

Cultivating Relationships

Over the years, farmers and urban residents have been in a state of constant turmoil. Whenever one does something, it almost always seems to conflict with the views of those on the other side. This needs to change. If city residents and ranchers took the time to reflect on their lives, they would realize that they are remarkably similar. When they are able to create meaningful relationships with each other, they often find that it is much easier to coexist, rather than squabbling over petty differences. It is important for Red Deer County farmers to have good relations with those in the city, as their lives are often intertwined. Unfortunately, initiating these relationships is not always a straightforward task. However, understanding, finding common goals, and communication are three steps that can be taken in order to bring farmers and their urban neighbors closer together. Once they can gain insight into the other's perspective, a bond will naturally form.

The culture within a farming community is much different than that of an urban community, and these roots can radically influence the way an individual perceives certain issues. If both sides could reconcile their preconceived notions of society in order to accommodate the needs of the other, it would be extremely beneficial. Simply the act of considering the opposing point of view is a huge step in the right direction. For example, those who live on the outskirts of Red Deer may complain about odors coming from a nearby farm. Their limited perspective only allows them to see the negative: bad smells are unpleasant. What they do not realize is that the very same manure they are smelling could be aiding in the growth of local produce that they happily consume on a daily basis. The small inconvenience of a foul odor needs to be accepted to allow the producers to continue to grow quality crops. On the other hand, farmers also need to be considerate of the needs of those living in the city. For instance, some roads or roundabouts may not be suitable for large farm equipment. Farmers need to realize that they are in the minority, and that the roadways should therefore be better suited for the average commuter rather than a bulky combine. When both parties are able to come to terms with their differences, and have a respect for the needs of others, it becomes far easier to build a solid relationship.

Finding commonalities is a surefire way to strengthen relationships. When Red Deer County ranchers and Red Deer residents think of each other, they may feel as though they have nothing in common, but in reality, their goals are the same. They both have a need to make a living, and to contribute to the local economy. Maybe they both have a family that depends on the success of their employment just so they can have a decent standard of living. Although the means by which these goals are attained could be vastly different, in the end, the result is the same. Once this is recognized, they can begin to work together harmoniously, using their respective strengths to make an impact in Central Alberta.

Without face to face connections, relationships cannot be properly improved. The ideas of understanding and finding common goals can only be achieved when both parties can freely communicate and express themselves. Red Deer's Agri-trade is a fantastic opportunity for people accustomed to city life to be exposed to more agricultural ideologies. Although the majority of attendees are from a farming background, it is a very eye-opening experience for those who are not. It allows both parties to converse and gain an understanding of the challenges and rewards associated with both farm and urban life. An increase in non-farm related vendors at this annual event would also

be beneficial, as it would draw in a greater number of individuals living in the city. Other events, such as farmer's markets, further increase opportunities for people to gain insight into the life of a farmer, and vice-versa. These times of interaction are crucial, as they provide a memorable experience to remind those who attend of the perspectives of others. When communication occurs, common disputes can be brought to light, and be easily resolved. It is only when farmers and city residents refuse to meet that they begin to grow distant.

For one to create a meaningful connection, they first have to have an awareness of the perspective of the other side. Often compromises have to be made to appease both points of view, but agreements can be made once the struggle of the other side is understood. Finding common ground is also critical in forming a relationship. When farmers and their urban neighbors can relate to each other, it provides the starting point for a lasting bond. Opportunities to express these feelings are necessary to make both parties aware of the differing perspectives. If these principles are followed, there is a good chance that ranchers and Red Deerians will be able to get along with each other, and have a reasonable appreciation for what they do for the Central Alberta area. When their differences are put aside, and their shared aims are acknowledged, great things can be accomplished.