the general understanding of the public (Doerfert & Miller, 2006). Primary research is congruent with these findings, with participants noting both the technological advancement of modern agriculture and the decreasing agricultural literacy among today's youth as the most significant changes in recent years. These changes have necessitated public relations activities to keep the public informed of agriculture and to maintain their trust (Doerfert & Miller, 2006).

Primary research indicates that the agricultural industry understands that diversity breeds strength in all sectors, but that diversity is not reflected in the industry, in part, due to the tradition of family farm succession. Primary research suggests that there are two key areas currently being underserved by the agricultural industry's messaging: women, and new Canadians. These groups are cited as target audiences for the majority of communicators interviewed, many of whom agree the industry as a whole can do a better job of communicating with them. However, primary and secondary research agree that there are significant, practical barriers to reaching the new Canadian demographic.

Agricultural Communications

While the body of agricultural communications research is growing, significant gaps in research remain. Secondary research confirms agricultural communications play a crucial role in bridging the gap between farmers and prospective entrants. Through primary research it became clear that public relations is being used to attract new farmers to Canada's agricultural landscape in a variety of ways, most predominantly of which include: government relations, media relations, digital communications, social media strategies (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube), influencer marketing, and user-generated content.

Primary research finds that overall, key messages being targeted toward new and beginner farmers revolves predominantly around the diversity of career options. Primary production is no longer the only option for farmers, and it's not the only way into the agricultural industry. However, findings from Doerfert and Miller (2006) identify three areas in which agricultural communicators struggle in relation to agricultural messaging today. Primary research is congruent with two of three: (1) using key messages to maintain the public's trust, (2) effectively explaining the scientific and technological aspects of the field, so they are easily understood.

Primary research finds that social media platforms are the most effective tools for all participants. Social media provides the platform necessary to connect with consumers directly, and a channel to tell the true story of agriculture. User-generated content supplements the social media strategies of all participants. All of the communicators interviewed suggest online influencers do have more of an influence than traditional media on their target audiences. Participants are augmenting their public relations strategies by using credible, relevant

influencers in the forms of key opinion leaders, trusted experts, celebrities, politicians, and athletes.

The visual element of social media communications was cited as something the industry as a whole should adapt more readily. Many participants agree this style of communication will better serve the industry's key messages. The majority of communicators interviewed agree that effective public relations strategies in the agricultural industry often include engaging all stakeholders, across multiple channels of communication.

Barriers to Communications

Media power in Canada is shifting, and media environments are continually changing. In turn, agricultural organizations are adapting the ways they strategically communicate to new and prospective farmers. Primary and secondary research agree that consumers have less as a result of consolidation and convergence of news. There are fewer farm beat reporters, news outlets and, ultimately, trustworthy sources of unbiased information. All participants agree that generalists reporting on agriculture in Canada is a challenge for agricultural communicators who can no longer ensure that these journalists understand its history and context. The majority of participants struggle to determine how to effectively deal with unbalanced reporting and journalists with no agricultural background reporting on agriculture.

Though Canada's agricultural industry brings in billions of dollars for the country, primary research finds that agriculture news is often not news that leads in the national media. Primary research finds that farm organizations get significant, positive local and rural attention, but attention from national media happens rarely or not at all.

Primary research finds that the negative portrayal of the agricultural industry by special interest groups is another significant barrier to communication. Communicators often spend a

considerable amount of time and resources on reactive communications as opposed to proactive communications.

Implications of the Research

While the demographics of farmer age and background change and members of the population with a direct connection to agriculture continue to decline in numbers, the topic of public relations' role in attracting new farmers to Canada's agricultural landscape is an important area of investigation. The future of agriculture depends on communicators' ability to effectively convey the importance and value of agriculture to non-agricultural audiences (Irani & Doerfert, 2013).

While the body of agricultural communications research is growing, significant gaps in research remain. Over the last two decades, researchers note that the communication needs, wants and expectations of the agricultural industry are changing rapidly (Doerfert & Miller, 2006). Secondary research confirms agricultural communications play a crucial role in bridging the gap between farmers and prospective entrants. What this literature fails to address are the methods by which communicators bridge these gaps.

As they relate to the field of public relations, the results of this study prove the importance of agricultural communicators to generate conversations, tell the story of agriculture, build relationships and increase awareness about the benefits and opportunities of a career in agriculture.

The agricultural industry may be well served by further exploration and empirical research in the following areas: the impact on entertainment media on the public's perceptions of agriculture; the effect of new farmers on the role of intergenerational farm succession; the role of government programs or agricultural policy on succession decisions in Canada; and the ways in

which new farmers acquire communication and marketing materials used to gain access to suitable markets, capital, land tenure, hands-on training, and education that are necessary to develop and sustain food and farming activities. Lundy, Ruth and Park (2007) suggest that a new model for reaching youth, who increasingly rely on entertainment media more than traditional news media, is necessary.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As Hamilton (2011) points out, the opportunity to focus the nation's attention on the needs of a new generation of farmers and the role they can play in the future of local and regional food systems presents an important opportunity for policymakers and public officials. Hamilton (2011) also points out that the people interested in food and farming come from all backgrounds, but there are segments of the population that present special opportunities and challenges.

To satisfy the rapidly changing communications-related needs of the agricultural industry and the agricultural communications profession, the discipline must continue to examine the factors that can influence the future direction of the profession (Doerfert & Miller, 2006). Much of the research concerning the agricultural communications field has been completed in Europe and the United States. Research findings have not included much literature explicitly addressing Canadian agricultural communications.

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Appendix I

Interview Questions and Transcripts: Agricultural Communications Professionals

Author note: *Identifying names, organizations and campaigns have been omitted to protect each participant's privacy.*

Question One. How long have you worked with the agricultural industry?

Participant A: I've been with [this organization] five years. Going on six in July.

Participant B: I came to [this organization] in April 2017 and that's pretty much my first foray into that.

Participant C: I have been in my current full-time position for four months. Prior to my full-time role, I was employed part-time for four years while completing my undergraduate and graduate degree. In addition, my master's research involved working directly with dairy producers and feed companies.

Participant D: About 34 years.

Participant E: Ten years.

Question Two. What are your top three job responsibilities?

Participant A: First of all, I'm a strategist for media relations. I plan the news releases and reports we'll be putting out and also reactively field media calls and connect reporters and journalists to our various spokespeople who are the content experts on agriculture. So that's number one.

Second, I support reputation management, issues management and crisis communications. So, whenever the issue that threatens the reputation of an organization that's where I play a part. And that's pretty much all reactive communications. So, what we do in support of that is develop some key messages and media lines in anticipation that an issue emerges in the media - nine times out of 10 it won't - but you always want to be ready for those type of issues when they arise. Being with an organization that lends money to agriculture, sometimes you'll be in situations where you know there's a person who can't pay and we have to take action. That's where sometimes the issues of reputation emerge. So that's the two areas.

