

Ideas Ignite at Young Farmers Summit

By Kaitlyn Gisler

Farm Credit Canada's (FCC) cross-Canada tour stopped in Langley this March. *Ignite: Young Farmers Summit* gathered individuals who shared an involvement in agriculture and agri-food. The diverse speakers specialized in relationship building, innovation literacy, stress management and the realities of running your own enterprise.

Stuart Knight is an entrepreneur and author with a special focus on creating connections. Every day we engage in short chats, but often these socializing spurts can be uninspiring, superficial interactions. To get more from these conversations (and from these individuals) Knight recommends four easy-to-remember tactics: go further in the conversations by asking quality two-part questions, find the 'why' to someone's story and ask bold, big questions – that might be outside your comfort zone – to get bolder and bigger responses. The most important conversation you have, however, is with yourself. Positivity and encouragement towards you is the first ingredient to engaging in meaningful and truthful ways with others.

"You have to be your own cheerleader," Knight summarized, "everyone else is too busy to do it for you."

Futurist and Digital Strategist Jesse Hirsh challenged attendees to use critical thinking when working with technology. Avoid the "death by GPS" syndrome of blindly following innovation without asking questions. Hirsh claims farmers were the original 'hackers,' as we readily embraced and developed new tools to become smarter and more efficient since the dawn of agriculture. Modern farm hackers still exist and collaborate online at farmhack.org. This open-source (free) platform is driven by sharing self-made tools and inventions for agriculture by farmers.



Entrepreneur Stuart Knight challenged the audience to be positive and encouraging to oneself first, then extend it to others.

"Data is the new Gold Rush," noted Hirsh, "it's mined, and it fuels the economy."

Some companies collect data about your business through use of their software. This data is no longer yours but becomes part of their archives. In some instances, when that software breaks down, you are not allowed to fix it. The loss of your personal data and your right to repair can only be controlled if you ask questions, remain critical, and maintain your technical literacy to the best of your ability, advised Hirsh.

Psychologist and Stress Expert Dr. Georges Sabongui has the stress cure. He's also identified the problem: our daily demands and our energy to meet these demands are out of balance. Often, we make cuts in our



Tonia Jahshan explained that small business operators need clear goals to help anchor their resolve through the tough times.

sleep, nutrition habits and leisure time to try and catch up. Our suffering manifests itself in physical and emotional hurt.

"Pain," said Dr. Sabongui, "is not the problem, but it's telling you that something is wrong."

Feeling muscular tension, grinding our teeth and fighting infections are some physical signs that we're suffering. Feeling distracted, memory loss and decision paralysis can be warning signs that you're mentally unwell. The serious signs are when these symptoms manifest into hopelessness, apathy and isolation.

To nourish our physical, emotional and mental wellness we can do three things every day: move more, eat better and rest often. To supercharge our mind and soul

we can follow Dr. Sabongui's Ten Serotonin Boosters: soak-up sunshine, sleep, smile, sports (five minutes of intense exercise), socialize, steak (eat good fats and protein), sand (or soil exposure for good bacteria), sensuality and practicing spirituality.

"Stress will become depression if not treated," warned Dr. Sabongui.

Tonia Jahshan is Founder and President of Steeped Tea and knows stress. Her drastic career shift from power tool sales to selling premium loose-leaf tea, followed by a pitch on Dragon's Den, has been an adventure. Today, with entrance into the US market, 7,500 tea consultants in North America and a 30,000 square-foot head office that employs 54 people, the stress might still be there, but so is the success.

Instead of trying to draw parallels between loose-leaf tea parties and farming, she highlighted the similarities of being an owner-operator, risk taking, working with family, which are all too familiar.

"Have a vision and have a goal," said Jahshan, "It will keep you going when times are tough."

"Don't be afraid to diversify your business," she told attendees, applauding a young second-generation cattle farmer who approached her on the Alberta stop of the tour. Alongside cattle farming he is growing Haskap berries and is trying to break into the nutrition market. He asked Jahshan if she'd put the berries in her tea; a couple of samples later he is their berry supplier for their new tea flavour.

"The product should sell itself. It's the people and the story that does the real selling," she said.

"We all have one thing in common and that's being an entrepreneur," summarized Jahshan. "We have the same problems and the same goals and it's up to us to support each other."