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The secret to effective canola research extension

Taryn Dickson[1]

[1] Canola Council of Canada, Winnipeg, Canada

Background:

Canada produced 18.2 million metric tonnes of canola in 2022 and contributed to nearly one third of the global canola production. A key contributor to the success of the canola industry in Canada has been the significant research investment and effective research extension to canola industry members.

Objective:

An investigation of the knowledge transfer mechanisms in the Canadian canola industry to inspire improvements and to stimulate new ideas, alternatives, and further advances.

Methods:

The effective communication of best management practices (BMPs) is a core initiative of the canola industry's strategic plan, which is set by the Canola Council of Canada (CCC). It emphasizes science-based evidence, such as results and conclusions from research projects, to generate, disseminate and drive the adoptions of canola production BMPs through various extension tools and communication vehicles (that appeal to a range of learning method preferences).

A 2022 survey reported that over a quarter of Canadian canola farmers use the CCC for the latest agronomic information. Another 2022 survey concluded the CCC was the dominant source of canola agronomy information for Canadian agronomists. This demonstrates both the success of the CCC extension efforts and the room for further improvements.

Results:

To maximize reach, the CCC utilizes several communication and extension methods across multiple platforms all year. Once canola production research is completed, websites such as the Canola Research Hub, post and share it. Project outcomes and findings are then used by the CCC to develop BMPs and then incorporate these BMPs into extension content. Content examples include slide decks, the Canola Encyclopedia webpages, the Canola Watch e-newsletter and website, and the quarterly print and digital Canola Digest magazines/ editions (that provincial canola grower organizations - Alberta Canola, SaskCanola and the Manitoba Canola Growers - partner on and share with their farmer membership).

The CCC's nine agronomy team members, who are located throughout the main Canadian canola-growing region, present slide decks (which feature the BMPs) at meetings, on webinars, and at conferences. These subsequently generate media interviews, which result in radio spots and print/online articles in well-read farmer newspapers.

Interactive tools that support the implementation of these BMPs by growers and agronomists (ex. insect scouting guides to ensure accurate insect identification and use of current economic thresholds) are then created by the CCC and widely shared.

For in-person opportunities, the CCC partners with grower organizations, government, and industry members on existing agricultural events (ex. field days, research site tours, tradeshows, etc.). The CCC also brings canola researchers, growers, and industry members together at the annual 'Canola Week' to evaluate the past growing season, share research findings and discuss industry priorities.

Conclusions:

The CCC's extension model of showcasing research, developing BMPs from the outcomes, building tools and resources that drive adoption, and then disseminating through internal communication vehicles and external networks has had some success in Canada. Further advances for both Canada and international canola growing regions can be generated from discussions and idea-sharing that this topic stimulates.