

Ivey Business School gets down to the business of soil, tillage

The new MBA case study was put together with farmer input

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London - When the top business school in Canada is turning out future CEOs, those who will develop sustainability policies affecting agriculture, the agriculture industry better make sure it is on the course outline.

The Ivey Business School is known for its case study teaching method and 70 farm and agri-business professionals gathered recently in a lecture room to weigh in on a new case developed for MBA students with the discussion led by Dr. Tima Bansal, Canada Research Chair in Business Sustainability.

The agriculture industry used to have a strong advocate teaching at Ivey, Professor Emeritus David Sparling and Chair of Agri-Food Innovation, until his passing in July 2016. He was a big influencer with government and the agri-food industry and communicated his passion to his students.

The gap left by Sparling's passing was filled later in 2016 with the two-year appointment of farmer and food innovator Brian Gilvesy, as Executive-in-Residence of Agriculture and Sustainability with a role as guest lecturer and case writer. Gilvesy was instrumental in bringing funding to Ivey to support the development of new agriculture case studies.

That's where Bob Kerr of Kerr Farms Ltd. and Wolfe Creek Organic Farms Ltd. of Chatham entered the picture with financial support to build the case based on soil quality and tillage practices at the farm of Blake Vince, also from Chatham. Vince practices no-till and in the case must explore how to convince other farmers to do the same.

Bansal admits her knowledge of tillage practices is limited to what she read online in the two days leading up to the meeting. Her role as facilitator meant she was looking for discussion from the audience that was filmed and will be used later with MBA students.

She has three objectives in teaching this case to the mostly urban students, firstly that they understand soil. Secondly that they understand it's a system – academics tend to see things isolated in silos but good soil means you have to feed that system.



Dr. Tima Bansal: "The issue we see most in business schools is climate change."

Finally she wants to teach them how to persuade people to look at and adopt a different view point.

"The issue we see most now in business schools is climate change. How do we convince people that climate change is real?"

A show of hands around the room was evenly split on the question of no-till versus tillage. Bansal led the group through a discussion of environmental impact and economics of no-till versus tillage, and regardless of what side the audience took on the first question, the majority agreed no-till was the best option for the environment.

Bansal says our choice of no-till or tillage is ideological and steeped in tradition, values and politics. Tillage is the dominant practice around the world but with climate change and the opportunity for agriculture to capture carbon and make a positive environmental impact we need to convert more farm practices to no-till.

"Our ideology screens the type of information that we receive. We will only hear what we want to hear. Convincing people on facts will never work."

She points to the irrefutable facts surrounding climate change, yet there are still climate change deniers because, "people filter the facts".

She says persuasion is about building trust, creating dialogue, listening, asking lots of questions, building empathy and finding shared values.

Bansal highlights the example of climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe, a Canadian now in Texas, who was able to reconcile



Chatham farmer Bob Kerr provided financial support to the school to develop a real case study focusing on tillage practices.

her deep religious faith with science by finding the overlapping values.

If you ask someone, "Do you want a better world", most people will say yes so you can persuade people and shift their thinking by agreeing on something rather than starting on what you disagree.

Find agreement on issues by focusing on the co-benefits – most people can agree on economic development, less pollution and the desire for a less polluted world.

People might not understand what we mean when we say we want to increase organisms in the soil but they might understand if we go a little further and say something about the future of our children and their health.

She suggests finding a trusted and respected interlocutor to bring the message, someone who has been on the other side of the fence and is now a no-till convert.

"Why has Greta Thunberg been so successful? Possibly because she is a child and can be trusted."

People that have something to lose, a child like Greta, are instantly more credible than a person already in a position of power or authority.

Bansal stresses the importance of experiential learning and getting people to the farm to see and understand no-till firsthand.

She says no-till is an opportunity for the agriculture industry to seize control of the climate change concern, create value and their own branding.

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