

As humans we are fascinated with the idea of the future; predicting it, building it and capturing it. We do our best to forecast everything from the weather and global population to the next new food trends, all of it meticulously calculated so that we can hope to make the most of it. At the 2017 GrowCanada conference there was a lot of talk about the future and how we are going to unleash its potential. In the midst of the discussion, there were key themes identified that will shape Canadian agriculture over the coming decades; a growing Chinese market, our capacity to embrace new technology and our ability to communicate with consumers.

The Chinese market presents a massive opportunity for the Canadian agri-food sector. The Chinese population, which already accounts for 21% of the global population, continues to grow. In addition to the sheer volume of people, China is also experiencing rapid urbanization and an increase in expendable wealth. "What's the first thing that the Chinese spend their wealth on? Food", says GrowCanada speaker Ted Fishman. Consumption of meat and fish in China has doubled since the 1980's. Lucky for us, Canada has a reputation for producing safe, quality food as well as the resources and technology necessary to meeting the rising demand.

In order to fill the growing demand and take complete advantage of the Asian opportunity in an environmentally, economically and socially conscience way, Canadian farmers will need to continue adopting new technology. We're standing on the precipitous edge of agriculture's data-revolution; we've barely scratched the surface of what we'll be capable of with more investment into agriculture research and development. As Silicon Valley starts to take notice of the opportunities in the agri-food space, we can expect our industry to change faster than ever. Dr. Robb Fraley, Chief Technology Officer at Monsanto, spoke on the way that innovations such as precision management strategies, RNAi crop protection technology, 2nd generation biotech traits, gene-editing tools and autonomous vehicles will alter the way that food is produced. Leonard Brady brought to our attention that the invention of the Impossible Burger, a fully lab-grown burger unidentifiable from real beef, is not 10-15 years away. It's here today, fully commercialized and available for purchase at select stores in the United States. It's innovations like this one that have the potential to completely transform our food system.

All of this opportunity will not come without its share of challenges; the most prominent one being the difficulty conveying benefits of agricultural technology to a public that is already cynical of the way their food is produced. Our farms are modern, efficient and working to be as environmentally sustainable as possible. We know this and our industry knows this; yet too many Canadians don't. This isn't entirely new news, lots of amazing progress has been made in the right direction and we need to keep going. The message at GrowCanada was clear; in order to fully capitalize on the opportunity in front of us, we need to maintain and build the trust of Canadians and our policy makers.

The future is promising for those, who like me, are just beginning a career in the agriculture industry. With that, my thanks; my most sincere thank-you to the Canadian Seed Trade Association for sponsoring my involvement in the GrowCanada conference, to CropLife Canada for hosting an outstanding event, and to all of the people who I had the pleasure of meeting throughout my time in Calgary.