The third area would be kind of supporting government relations and also needing to respond to MP questions and provide key messages and try to frame the issue for anything in support of the government, because we're a federal crown corporation.

Participant B: I am overseeing the communications department of [this organization], which means taking care of our public facing issues and programs. So, I am responsible for managing that department; publications digital side; and media relations and public relations.

Participant C: Plan events with experiential learning opportunities in agriculture, food, communities and environment for high school classes on the University Campus (often specifically for Specialist High Skills Major program). Attend external events (i.e. Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, Career fairs, University fairs, teach conferences etc.) to promote our academic programs and/or learning opportunities and resources. Promote [this college] through social media and networking events. Priorities include: Increase awareness of all academic programs offered by [this college] at the diploma and degree level Improve understanding of career paths in agriculture and related industries (i.e. environment, animal science, plant science, food science, landscape architecture etc.). Provide support to teachers and guidance counsellors to integrate material on food, agriculture, communities, and environment in their classrooms.

Participant D: First, I am the executive director of an organization that supports young farmers. I manage that organization. I'm also the head of a youth program for agriculture kids ages three to 21, and I'm the president of that organization. So, I would say mostly leadership, management and program delivery.

Participant E: I lead a team of public relations professionals to provide PR strategy and support for our clients. I develop PR strategies and implement them for our clients, and conduct, I would say, agricultural advocacy and awareness PR.

Question Three. Can you explain any initiatives offered through your workplace that are designed to assist a wide range of individuals who are aspiring, planning, and/or starting to farm?

Participant A: We have some loan programs specifically designed for young farmers and young entrepreneurs. These are people forty years-old and under. Both are designed to help people reach into either farming or an entrepreneurial role in the agricultural industry, which could be retail, manufacturing, processing or manufacturing. We target those subsets of people who are young and don't have access to the capital it takes to get started or established in the industry.

Another product that we put out is a transition loan that helps people who are exiting the industry pass on to the next generation of farmer. It's called a transition loan and it targets people who are leaving the industry, or essentially retiring. Those are the products that are very specific to the demographics of farming. Those who are entering the industry and those who are exiting.

Participant B: Well as you know we've been around 105 years right now and our bread and butter really is in the agricultural rural areas of Canada. [This organization] used to be a lot larger than it is now. And that's just due to people migrating out of the rural areas and going into the urban areas. So those population centers have dropped but we have been on the rise lately. Part of the reason is getting back to focusing on getting kids and youths, age ranges from 6 to 25, in our program. And we try and get those kids back involved and to learn about agriculture food and a lot more in the hopes that one day maybe as they grow up they can find themselves back into the, not just, farming but into the global agriculture business. It is a large employer in Canada. One of the largest employers in Canada is getting people to realize that you don't have to get on a tractor and go plough the fields or deal with the cows. You could actually go out and get a job in the urban centers and be part of the agriculture process in that way.

So, a lot of what we do is so so we have projects you know the kids join these clubs and they can do beef projects they can do goat projects. They can also learn about sustainable farming and you know global agriculture in that way so it's really a variety. I can talk for hours about the types of programs we have and how it reconnects our youth to agriculture and farming and to get them into a small engine repair. We had one kid who just won a scholarship who converted his diesel engine to biofuels.

This is a really good one, but it's called careers on the grow. It's focused on leader or our older youth members. So, it can connect them to volunteer opportunities in the industries, it can connect them to mentors. And that's really a great way of finding them and getting them reconnected agriculture if they've lost their way and gone to urban centers and find jobs aren't there. They can go back to [website name] and find those opportunities. Once they leave school, this platform is out there to give them the volunteer experience, internship experience, and what-not.

Participant C: N/A

Participant D: How about I give you a bit about what [this organization] does and why we started in the first place. Because I had, and my children had all gone through our youth program for ages three to 21, we recognized that once they reached age 21 there wasn't a lot of programming that was available for them - For young farmers. And we know that the young farmer situation is a little bit dire, and it's not just dire in Canada. It's all over the world. So we created content, and learning opportunities and so forth so that a young farmer had some place to start.

What was happening in the industry at the time, which is maybe not as crucial now, but it certainly was when we first got started back in 2008, was that there was a whole bunch of parents who said, "don't get in to farming. It's not viable and you're not going to make a living. And we don't want you struggling like we do every single day." And when we met with young farmers, people who loved the farm, even though people told them not to get into farming you could see that was an internal conflict for them because they loved the farm and they loved the lifestyle. They didn't want to be told not to be there, but they couldn't see a way to do it any other way.

So, we did a survey, we did a lot of talking to a lot of young farmers, ages probably 20 to 35, and the one thing they identified with was that they didn't want to hear that negativity. They wanted to be encouraged, they wanted optimism and they wanted to have a feeling of pride in the agriculture industry. When we created [this organization] we created it with two things in mind: To create that feeling of optimism and pride in the industry and being a part of that, and to provide some really basic learning tools in areas that might make a difference for them. The areas we identified were succession planning and financial management. That was beyond our scope.

There are a lot of courses in Canada and all kinds of learning opportunities to help with business, and farming's a business. So, it seemed ridiculous to duplicate that. But maybe we could highlight some of those industries or do some interviews with them. Something to attract young

farmers and let them know what kinds of learning opportunities were already out there. There was an area that wasn't covered and that was simple learnings, things like how to set up a grazing fence. We created what we called the Fast Farmer and it was really just really quick videos that explained how to tie a knot in a fence, or how to set up the fence. Things like that. I don't remember how many were in the series but to this day they are still are most popular videos that get watched all over the world.

What we hit on was that this feeling of pride was way bigger than people realized. So we created videos that helped create those kinds of feelings for them. We really hit on the idea that it's possible and there are ways to get the help you need.

Participant E: Yes, so probably several different ones. So, one would be an initiative called Workhorse, which you can find online. So, we branded that, came up with the name on behalf of a client, and it's entirely aimed at finding skilled and manual talent to work in agriculture all around the world.

Question Four. What is the most significant change the Canadian agriculture industry has experienced over your time with the industry?

Participant A: What I have seen is that it's a very vibrant and robust industry as opposed to several years back in the 1980s when all you heard about was doom and gloom and people on the verge of bankruptcy. Today, farming is very much a medium to large business and it requires a lot of cash. It's very capital-intense. It takes a lot of money to get in and for the last several years it's been quite stable. Commodity prices have been relatively high, and productivity has increased significantly. If you compare the amount of food that you're able to produce per acre of land now and in the 1980s it's completely different. Farming is a very modern image. The old image of the red barn on the prairies is kind of outdated. Now it's very modern and you see a lot of technology and innovation. So, what we're seeing is a boom and bust cycle because there's a lot of business savvy out there and people understand we've got a dynamic economy that's constantly changing. Foreign markets are also constantly changing and we're much more prepared than we were in the past.

