How to Influence a Farmer to Change Practice?
Removing the barriers.

2 October 2015 – Greg LaPlante
Introduction

When I attended University I didn’t understand the need for 18 credits of humanity classes required to earn my agronomy degree. I was going to be an agronomist not a psychologist. I was going to use what I learned in college to help farmers be more profitable. The science should be enough to effect change.
After a few months or years of frustration that science wasn’t getting through to them I realized I needed to listen not just talk and to engage them on a more personal level. I needed to build their confidence in what I knew.
They needed to know that I was confident and believed what I was saying and I had Integrity. I needed to earn their trust. I was then and still after 30 years asking them to change behavior.
I realize I should have had 4 years of behavioral science along with Agricultural science.
Barriers to Change

- Traditional practices
- University – Research/Extension
- Government/Regulators/Regulations
- Industry – Manufactures/Retail/Distribution/Crop Advisors/Commodity Groups
- Accountability/Awareness
- Education/Knowledge Transfer/Media
University

• Conflicting messaging
  • Weed science vs. Soil health education
  • Need for more consistent messaging
    • Specialists need to understand each other perspectives
• Farmer engagement
  • Need to be in the field with growers and crop advisors
  • Not just at winter meetings
  • Need to understand the difficulty in adapting to individual farming practices (environmental,economical)
• What works
  • North Dakota State Soil Health Field Days/Café Talks/Educational videos
  • Positive re-enforcement of tangible action plans

Photo credit: Mikkel Pates
Government/Regulators

- Lack of understanding of grower practices
  - Locally, regionally, nationally/one size fits all doesn’t work
- Lack of connectivity to production agriculture
- Increased regulatory hurdles that inhibit or limit tools that combat weed resistance
  - UAV, residual herbicides, buffer strips/road ditches/non-crop areas
  - Restriction of growers being able to make money on conservation acres
- Regulators need to interact with those they regulate
  - Need to walk in growers shoes
  - Be actively invested in solutions, not in regulations
Industry – Manufactures and Distributors

- Marketing programs that prohibit the use of the best modes of action outside of your portfolio
  - Not all toolboxes are complete with the best tools
- Price products individually, not as a package
- Farmers forced to use a less effective product due to programs
- Retail and Distribution forced to comply with marketing programs
- Not always the best mode of action for the problem
- Inventory management instead of product availability
- Need for greater staff education involved with chemical sales for BMP’s

Photo credit: Mikkel Pates
Industry – Crop Advisors and Commodity Groups

- Crop advisors become complacent with marketing programs to get ROI instead of best MOA
  - Need to become more engaged with resistance management outcomes
  - Need to take the leadership role with farmers
  - Become a intragul member in operation
- Commodity group involvement
  - Groups reaching out to industry and crop advisors for grower education
  - Rally the growers
  - Maintain high level of leadership during difficult economic cycles
Grower Accountability/Awareness

• Need to understand and recognize resistance developing on their farm and region
• Chemicals not only solution for management
• What moves weed seeds to the farm, locally/regionally
• Growers need to take action on field borders and waterway weed sanitation
• Need to understand the value of an integrated management system
• Understand what are the costs of a broken weed management system to everyone in society?
Vision for the Future

• Education/Knowledge Transfer
  • We need to understand the complexity of running a modern day farm and help farmers overcome challenges and not just preach they need to change
  • We need to engage at the farm/personal level and develop the relationships to earn the trust of the farmer
  • Develop educational programming focused at the farm, local, and regional level
    • Partnership between industry, university, regulatory and commodity groups
  • Educate and develop action plans that account for variability, then repeat/reinforce constantly
Vision for the Future

• Education/Knowledge Transfer
  • We ALL need to expand our leadership/commitment to managing pest resistance
  • In order to get farmers to change they need to understand clear concise messaging
  • Talking points need to have action plans and be adaptable to environmental and unanticipated conditions
  • Engaging the next generation by transferring knowledge and engaging them to develop solutions
Engaging the next Generation in Agriculture

Innovations Challenge Competition
North Dakota State University.
Last years winner of the Agriculture Production track used the concept of the seed pulverizer Steve Powles talked about and designed it to be incorporated into the combine as an aftermarket addition. We as an industry need to get involved with the Student Innovation contests to nurture the next generation of Innovators.
Conclusion

How to make a farmer change practices

To change the behavior of a practice it requires education, understanding, redundancy, and above all persistence!

It requires not only investment of capital, but people to develop the relationships that get the job done.

We are above all in the People business.
Thank you all of you for participating and sharing your knowledge! Thanks to Christine, Arlene and Angela from Bayer Crop Science for inviting me.