



Education Nation

Interesting youth in agriculture key priority for Saskatchewan Director

BY HEATHER HUDSON

A career in agriculture wasn't exactly his first choice, but it's one that's blossomed into a calling. Who better, then, to reach out to youth to consider a career in our industry than a man who's learned on the job how enriching it can be?

CAAR's Saskatchewan Board Director and Communications & Public Relations Chair Grant Larocque considers educating youth about agriculture one of his primary mandates.

He and his colleagues on the CAAR Board are working on getting out into the community and high schools to encourage young people to enter the field of agriculture.

He points to a reduction in small family farms, youth choosing other career paths plus the rapidly encroaching oil and mining industries in Saskatchewan as just a few of the reasons we're approaching a shortage of bright minds and able bodies in agriculture.

"There's a real hole to fill right now, as there just don't seem to be as many students entering agricultural colleges anymore—definitely not as many as are needed in the industry at the moment," Larocque said.

"The idea is to try and present agriculture as a viable, fulfilling career.

Over the course of the next 40 years there could be a major food shortage worldwide. We need skilled people to increase yields, whether that's as a scientist or other specialist who can contribute to increasing food production."

He brings a unique perspective to the endeavor, having come to value both agriculture and higher education later in life. Though he grew up in a farming community and put in a lot of hours on his uncles' and friends' farms, it just wasn't something that he thought to pursue.

"When I graduated high school, I went right into the work force. The plan was to take a couple of years off and go to university for a commerce degree, but that never happened. I worked in the landscape supply industry for 13 years, working my way up to manager," he explained.

When Orchard Transport had an opening in its agriculture division in 1995, Larocque was ready to seize a new opportunity. And with a new job came a new focus.

"It was at that point that I started to think again about education. The job itself offered many opportunities

GRANT LAROCQUE,
SASKATCHEWAN DIRECTOR



for industry education and learning, which I enjoyed," Larocque said. "And at that time, my wife and I were raising two sons and when my youngest graduated high school in 2004 and entered university, I did too."

Thus began four years of working full-time at Orchard Transport during the day and burning the midnight oil to complete a business administration certificate through the Edwards School of Business at the University of Saskatchewan.

"It was a challenge keeping up with coursework; there were a lot of late nights doing assignments, but

MEET YOUR DIRECTORS



Frank [Orchard] is very encouraging when it comes to employees furthering education," he said. "He bent over backwards to give me extra time, allow me to leave early or, if it was slow, do some reading."

As a result, Larocque says he's become more efficient in his role as Operations Manager of the Agriculture

Division, offering a deeper insight when dealing with customers, colleagues and employees who report to him. "I've definitely got a higher overall confidence level," he maintained.

Even though he graduated in 2008, he's since gone back to take a human resources class and plans to enroll in other courses at the university, including one in adult education.

"I enjoyed school when I was younger, but I definitely appreciated this

education more as an adult. There was a maturity factor that helped me dedicate myself differently and prioritize the work more," Larocque said.

His adventures in higher education inspired him to get involved in CAAR from the inside out. He's been a Director on the Board since February 2011 and became Chair of the

Communications & Public Relations Committee in February 2012.

"I have attended every CAAR Convention since 1996, so I have always been there at the grassroots level since starting in this job," he noted. "It was time for me to take on another challenge and they were looking for directors at that time, so it was a perfect opportunity for me to help improve the organization, the ag business as a whole and to be involved and not just somebody sitting back and watching it happen."

As a Director, Larocque plans to bring the message to the youth population that they can make a difference in the world while participating in a challenging industry.

"There's a future in agriculture, from farmer to ag-retail to wholesaler distributing to manufacturing to scientific study," he said. "All of it contributes to the greater good and the young should know that." ♦

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Grant Larocque, Saskatchewan Director

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