

*For Immediate Release*

*“Two monologues is not a conversation”*  
**Conference highlights practical ways of communicating with the public**

April 18, 2016 – The annual Farm & Food Care Ontario conference and speakers’ program was held in Milton on April 13, with over 200 agriculture and food stakeholders attending the event.

Attendees listened to presentations given by Dr. Mike Von Massow, Associate Professor for the University of Guelph College of Business and Economics; Andy Vance, an expert in agricultural marketing, advertising and messaging, and Dr. Kevin Folta, a world-renowned biotechnology spokesperson and researcher at the University of Florida. These keynote speakers discussed how to build a conversation about food with a concerned public, and the role of personal stories in establishing a more productive dialogue on food and farming.

“Our research shows that consumers want and do trust farmers. Concern about farming practices are not demographic specific though - it’s growing across all groups,” said Dr. Massow. “The public want to hear from you, but a conversation can’t be two monologues. It’s important to listen and understand that [non-farming consumers] are concerned about doing the right thing.”

Andy Vance touched on the need to be transparent “in the right amount.” More specifically, Vance said the average consumer does not want to know everything, but they need to have a general idea of what farmers do in order to feel confident in what they are eating.

Dr. Folta addressed ways that farmers, researchers and other food stakeholders can effectively reach non-farming consumers, and simultaneously erode the influence of those who seek to “take tools away” from the agriculture community. He suggests those in agriculture “grab their own online real estate” by setting up a blog, reserving their name or farm name on twitter, and any other space where farmers can directly communicate with the public.

“We are seeing a battle between fear and fact – between the heart and the head – and heart always wins [...] We are all consumers and we have stories that connect,” says Folta.

Conference attendees also had the opportunity to engage in a discussion panel featuring a chef, dietitian and local food store owner - Brad Watt of Peterborough, Jackie Fraser of Fergus and Carol Harrison of Toronto respectively. The panellists answered questions on their interactions with Canadian consumers, how social media plays a role in their careers and what communication methods bring them the most success.

The conference proved to be popular on social media as well. The Farm & Food Care Ontario twitter handle (@FarmFoodCareON) reached 200,100 other twitter accounts, with 378 mentions from 170 contributors. The conference’s hash-tag (#FFC16) had a reach of 218,400 – equivalent to 996 tweets from 294 contributors, or 41.5 tweets per hour).

The day was extremely successful. There was a great deal of excitement and positive sentiment expressed by attendees,” says Bruce Christie, a Farm & Food Care Ontario board member.

Farm & Food Care Ontario is a coalition of farmers, agriculture and food partners proactively working together to ensure public trust and confidence in food and farming. For more information visit [www.farmfoodcareON.org](http://www.farmfoodcareON.org).

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