Participant B: N/A

Participant C: Technological and automation advances. Modern agriculture is striving to improve precision, decrease labor and increase efficiency. I work predominantly with youth; therefore, this response will reflect that. High school aged youth, especially urban youth, are increase less informed or misinformed on topics related to food and agriculture. Therefore, unless they have had direct involvement with the industry (i.e. farming background) their "agricultural literacy" and interest in food and agriculture is lacking.

Participant D: I think for the first time, the industry itself in the time that we've been in the industry, has gone from a lifestyle, intergenerational, niche-generational business that was passed down from family to family, or father to son, or father to daughter, whichever it was, but it's gone from that to being much more ... you need more technology. We need more ... they're larger farms, so management skills and employee supervision, things like that are all new skills that

people had to learn along the way, whereas it just used to be the family farm used to be just the family farm. Even though they are still family farms, they're much more complex businesses now than they were back then, so we've noticed that the other thing is ... I think for the first time in history, we actually have two generations of individual, maybe even three, that have different ways of communicating, different ways of learning and finding the information that they need.

We have a whole generation that's still looking at fliers and magazines and newspapers and radios and that sort of thing, and then look at the other generation that is completely connected by social media, and videos and always their phone in their hand so that they can check up on what they need. When you as an industry are trying to send out information and provide resources, you have to be aware of that, because you're not going to hit ... one method of communication, or even two methods of communication is not good enough to reach the entire industry.

Participant E: Oh, wow. I would say the consumer awareness and consumer demands around food have completely changed the industry.

Question Five. How have you adapted to these changes, professionally?

Participant A: We look at the new narrative and professionally we are kind of breaking the stereotype of the farm practices. Now we've got a campaign called that's also an industry driven initiative to kind of break the narrative of gloom and doom and show the real face of agriculture today. It's young, vibrant and modern. We also make sure people speak positively about agriculture. We also try to connect those who produce the food with those who consume it. So, there's a little bit more effort to create understanding among the consumer on how their food is produced. So many people in this day and age are so far removed from where their food is produced and they have very little knowledge about how it's produced.

It's becoming a situation where they're very susceptible to groups that want to tell a different narrative of agriculture. That it's industrial, very commercial, and not caring about what the consumer buys. It's very different. We still have farmers who want the consumer to know how their food is produced and that is with care and health and safety in mind. We're more targeting consumers and making sure they have an understanding of how food is produced in Canada. And there are a variety of ways.

Participant B: N/A

Participant C: Yes. The [college name] Liaison Program has shifted a lot of our messaging to career opportunities and career in agriculture that are less obvious. For example, if a student is interested in working with animals often their perception is that the only option is to be a veterinarian, we host events where prospective students can interact with current students, alumni and faculty in our animal focused programs to broaden their understanding of the career paths outside of veterinary medicine (i.e. animal nutritionist, geneticists, reproductive technologist). We have also tried to make as much interactive learning opportunities as we can to foster interest in food and agriculture.

Participant D: When we started out, it was an all-encompassing organization, and now what we decided was we needed to fill the gap towards the younger generation. We adapted the way we presented our information, and to be quite frank, that was an ongoing process, because in our foundation was the majority of the people that were working in it were in that generation we were trying to serve, which is about 30 and under, 35 and under. I was the only one that wasn't. What I saw as a way of reaching them, I soon learned that I needed to listen to the 35-and-unders, because you listen and you observe what's happening, you can soon learn a different way of approach, and that's what happened, is they did what they knew. Most of us had farmed as well, that were part of the organization, and so they knew how they were accessing the information they needed. They knew how they were communicating. We just adapted our organization's methods of communication and methods of delivery to meet what they knew was going to work.

Participant E: It's been, I would say arguably the biggest change in communications approach for the entire agricultural. That the entire approach has changed because ten, twelve, twenty, thirty, forty years ago, no one in agriculture had to speak to consumers.

Farmers grew stuff, raised it, delivered it to a producer in the middle, a distributor, and delivered to the consumer. That's completely upside-down now. Everyone wants to know the farmer. They want to know who raised the chicken, they want to know the story about it, where it came from. Everyone wants to know how, where, when, why and everything about that story. Whereas previously, farmers had no obligation whatsoever to do that.

Question Six. The demographics in terms of farmer background and farmer age in Canadian agriculture are changing. How does this change the way you develop communication plans or programs?

Participant A: Right now, we recognize that diversity breeds strength in the all sectors. I think we're not as diverse as we'd like to be, so we're looking at loans or encouraging people who are interested in agriculture to join the industry. Show them that there are so many careers related to agriculture that aren't just production but also the agri-food sector. We're targeting, for example, women in agriculture. People who want to take a business role, or in the sciences, engineering, manufacturing, you name it! I think most people think agriculture as the primary sector where people are simply farming, whereas there are a wide array of careers out there for people. That's where diversity comes in to play. Right now, we're only beginning to venture in to that area of promoting diversity.

I think what traditionally has happened is those who settle the land naturally pass on the land to their sons and daughters, so you don't get any change. Canadian society is bringing in a lot of diversity right now and that's not quite reflected in our industry and I think we can do a better job promoting that.

Participant B: We're trying to reach out and get people aware of [this organization] and what we do. A lot of the problems that we face are based on trying to get a new generation to understand what we do and that's often a problem with farming as well. You know you have an older aging generation who knows about farming and agriculture are and trying to get this new

generation aware of what [this organization] does and how they can get involved at that level and then maybe as they grow they grow into that farming background. So, we're definitely trying to get those younger audiences while still trying to appeal to our base of volunteers that have been around forever.

We're a volunteer-based organization with 7700 volunteers across Canada who help us deal with these youth groups and try to teach them to learn to do by doing. That's our tagline. I feel that our biggest challenge is to get a new generation of kids aware of who we are what we do and the value behind it. And so, we're trying to gear our efforts towards that. Get more digital you know get a little more grassroots organized and hit them that way rather than with over-the-head messaging, which they see through, nowadays. So that's the challenge the farming community has as well, to get them to understand that because it's really an interesting and impactful thing because you've got to feed yourself and the rest of the world is having this problem too. The big conversation right now is how to get people back into farming.

Participant C: N/A

Participant D: Right, so that's how it was. We used the newer tools, and quite frankly, I think we need to lead the way in some ways, because we tried to work with organizations that were agriculturally based, so some of the egg farmers and beef organization and so forth, and tried to support them to create content that was going to reach the people they were trying to reach because we were listening to a whole lot of, "old farmers are dying. We don't have enough young farmers, and our older ones are dying off and not a part of the farm anywhere. We have no young people joining the boards, and everything's falling apart." We tried to work with them to create new content and content that was more applicable to the younger group that they believed they wanted to target. However, we discovered we were just a little bit ahead of our time and that they were not quite ready for it.

