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The Importance of Trust and Transparency in Modern Agriculture

Truth and honesty, two key values many individuals possess and incorporate into their everyday lives. These values also apply to consumer and producer relationships in industries such as modern agriculture, as the honesty of being transparent builds trust. One main difference between traditional agriculture and modern agriculture is the integration of modern technology¹. This technology decreases the need for extensive labor, while also creating an abundance of new possibilities for farmers to connect with their consumers. The important industry of modern agriculture relies profoundly on transparency as it influences the public's perception, builds trust in a consumer and producer relationship and is now presented to the public in a variety of modern, accessible ways.

Canadians pride themselves in making their own choices regarding the food they purchase and consume, but in order for these decisions to be made they require proper education². More than ever, consumers are ethically aware in regards to the practices that take place within the agricultural industry³. Without sufficient education on these practices, the public creates their perception on the industry without fully comprehending the meaning behind why things are done the way they are⁴. A lack of understanding damages the industry by creating a false public perspective that results in less consumption. Without consumers being informed about the farming practices that take place, the truth and transparency expressed by farmers about their practices are ineffectual. Education creates transparency that helps play a key role in influencing the

public's perceptions of the agricultural industry as it helps consumers make informed decisions regarding agricultural goods. It is just as necessary for the consumer to be asking questions as it is for the producer to be supplying the answers in a truthful and honest manner.

Trust is an element found in all healthy relationships, especially those consisting of business practices. The value of trustworthiness is important in the agricultural industry and to the consumers as it assures the quality of goods produced and provides answers regarding agricultural practices⁵. A conference held in Saskatoon titled Farmers at the Table explored the relationship between consumers and farmers. In this event, held by Farm and Food Care Saskatchewan, three major concerns the public possesses regarding trust in agriculture were expressed; these were the use of genetically modified organisms, antibiotics and animal welfare⁶. The importance of consumers voicing their concerns is to have farmers respond and supply information about their farms and animal care to the public, which builds trust. Communication in this association of producer and consumer is what drives the trust in the relationship and is the key to sustaining transparency. Building this trust is the responsibility of the producer as they are the only ones to present it to their consumers, but there is also a responsibility on the consumer to have the motive to look and become educated on their own consumption. The truth in agriculture is vital to build transparency in the industry, but it is also very important for the truth to be presented to the public in accessible ways.

Transparency can be presented to the public in numerous ways such as through social media, the packaging of goods and genuine in-person interactions with farmers. Technological advancements in our society have not only positively impacted farmers on

the fields, but also off the fields through social media. In a click of a button farmers can share images and information about their farms, animals and crops. Media consumption is beneficial to both parties as it aids farmers by bringing in more customers, while also educating and exposing customers to the truth of farming⁷. Packaging and marketing are also tools for creating a transparent industry by providing information regarding where the food was grown or raised. The packaging of goods can give grocery-shopping consumers a small glimpse of the agricultural background of their foods moments before purchasing. A more traditional approach to communication is through public engagement of farms and building a farmer and consumer relationship. This interaction can take place at local farmer's markets and provides the consumer with a clear image of the people who produce the food they eat, while simultaneously allowing for an opportunity to ask questions at the source⁹.

The best way to improve the agricultural industry, transparency wise, is to further better the communication between farmer and consumer¹⁰. The continuation of farmers using social media to build a platform to reach more people would be beneficial to improving the transparency of the industry. While communication through social media is advantageous and should be used, a consumer having an in person interaction with a farmer creates a memorable, raw and authentic connection. Furthermore, the incorporation of more agricultural sciences in elementary and high school curricula will assist the youth in their consumerism and create a more agriculturally educated future generation¹¹. The more educated we are as a society on agriculture, the easier it is for information and truths to be absorbed from farmers. The right blend of virtual and direct

communication and incorporation of more agricultural sciences in curricula is what will ultimately lead the industry into betterment and advancement.

The transparency within the modern agricultural industry shapes and defines the future of not only the industry, but society as well. The public's perception is based on the knowledge they possess and what is offered to them. This information contributes to public perception of the industry and ultimately influences their behavior regarding agricultural purchases. Transparency establishes a bond between farmer and consumer that is glued together by trust. This trust reassures consumers are making the right decision when purchasing and consuming agricultural goods. Communication through a variety of different media tools, packaging and face-to-face interactions with farmers promotes more opportunities for truth to be displayed. Transparency does not exist without its two core fundamental values, truth and honesty, in the absence of these two imperative morals the transparency within the industry of modern agriculture would not exist either.

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