

Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture

Opening Presentation – Clinton Monchuk PAg, BSA, MBA

Thank you to the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry for allowing me to present today. My name is Clinton Monchuk and my position with Farm & Food Care Saskatchewan allows me to see first hand how speaking to Canadian consumers can help fuel food literacy. With less than three percent of our population actively engaged in farming or ranching, it makes sense that there are a lot questions about how food is produced today. There is a real disconnect exists between those who grow and those who consume food. There also seems to be a romanticized idea of how farmers shouldn't be using modern genetics, technology or equipment to grow food and the 'good ole days' of growing food of the past were much better. I'm hear to tell you, they weren't. Things are much better today in 2023 than they have ever been and will continue to get better with new innovations into the future.

Engagement with Canadians through story telling helps build trust about food production in our great country, so this is my story. I farm with my brother Andrew and we are fourth generation Canadian farmers. Our great-grandfather homesteaded across the road from where our main farm currently exists. Over the last 117 years we have continually made improvements to how we grow food and I hope, one day, the fifth generation will take over our family farm. When I speak to those who are not in agriculture, I like to say that without healthy soil we as a civilization would not exist. Healthy soil allows food security here in Canada, as well as food security for those countries who buy the abundance of food we produce.

In 1996, my father made the decision to switch to a one pass, minimal tillage, planting system, saving time and money on fuel, but also setting in process the capturing of carbon and putting it back into the soil. Previous to 1996 our system included tilling the soil, possibly putting down a granular herbicide through harrowing, tilling it again, harrowing again, then planting. These extra passes increased soil erosion and released carbon into the environment. With direct seeding technology, we control weeds without tilling the soil by applying a non-selective herbicide, like glyphosate, then plant directly into the crop residue that was left over from the year before. This practice has fundamentally changed our soil health, increased productivity and benefited the environment.

Our family farm continues to use the latest technology, like variable rate nutrient application, and has implemented the 4R Nutrient Stewardship program, putting nutrients in the right place, the right amount, at the right time and from the right source (see Documents 1 and 2). As a result, we're seeing increased soil organic matter, better aggregate structure and tilth, and over all healthier soil and thriving soil organisms in it, like earthworms. The benefits of this include more productive land, stronger resilience to changes in climate and a healthier environment for growing our food.

In 2021 95% of Saskatchewan farmers used zero or minimal tillage practices, all contributing to better soil health and reduction of carbon emissions. Peer-reviewed literature is pointing to net zero emissions in Saskatchewan because of technologies like glyphosate, GMOs and minimal tillage (Document 3). This positive story of what farmers are doing for the environment, bringing food production close to net zero emissions, does not always make its way to classrooms or consumers to the degree it needs to be. We are making an impact through initiatives in Agriculture in the Classroom, Farm & Food Care, and Canadian Food Focus, but more can be done.

The best example of engagement is through our farm tours at Farm & Food Care, which involve everyone from college students to food influencers. Given the ability to see modern farms, feel the soil and talk to farmers, participants increase their knowledge of food production and have an overall stronger positive impression of our practices. For our online engagement, Canadian Food Focus brings close to a million consumers into the discussion about food each month and provides videos and articles about how the food they enjoy is being produced, throughout Canada.

You see, our soil has never been healthier, our productivity continues to increase and we're doing this all while being close to carbon neutral. This is a great story, a story that we should all be proud to tell as Canadians.