While they are now ready for it, the agricultural industry is behind, and they're quite a bit behind on how to use the new kind of technology to attract the people that they're trying to serve, or the people that they would want to attract into the industry. As organizations, they're just now starting to say, "Oh, we should probably pay attention to this," whereas before, they were not, and it was a struggle. I have to tell you that because our group was all 35 and under, with the exception of me, I think those established organizations felt like they weren't part of the real world. They didn't have an understanding, and they almost dismissed it. I think as an example, like I said, on our YouTube page, we have thousands and thousands and thousands of views on many of our videos, and we are now getting organizations, some of the large organizations, asking us to help them create that content for them, which is five years behind when we started, or more. 2008 is when we started, so it's been 10 years since we started.

Participant E: Yeah. That would be, I think, just be advent of digital and digital communications. So, we know that that next generation of farmers and producers are much more socially conscious. It's not even a question for them and how they find, source, and research stuff. Whether it's buying a new piece of equipment or sourcing products for the farm, they spend a lot more time doing their own research and googling and comparing and stuff before they make a decision.

It equates, honestly, to how we book a trip now, right. Like, we go on and check our TripAdvisor and we check twenty-seven different reviews from peers, and then we do an aggregate. Right along, you're going to this holiday Inn because it looks like the best location, the best price, and that's exactly what's happening with farming as well. It's gone to that digital conversation.

Question Seven. What opportunities does social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat) present for communicators and/or marketing professionals working with the agriculture industry in Canada?

Participant A: It's huge. Until five years ago we didn't have a Facebook account or a Twitter account and over time we used those social mediums to build up a following and to encourage other farm organizations to also utilize the tool of reaching out to the public. These are very effective tools in that we're able to connect or tell the true story of agriculture to connect to consumers. And also, no longer is it the case where agriculture just sits back and doesn't have a voice. Now the industry does have a voice and a channel to tell their story. Among the others who are trying to tell it for them.

So I think it's you know our culture to take control over their own narrative and tell what's really happening on the farm. So yeah, it's a huge opportunity through social media. I don't run the social media operations, but we're side by side working effectively. For example, for the last two years we've run what's called [event name]. And this year it was February 13th. Our social media following for that day, for most of the day we trended in most of top five in Canada for any issue. So we're able to use social effectively, leverage other voices in the industry and tell the story of agriculture. It's been very successful.

Participant B: It's one of our biggest tools that we have to reach an audience. The traditional ways don't really function anymore to reach the audiences, the youth, that we're hoping to engage into this world. So, you know a lot of our efforts are through social media you know the one of the biggest and rising areas for them is Instagram Stories. Using all those story posts to get people involved that way. That's a new new way to tell stories rather than sending advertisements to papers and putting out radio advertisements. Those are great and they work, but you have to think differently nowadays to reach this audience.

We have a very engaged audience. Rural communities and farming communities are super engaged online. They read and they're online all the time and they call you out on things. Very often there's podcasts that call me up all the time for this kind of thing and as a newbie to this, I've been shocked about the level of engagement from the 4-H community as a whole. The farming community in general is out there reading social media and stuff. It's important for us to constantly be updating that and to try to seem a little edgy and not to be stayed in our messaging. That's the biggest thing we can do is to constantly be putting stuff up on social media. Not just press releases. You have to stay engaged. Wendy's is a great example of how to engage, but we don't necessarily go to that level because we're a youth organization and a not-for-profit. But it's important to be engaged and meet people at their level. I think you do this by hiring the right people internally. We have a 22-year-old doing social media for us right now. So that's one of the best ways to do it - using social media in that way.

One of the biggest things I've been reading is about the visual element. Before there wasn't that visual element and I think a lot of farming organizations could use that communication style to get their messages across better.

Participant C: Social media is widely used by youth and young adults and can be an opportunity for information sharing. It can also be a networking tool between companies or new graduates.

Participant D: We use Twitter and Facebook a lot, Facebook particularly. In fact, we created in, I don't know which year it was, I'm gonna say 2013, we created an event where we were trying to have people in the agricultural industry identify what they do well in the industry. What we wanted was people on Earth Day, farmers, to put up a picture that gave a visual description of what farmers do and what kinds of things that they deal with on a day to day basis. We ended up, we started that in February, the promotion of it, and on April 22nd that year in 2013, we had over 26 countries around the world participate and we had thousands and thousands of pictures that were put up through Twitter and Facebook.

It was an incredible movement. We did it for three years, and then we slowed down because people, again, people that were behind the ball, started some new ones. I think we had the Andrew, whatever his name is, from Canada that did the 365 day one, and there was others that created opportunities through social media to start to show what farmers are dealing with on a daily sort of thing. We really did build a community that was quite large and quite active. To be frank, we got to a point where funding was difficult to keep a full-time staff, and so what's happened with this foundation, because again, the agricultural industry did not necessarily see the value at that time of that platform to connect with the public as well as themselves, internally. We ended up going back down to a volunteer role in it, and it still is a volunteer role, because you can't keep doing grants year after year after year. You got to find a way to be sustainable. It was difficult when you don't have an industry that, at the time, thought... they do now, but now all of our young people have ventured into their own businesses.

We've still got that going on. We've still got the teaching about how to use social media in agriculture, and how to promote and attract people, but they're doing it as their own businesses now, so they're getting hired by the organizations in that way.

Participant E: Yeah, I guess that's another area where I would say, it's in massive change and flux, kind of again, right. You're seeing all the stuff and data on Facebook. I think social has become just an automatic part of every piece of communications or campaign or client work that we do. It's not an extra thing that you had mentioned, right, like - oh, hey should we be doing social?

It's just an automatic, assumed part of communication, but I also think that we're entering a time where that is changing again. So, we can no longer assume just by Tweeting out stuff that farmers are going to get and see that information. Or, the consumers are - there's just been so much information pumped out by social and digital that we're now at a point as a communications company where we are really stopping and measuring and thinking and

analyzing data. Right, because it's way more important for us to reach the right five people than to have five-hundred likes.

Question Eight. What challenges does media relations (working with traditional journalists and mass media) present for communicators and/or marketing professionals working with the agriculture industry in Canada?

Participant A: Media has changed and evolved very quickly and the line between social and traditional media has blurred and become very unclear. For years you had clearer rules of engagement and traditional media would generally follow that. They would follow the structure of fair and balanced reporting. Often times, agriculture would have their own beat reporter and that's no longer the case. More and more newsrooms in Canada are being filled with generalists who are assigned to cover stories on a one-off basis. So, you don't have specialists in agriculture reporting on agriculture. You're someone who's parachuted in to cover this specific story related to agriculture and as a consequence, it becomes very challenging to ensure that that person understands the history and context of agriculture in Canada.

Then you get situations where you've got media that don't respect the rules of journalism that are coming at you with a specific perspective, a bias, or political agenda and they don't necessarily follow the rules of being fair and balanced like most journalists are. As a consequence, you get distorted reporting. You still have to deal with them, except that it becomes a bit more of a challenge when you don't understand if they're playing by the same rules as you are. You have bloggers, you have people who no agricultural background whatsoever reporting on agriculture and how do you deal with them? We still haven't figured it out.

