

The Pelletier Column

From curiosity to action

by Christophe Pelletier



In my previous column, I wrote about why curiosity is a great asset when it comes to facing and preparing for the future. However, that is not quite the whole story. Food and agriculture are not intellectual exercises, they must deliver concrete products and results. It

is nice to be curious but what do you do with that? The answer to this question is quite simple: action!

According to the saying, knowledge is power. Knowledge is only truly power when it is active and circulating.

Knowledge that remains in a brain or in a drawer is not very useful for the greater good.

The first step that I advise curious people to do is to always share what they learn. It is even easier today with the Internet, and there is a lot of knowledge out there. By sharing, I do not mean simply copy and paste or click the share button. Before sharing, it is essential to make sure that what you share is quality.

There is too much information that is spread on social media while clearly not critically reviewed, not to say not even read; as is quite often the case. The mindset here is a mix of enthusiasm, critical thinking and practical service orientation. The knowledge must be correct and the message must come over.

It also must be useful to the recipients; it must connect to their needs and add value to them. The final result has to be better food through more efficient and sustainable systems that are financially viable. In the food and agriculture sector, it must lead to always more collaboration and knowledge transfer in all directions within the entire value chain.

Often, the weakness of communication is that it stays too long in the same circle and other links, and consumers in particular, are kept too long out of the loop. It results too often in misunderstanding, distrust and erroneous perception.

Through collaboration and brainstorming, curiosity helps create a more accurate and achievable vision of the future, on which action can further be carried out to shape the future. From this angle, there is no doubt that collaboration between all stakeholders is certainly an ongoing process; this is especially true with technology. There are new developments all the time and it certainly takes a curious mind to be able to keep up with novelties. It actually takes many curious minds, considering how huge the quantity of knowledge and information is. It

also takes minds that can connect all the dots, and also connect with each other.

Although time consuming, through back and forth collaboration, together with ongoing feedback about performance and new demands, all links of the chain will become much more aware of what the objectives are and how to foster ongoing improvement.

As many new technological developments come from outside of the food and agriculture sectors, I believe it is critical that the food producers be proactive in the development of technologies and applications, but stating clearly what they expect from technology suppliers and tell them what they expect from them.

It is never too early to let them know what your problems, limitations and/or objectives are, so that they can work on it as soon as possible. Being proactive will help speed up the development of the right products, systems and applications.

Leadership is essential to create the right dynamic. In this process, leadership is of the essence. Leadership is essential to create the right dynamics to make knowledge transfer happen, fast and well. The role of leaders here is to make knowledge transfer attractive and stimulating for others, so that more stakeholders participate in the development of innovation.

The more pressure that is put on suppliers to bring better solutions to the food sector, the higher the chances of it actually happening. Leaders must also foster connections and networking across the disciplines; especially with partners outside of the food and agriculture sector.

A vision that includes the bigger picture will have more chances of stimulating the cross-discipline and cross-sector collaboration. At the same time, it is crucial to stay practical. The goal is to produce food, and that must be in the minds of all participants.

Curiosity is really just the starting point. It feeds an entire chain of ideas and decisions that are the basis for improvement. There is no doubt that fortune favours the bold. In the never-ending quest towards better foods and better agricultural practices, such a process becomes an illustration of “the best way to predict the future is to create it”. This saying may have not been so true as today, progress and food security depend on it.

Christophe Pelletier is a food and agriculture strategist and futurist from Canada. He works internationally. He has published two books on feeding the world's growing population. His blog is called “The Food Futurist”.