



Banff Pork Seminar
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News Feature

Mark Chambers: New talent key to a progressive pork industry

Banff Pork Seminar (BPS) 2017 chair, Mark Chambers opened this year's event with some personal memories and a personal challenge for the delegates attending to do more to sell their industry to attract new talent.

"The first Banff Pork Seminar I attended was 20 years ago," Chambers reminisced. "The reception was in the foyer of the Banff Center. They fit because there were about 240 delegates that year.

"Fast forward to today and look around you. There are nearly 650 delegates signed up to attend this year in this beautiful facility for what has become a premiere event for networking, knowledge gathering and teambuilding."

Thinking back to 1997 the industry has changed significantly, says Chambers. Costs to produce a pig have gone up dramatically, but revenue has not kept pace.

"The way we continually move forward is with research, innovation, genetic progress, improved management and above all, resilience. Our industry players, which include all of you in this room, are very innovative, resilient folks. It is events like this that bring the different components of our industry together to share knowledge throughout this Seminar week."

New talent critical

Chambers says as he looks around the room he sees a lot of familiar faces and some new ones.

"To me one striking concern is the lack of new ones," he says.

The production side of our industry is challenged to attract new talent, says Chambers, who has been an active player in industry personnel policy, training and recruitment. "We have the stigma of modern farming and a lot of new activist groups putting pressure on farming so there is a growing lack of trust on farming practices. All of us in this room, need to ensure we are focused and paying attention to attract new talent. Making sure we spin the positives of our industry to all possible new recruits.

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“We should not sell ourselves short and make sure each time we travel or meet someone we are blowing our industry’s trumpet and our own on what we do for the public today to ensure they are fed safe, affordable and nutritious food.

“I’m sure everyone in this room who employs labour will relate to this. And we do have a breakout session focused on labour so if you are attending this make sure you interact and have good discussions around this topic.”

Issues of the day

The theme for this year’s 46th seminar is “Innovative and sustainable solutions for an evolving industry.” It’s a very fitting theme, says Chambers. The industry has been recovering from serious threats from foreign animal disease such as PED. There is continual pressure from activist groups and growing pressure for increased meat consumption while maintaining natural resources. And there is growing recognition agriculture needs to change the conversation to connect with consumers’ emotion as they make food purchases, not battle with scientific data.

On the market side, the past three years have seen strong profitability but the question is will that continue? What will be the impact of increased packing capacity coming on stream in the US?

“We have top speakers to address all those issues and offer a wide range of practical advice that producers can take home and make improvements in their operations,” says Chambers.

Thanks for support

Chambers introduced and thanked his organizing committee for their efforts noting especially their employers who allow them to spend this time. He made a special effort to thank BPS sponsors, whose strong support means all BPS delegates are able to attend at a significant discount.

And he encouraged all delegates to provide feedback, without which a prestigious seminar is not possible. “The committee is always looking for new topics, speakers and innovative ways to attract people to the seminar,” he says, “so we depend on your feedback, good or bad, to accomplish that.”