Participant B: Even though it's part of our everyday lives and the importance of the billions of dollars it brings in for our country, it's not often news that leads. So, you often are met with that roadblock so a lot of what traction we get the media particularly is the rural and local media attention. We get a lot of that a lot of that is very positive. We have a great working relationship with people in those areas. But, it's a struggle to get other media like national media, to fully understand who we are, what we do and the importance of it. One of the most important things in the world is to get them to understand. So, it's often half that platform.

Luckily, we have that global summit. We did get a lot of - we had a story on national media, on CTV National News at night with one of our kids who partnered with the [organization] club in Ghana to teach them about dairy practices in Canada. We had the platform and to be able to announce it and be able to talk about us and we got on local CBC news, but often that doesn't happen even though we consider a lot of what we do important and it's a positive news story as it's a positive youth organization it's often hard to get that positive news out there. Usually it's the tail end of the story, if we're out there at all. So, it's usually just Glacier media publishing a lot of what we do. We have rural papers like Beef and Sheep magazines from the Atlantic Monthly. It's hard to get the big attention for our big programs.

Participant C: N/A

Participant D: Well, I think perception's everything. We believed for a long time that we needed to do something to hold up what the agricultural industry truly was, versus what the media was promoting, because media, the mass media and the traditional media, they delivered a story of the day. Their goal is not to deliver the story of the whole. Do you know what I mean? I don't know if you understand what I'm saying there. But anyway, it's the story of the day. The only way agriculture has an opportunity to change that perception is to tell the story, period. It's a challenge, because mass media wants to pick up on the sensationalism, and they want to pick up on the ... I'll give you an example. There's a video of a child who's eight years old or nine years old or something that goes and talks about ... and children, of course, are always big draws. It was this story of how she couldn't possibly eat animals and she's going on and on and on. That story got picked up by mass media. That video got all over the world.

People who don't even understand anything about the agricultural industry, but love to watch a child speak, were sharing it. Now, now you're up against that story and you haven't got your story out there. I think there's still a lot of work to be done in agriculture around those stories. I think for the most part, in the last 10 years since we started, that family farms are still seen as quite something people want to support. What you hear in people's speaking is that corporations are the problem. Well, many family farms are corporations. There's nobody telling the story and showing how animals are cared for. Always the bad apples get the ... because in any industry, there's people who don't do a good job of it, and agriculture's no different, and agriculture needs to acknowledge that publicly, as well as talk about the 98% that are doing a good job of what they do.

They don't want to ever acknowledge it, and you can't do that, because the reality is, there are some.

Participant E: I kind of was dealing with that this morning, an issue. It's that so - at the same time where mainstream media has completely changed and is in decline in terms of print, community newspapers, community news, and community media have been in massive flux.

Agriculture media is actually quite strong. There's a lot of loyalty there in terms of, you know, most of the farming and agricultural publications. But as you said, it's kind of the old crew, right? So, I'm watching people retire, and I spoke with the editor of The Western Producer, and he can barely hire someone to go work, even in Ottawa, to be the parliamentary affairs reporter for an agricultural publication. There's not a lot of people with that skill set or interest in covering a niche. Agriculture tends not to be an overly sexy topic, right?

So, it's one of those sectors that's a significant driver of the economy and there's a lot of action and innovation and technology going on, but you kind of have to come at it from the inside. So even for us, hiring people to work at AdFarm. Right, like you as an example, right. If you were to graduate from your program and you came to the rural sensitivity and even an awareness of these issues you're talking about in your thesis - You'd get an interview at AdFarm. We would want to talk to you, right?

The last ten years or so, until recently, everyone who works in PR or communications wanted to work in energy. It's growing fast. Whether it's renewables or oil and gas, right? Whereas these

days, the jobs in agricultural communications, so whether it's at an agency like us or working at Dow or John Deere, there are huge opportunities for people leaving school.

But not many people - like as an example, one of my young PR staff members graduated from Mount Royal University's PR program and she was the only graduate that year who actually said, oh I want to go work in agriculture. Well, she got a job. Right?

Question Nine. Do bloggers and other online influencers have more of an influence on your target audiences than traditional media?

Participant A: I think traditional media still carries credibility in the public. We were introduced to a trust barometer and due to what's happening in the United States, I think more people are gravitating back to traditional sources of news and journalism because it's so unclear as to what to believe or not. You go on social media and you can't determine what is well-sourced, informed or verified. What is fake? It's really tough for the public to sort that out. I think this is helping journalists in Canada regain credibility. You're seeing the pendulum swing back and traditional media still has a very powerful reach and still carries credibility.

Social media sometimes can feed into people's specific circles of interests in their own bubbles. It can feed into their own perspectives and people don't stray beyond those bubbles that they are comfortable with. They see a narrative that supports their existing views and only move to sources that reinforce those views. People now are saying "ok, let's stray from these bubbles and see how traditional media is covering this".

Participant B: We're trying to promote that sort of thing because if you look at our club, there are a lot of members out there. I call them the [organization name] army. We're finding a lot of people who are now influencers as you say - CEOs and sports figures who were members and we're trying to re-engage those people to be able to get them involved in the community. Then eventually, as our promoters and our champions who talk about what we can do for families, kids, youth and communities. It's all about building those communities. So, we're trying to get those kinds of people involved and those are the shining samples of people who have been in the program and who have gone on to make something of themselves. That's how I see my my communications efforts paying off in the end. It's to do those sorts of connections that make those sorts of connections with people that they can basically do the work for you.

Participant C: Yes. Online influencers seem to be the largest source of information for youth opposed to traditional media. We use our experts in respective fields as often as possible. Utilizing faculty, technicians, and graduate students can be really effective at engaging high school students and disseminating the correct information. Unfortunately, it is easier to communicate with audiences that are already interested in agricultural issues. Reaching a larger audience is a constant challenge.

Participant D: Yes! What happens is the bloggers develop a relationship. Even the stories that we created, we created them with the intent of having people feel like they were connected to it, and that's, I think, what bloggers do. They're telling the story and they're saying the things that many of them wish they could say or wish they could. They don't feel like they're brave enough to go on social media themselves or in the traditional media, so they support the individual who

they develop an online relationship with, basically, and who shares their story. Journalists are seen, which is probably not fair, but they're just seen as looking for the story, looking for something that's going to attract, where bloggers are seen as on the journey and experiencing it right beside you, and I think that's the difference between them.

Participant E: I would say yeah, totally. Agriculture and food is one of those areas where influencers and non-traditional media influencers have really grown and created a great deal of influence.

Question Ten. What are some of your goals and objectives when you develop communication plans and programs targeted to new and beginning farmers?

Participant A: I think we're still in the process of that. We're trying to portray that the agriculture industry is modern and really needs business savvy people. We need people who are blank and have a broad outlook. We need highly educated people as well. So that influences our approach to communications. Wherever we can we describe agriculture as a dynamic and growing industry in Canada. However, that narrative is only fairly recent. In the last five years or so. Prior to that it was simply looking at it as a profession that people could get in to and just make a living. But now we're saying its full of opportunities and young people are who we need to keep the sector strong and vibrant.

Participant B: One of our youth members was 10 and he had known nothing about farming until this. His father was a carpenter and his mother was a teacher. He just won our Leads Scholarship, it's our most prestigious scholarship. We offer twenty thousand dollars for his schooling in University. The reason he won was that he found out about farming through 4-H. He got involved in the program because he wanted to take care of a rabbit, so he got into a rabbit project. The rabbit project led him to do the sheep project which led him to develop an interest in farming. And at 14 went to an organization in Nova Scotia and they give him twenty-five thousand dollars to start his own farm at 14. So now at 14, he owns over 500 acres in Nova Scotia and has 600 sheep. Grows his own hay because Nova Scotia doesn't have any hay, so they had to import it all. And he employs his sister his mother and his father during peak seasons and he's 19 years old now.

Participant C: N/A

Participant D: Well, that changed over time. It started out, our goal was we were going to save the world and provide all the resources and learning that they needed, and soon realized that that's not possible, that what we were better off to do was to do almost like the bloggers do and let them know that we understood. We were one of them, and there was a way of telling their story or sharing the new information and the new stories that they needed to hear. What was the end of the question?

Our goal really was to connect, to build a community. We did a good job of that. We did build a community. We still have people tell us that it made a difference for them. If you think about it, the demographics at that time in Canada, and probably still are, I haven't checked the current demographics, but young farmers don't go to the coffee shops where the farmers all gather.

Where did you find your next young farmer? And it maybe was miles and miles away, or you wouldn't even come across them unless they all went to a conference or something. I think we were able to develop an online community where people could share in the way that they now communicate. Our goal was to ensure that that opportunity was there for them, and they could see themselves, or at least share their stories with each other, that they had some similarities and some differences that they could share. It worked. The community was built.

Even though we're in a volunteer capacity right now, if we throw a video up on Facebook, because last year we did some safety videos, they'll get thousands and thousands of shares and views sometimes up in the quarter of a million. The community's still there, it's just not as active every day as we were doing when we had full time staff.

Participant E: Well, it's tough one, and I think the answer is that everyone's really grappling with that because farming is not - it's not like opening a restaurant or starting another type of business, so unless people have the succession of the family business or a family in that, right.

The chances of entering farming at least at a production scale is pretty difficult. I don't know if I know any as an example. Anybody that went to school in agricultural or Ag-sciences, or animal health without any kind of background or anything like this, start on the farms.

Question Eleven. What public relations strategies do you develop to communicate agricultural issues effectively to new and beginning farmers? Based on program evaluation and audience response, please provide an example of an effective and/or ineffective strategy from your perspective.

Participant A: Most of our communications center around our products that we offer. Loan products. But we also have agriculture software. We're trying to get agriculture software into businesses by reaching out to professionals who can use this for succession planning and business planning. It takes a more broad approach. Our strategies are broad. But they are all meant to reassure young people that there are the tools and the people there to support them. That's what we lean toward. These kids are not alone when they enter the industry. It's difficult to find a coherent strategy in agriculture because we've only just arrived where we are today.

I think that big even day was an effective strategy because we tapped into so many different channels of communication. We used social media, traditional media, we had an advertising campaign. We tapped into various industry stakeholders to carry the message. Whenever you get everyone in the industry in the same direction basically telling the same narrative, I think it turns out to be a successful strategy. You managed to engage consumers in the conversation about agriculture. And that's the first step to a good program is being able to engage consumers in the conversation about agriculture. For years we let other groups tell the story about agriculture and now we're telling the story of agriculture. You'll hear from the most effective communicators and also those people who do the farming. They the most trusted among consumers so finally we're connecting the farmers with the consumers. And that's the most effective strategy. We had a lot of engagement by the general public and a lot of focus on this industry.

There's nothing more interesting to people than a day in the life on a farm. When a farmer goes out to a field with his iPhone and does a short video on how his crops are coming along, or shows himself hooking up the milking machine to a dairy cow, that wakes people up to the fact that the industry has changed. It's coming right from the farmer. You see the care that goes into producing food on a daily basis when it comes from the producer. The most effective form of communications, I think, is utilizing the people who are in the industry. Authenticity makes good communications, and this is what social media has opened the door to.

Participant B: We just started with government relations. We have a government relations department and the director does a fantastic job of engaging government officials, ministers, MPs in the programs that we do.

Catherine McKenna comes out to some of our events, and the minister of science comes out to a lot of our events. So, we gain a lot of exposure that way and we get a lot of people going, "oh 4-H, I didn't realize you guys are still a thing and we're still around. Wow, I can't believe you are still out there". So, we have that sort of public relations strategy that really pays benefits for us with our government relations and how we promote our programs and things like that. I can't really speak to any big huge public relations strategy because we're really small and funding is small for that sort of thing.

Participant C: N/A

Participant D: Really honestly, all of our work is online. We don't use traditional media at all, because that's where the community was created, was online, and it was created with that demographic in mind. We don't use any other forms of ... We don't send out news releases and we don't use traditional media in any way, shape or form. It's not to say that some of the young farmers aren't using it, but we're not. Online is our only strategy. We're very good at it. In fact, like I said when I was talking about the young people that created businesses, that is the one area that as a business one of our girls created, that she can't keep up to, because everybody's asking now, in the agricultural industry, either for support, they hire her to support them, or she runs workshops to help them learn how to do it themselves.

As for ineffective strategies, we're always testing. We tested by trying a new way of communicating or a new concept or... Sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. The one nice thing about online is that it's relatively inexpensive to test. You don't have to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars or even thousands of dollars in magazine ads or newspaper articles to try and reach a large number of people. In our case, throughout Canada, you don't have to spend those thousands of dollars. You can test something for nine dollars. You can reach a large audience. We often do a lot of testing on content that we think might be something that is useful. We'll test, we'll do what we call a split AB testing, so we'll try one method of content one way, and then we'll do a B side, and then we just see. We watch our audience and our members on social media to see how they respond. Then that's how we know what to move forward with. We've got quite a few strategies that we use to test before we even actually, lot of times, go out and use them.

We'll just quickly test. Actually, [name] who does most of it, created an online agricultural business that way by split AB testing, and discovered what people were gonna respond to online as far as purchasing a product, which was a children's agricultural toy. She just created an amazing business out of it.

Participant E: Yeah, I think that stuff all really comes through groups like Farm Credit Canada, Agriculture Canada, the Provincial Agriculture. We've worked with some of them. I think it's just awareness of educational tools and influences that are out there to support. So as an example, a group like ATB, they host entrepreneurial workshops, support for - and it's kind of across both worlds, right. They work with chefs and craft brewers and people entering that business, but then they connect them to farmers and young farmers entering the business, and they support them through working with them on marketing and outreach?

So, what's successful with that? I think it's the mentoring and networking connections that groups would provide. You have people entering the industry. It's overwhelming to understand the complexity of it and the regulatory side for whether it's crop production, or the use of technologies, and really and truly the debt and the capital outright is humongous.

So, I didn't include the other important thing to mention. It's - they talk about succession, right. On farms, the days of the parents or grandparents being able to actually afford passing on the entire operation, like here's the keys, we'll just sit on the porch are over. Everybody's living longer, and the cost of living is huge so, mom and dad actually need the kids to figure out a way that there's an actual transfer of dollars, right.

Question Twelve. What are the key messages the agriculture industry is communicating to new and beginner farmers today?

Participant A: It's mainly about careers. And showing that there is diversity in the careers. You don't need to be involved in primary production to be a farmer. You can be a machinist, you can be an engineer, you can be a veterinarian. We want to show people that primary production isn't the only way to get into agriculture. There are many doors open and lots of opportunity. This industry more than a lot of other industries needs people and they need people fast. We want to attract the best people. You don't have to be on the farm to someday be involved. You don't have to have that background.

Participant B: The biggest messages I've heard since I joined is that we're here, it's innovative, there are jobs and it's a positive organization that's growing. The importance of agriculture to Canada is huge. I think that's one of the biggest things that will appeal to millennials who often complain that there's no jobs out there, or they can't get the experience they need. In agriculture, the majority of people who are working right now are 45 and older, so they're going to be retiring soon and the opportunities are there. It's to present that opportunity and to show the diversity of agriculture that it's not just, as I said before, sitting on a tractor. It's people in labs working at Behr. It's people with some of our partners like [organization name] who do really crazy things in science and technology and it's not just plowing a field. You can do a variety of things and even if you are a farmer, you need to know, and you need to be educated and involved in your community.

I think is the biggest plus-side that we have going for us in this community is to get people to say, "This is not just boring stuff this is really cutting edge interesting stuff". If you want to be at the cutting edge of science and technology you know the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and things like that, agriculture is it. Agriculture is the future. Feeding the world into 2030 is part of the UN agenda. Part of our goals and what we teach kids and it's part of Canada's goals and those are things that to me are interesting and that we're trying to get across to the youth and the twenty five thousand and growing youth in our community. I think that's the biggest seller to me is that you know the opportunities are there. We'll show you how to get it. We'll give you that opportunity.

Participant C: N/A

Participant D: I'm not sure I'm the right person to ask that question to, but I will ... because I'm not at the age, and I'm not always aware of all of the messages that are available, but the ones that I do know, there's a big push, particularly in the financial industry, around succession planning and getting them set up so that succession planning works for them, and around sustainability, on not just financial sustainability, but on environmental, social, all those sort of things. It's a big push, and that is the message that lots of them are hearing. I think it also causes a little bit of angst, because farming is difficult to get into financially. And secondly, sustainability, particularly environmental sustainability, some people have really embraced it, and others, all they've ever known is the way they've done it. It's a new way of looking at it. I think the messages around sustainability is really what everybody's focused on right now.

Participant E: I think it goes back to the interest, and consumer interest in food is at an all-time high, so it's kind of like we say, right, good news, bad news. Bad news is everyone wants to know where food's coming from and every detail about it. Good news is everyone wants to know where their food's coming from. So, young farmers and progressive smart business people, farmers, have a real opportunity to step out and kind of be like new heroes, right, in their communities.

I was just at a restaurant last night where on the first page of the menu was every farmer that they deal with. So, it's communicating that in a whole new light, right. Whereas previously, agriculture is definitely passed on through the family, so it was like - alright, and the other thing that I should throw in that is the changing demographics. There's a lot of women, probably for the first generation, who are leading farm businesses and leading positions within agricultural companies whereas previously that has been a humongously male-dominated world, right. Like I've talked to farmers even recently who would say, oh, you know, I had three daughters, so the farm is done, right. We'll sell it when we move on. Whereas that attitude has completely changed.

So, in terms of marketing and communications and that message, I would actually say that two of the kind of newer demographics that are being targeted are new Canadians and women. Women in the role of farming, agriculture, science, technology, and new Canadians that may have come here and to see agriculture as a viable career option.

Question Thirteen. Do you see gaps in the communication process that prevent your target audiences from receiving an agricultural organization's key messaging? What are these gaps, if any?

Participant A: More barriers than gaps. I think sometimes special interest groups portray agriculture in a way that is not really the case. I don't see a lot of gaps per se. Just potential to expand in what we're doing right now. We can also always get better at what we're doing too.

Participant B: I think it's just what I said before - the media picking up on our story. That's one of the biggest things. You know we often have a hard time breaking that barrier and getting into the national conversation. I think it's the biggest challenge we have. We really speak well to our community - the people who are already part of it. It's just it's hard to break through that barrier of new communities.

New Canadians is one of our focuses. I have to say it's like new Canadians coming in urban centers to get people jazzed about agriculture who live in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary. I think that's the biggest barrier is getting across to them because you know we speak very well and our communities are involved. People in our programs love to speak about them. Any time you talk about them talk to them about agriculture they can talk your ear off. It's just hard to get new communities jazzed just because getting a foot in there is hard. And with new Canadians and urban centers because they don't really have a connection it. Some kid growing up in Mississauga, you know what's this club and why do I care about agriculture? So that's probably the biggest thing is to get schools involved teaching about food. And it's more and more that schools are doing that, and that will lead to more conversations about agriculture.

Participant C: A lot of the general public's information is sourced from unreliable sources or extremist on issues. Therefore, having a balanced conversation about contentious issues like GMOs, animal welfare, pesticides etcetera, can be challenging. Typically, general public is painting agriculture and food production with a negative brush, resulting in a lot of energy going into debunking myths and incorrect information instead of being able to talk about intended messaging. Anti-solicitation laws are a barrier to direct communication with teachers to advertise our offerings. Attracting students to our passive methods of communications (Twitter, website etc.) is difficult.

Participant D: Yeah, I honestly believe that the connection between a consumer and agriculture is a gap. I think that nobody has focused solely on that. Agriculture is, in my opinion, is so splintered that we have, even in the beef ... Let's take beef, for example, there's all the different breeds, plus there's Canada Beef, plus there's Provincial Beef organizations. Instead of them all collaborating to deliver the same message to the general public, they all try to do it on their own. I think that's a really difficult thing to overcome, because they're all trying to survive as organizations, and all feel like they have a lot to offer. But they're not seeing that collaboration and delivering as single message, because quite frankly, the public doesn't care how many beef organizations there are, and they don't even care who they are. Basically, what they care about is their food safe? Is it environmentally viable, those sorts of things? There's so many good things about agriculture that don't end up being a part of the messages that we deliver to the general public, because collaboration, it's not something that is a normal way of operating in agriculture.

Participant E: You know what, I think on that one I would say, I would default to the fact that the agriculture industry has typically not done a great job of promoting itself. And that goes back decades, and decades, and decades. Right, it's not a sexy career option. We really haven't promoted the amazing amount of education that most farmers have like, not many farmers working today that don't have one, probably two degrees. They have to be business managers and scientists and environmentalists, right.

So, I think that side, and then I think the other one is, the gap would be in our education system. So, most kids go through their entire education in Canada without having or having very, very little connection to agriculture, which is one of the most significant economic drivers in the country.

In the old days, I guess I would say that a core part of education was, whether it was through home economics or whatever, but there was always an agricultural component, and we've lost that in our education system. So we have people graduating school that literally know nothing about what's produced in their own country or the size and scope of the industry.

Appendix II

Sample Information Letter for Interview Participants



To: [\[participant email\]](#)
From: [\[author email\]](#)
Sent: Tuesday, March 13, 2018 at 9:49 a.m.
Subject: Bachelor of Public Relations Student Thesis: Invitation To Participate in An Examination of using public relations to attract new farmers to Canada's agricultural landscape.

Good morning [name],

My name is Adrienne Shaw, and I am a fourth-year Bachelor of Public Relations program student at Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning. I am currently conducting research as part of my final semester capstone thesis titled, How is public relations used to attract new farmers to Canada's agricultural landscape. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Lydia Boyko, Professor, School of Media Studies & Information Technology, Humber College. I am writing to request your participation in the interview.

The structure of Canada's agriculture landscape is undergoing significant changes characterized by an aging population and a reduced number of new farmers from both farm and non-farm backgrounds. This raises questions about the survival of agriculture and agribusiness in Canada. This study focuses on understanding the communication tools professionals are currently employing to attract new entrants into Canada's farming industries and how effective they are in reaching new entrants. Through empirical and non-empirical research, this research project aims to add a modest amount of information about Canada's new farmer demographics and psychographics to the field of agricultural communications, of which there is currently very little.

You were identified for participation on the basis of your position as [job title] at [organization name].

Understanding the demands and limitations on your time, the session will be 30 minutes in length, at the Lakeshore campus of Humber College, or at a location on your premises or by phone/email if more convenient for you. Handwritten notes will be taken; the discussion will also be audio recorded.

Only aggregate data will be reported and no participant will be identified or identifiable individually. The data (including audiotapes) will be destroyed three years after the study has been completed and the results have been published.

Subject to the student's/investigator's consent, this research project may be published in the Humber Library Repository - an open access website available to the public

(<https://library.humber.ca/collections>) – or in another publication, and/or presented at professional and/or industry conferences. If published/presented, participants' privacy will be protected by using pseudonyms or removing any identifying features.

Participants will have the option of reviewing transcripts to ensure clarity and to expand upon commentary if they wish to do so. Participants will be sent a summary of findings by email after the project has been completed and evaluated by the thesis supervisor/professor early May 2018.

No risks, harms or inconveniences are anticipated to involvement in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason, without any need of explanation or penalty of any kind. You are free to reply to any questions you want and to ignore any questions you would prefer not to answer.

There is no immediate financial compensation for providing input to this study. Your contribution will serve not only to bridge a large gap in the literature on the Canadian public relations profession but potentially, on a practical level, to enhance the preparation for and recognition of the practitioner's roles and responsibilities in a complex operating environment.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me (coordinates provided below) or Dr. Boyko directly: 3199 Lake Shore Blvd. W., L4000, Toronto, Ontario M8V 1K8; (tel) [416-675-6622](tel:416-675-6622) (ext. 79322); (email) lydia.boyko@humber.ca.

For information regarding your rights as a research participant or for clarification about the ethics approval, please contact the Humber Research Ethics Board (REB): Jasteena Dhillon, REB Chair, [416-675-6622](tel:416-675-6622) (ext. 4543), jasteena.dhillon@humber.ca.

Your time, consideration and insights are appreciated.

Adrienne Shaw

Student

Bachelor of Public Relations

School of Media Studies & Information Technology

Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning

[\[author email\]](#)

[\[author phone\]](#)

Appendix III

Sample Consent Form for Participants



Re: Bachelor of Public Relations Student Thesis: Invitation To Participate in An Examination of using public relations to attract new farmers to Canada’s agricultural landscape. Consent To Participate in an interview

I, [name of participant] have carefully read the information in the invitation letter for the project, An Examination of using public relations to attract new farmers to Canada’s agricultural landscape. emailed to me [date]. I understand that if I have additional questions about the project, I can contact Adrienne Shaw, researcher; 416-206-9590 or Dr. Lydia Boyko, supervisor: lydia.boyko@humber.ca; 416- 675-6622 (ext. 79322) at any time during the project.

I confirm that I do not require approval of my department/organization to participate in the study. I am participating as an individual based on my experience in the profession and am expressing personal views and not those of my organization.

I agree to being audio taped during the interview and understand that I will not be identified by name or identifiable in any way in the reported results.

I understand this project has been approved by the Humber Research Ethics Board (REB). If I have any questions about my rights as a research participant, I can contact Jasteena Dhillon, REB Chair, 416-675-6622 ext. 4543, jasteena.dhillon@humber.ca .

I understand that, subject to the student’s/investigator’s consent, this research project may be published in the Humber Library Repository - an open access website available to the public (<https://library.humber.ca/collections/>) – or in another publication, and/or presented at professional and/or industry conferences. If published/presented, participants’ privacy will be protected by using pseudonyms or removing any identifying features.

I also understand that I may decline or withdraw from participation at any time without negative consequences.

My signature below verifies I have received a copy of the information letter, and that I agree to participate in the research project as described in the information letter.

Participant’s Name (printed)

Participant’s Signature

Date

Appendix IV**Consent Form for Student Data Disposal****Bachelor of Public Relations Student Thesis: Data Disposal Consent**

I, Adrienne Shaw, agree to destroy the electronic data stored on my computer and/or separate hard drive when the thesis project, An Examination of using public relations to attract new farmers to Canada's agricultural landscape, has been completed and evaluated by my thesis supervisor, Dr. Lydia Boyko. I will have three years from the date of final approval of the project to destroy the data.

I agree to submit the USB memory file to Professor Boyko upon completion of the project.

This USB memory file must incorporate the following: the final thesis document in Word and PDF forms as submitted to the professor, original data from surveys if conducted, and original tapes and transcripts from interviews/focus groups if conducted.

Professor Boyko will keep the data file in a locked cabinet in L4000, Lakeshore campus, for three years, and then destroy the file.

My signature below confirms my agreement to the requirements as described in this consent form.

Investigator's Name (printed)

Investigator's Signature

Date