

Dan Wright MAAF interview

Dan is one of the first men becoming involved in the women in ag initiative. He also has a proven track record working for diversity. As president of the (Canadian Seed Trade Association) CSTA he led an initiative to advance diversity in agriculture and is currently advancing same topic at his work place, i.e., Monsanto (now Bayer). As parent and President of the Rockets Girls Hockey, he worked for equal opportunities for girls.

Work title: Canada Corn and Soybean Portfolio Lead Bayer/Monsanto

Background: Masters of Business Administration, Advance Agricultural Leadership Program graduate, Marketing Diploma.

1. What are the main milestones of your career?

I grew up on a family farm that included a farm equipment dealership. My mom owned 2 restaurants. After graduation, I went back to the farm and worked at the dealership. However, our family made the tough decision to close the dealership as it was not profitable. It was hard for our family but it was the right decision. I moved on and worked in Kitchener and Waterloo (ON) in several jobs, each for less than 2 years; none was a good fit. It was not until I came to Monsanto, which has been just purchased by Bayer, that I found my spot and I have been here for over 18 years. I have been fortunate to work with great people, and have the opportunity to lead the introduction of several technologies that have improved agriculture.

My work with CSTA has been important, working to help move the industry forward. Working with more great people and learning things outside my day job has been a wonderful experience.

Outside my career, other important milestones concern my work as volunteer. I worked for Ayr minor soft ball and the girl's hockey associations. I wanted the girls to have the same opportunities as the boys in our small town, and as I worked for that we encountered much push back from the provincial hockey association. Nevertheless, I stayed focused because equal opportunities for them was very important to me. We were successful getting the girls organization started and the organization is doing great!

My work for the CSTA, where I was the president, was also a voluntary position. Again, my focus was on moving the association forward and fostering diversity.

2. What were the reasons of your milestones?

Desire for progress. Everything I am proud of is my belief in the importance of change and leading for progress. I also believe in doing the right thing.

3. What motivates you in good times and through road blocks?

Doesn't matter what type of project, I believe that if you do the work and have a good plan in place, you can move forward. The work must be well planned, have a positive outcome, and foster discussions with people. As in most cases the road blocks are people, discussions play an important role. The work you do must also benefit most people. If it benefits only a few or yourself, it is much harder or not possible to achieve what you want. We see that in discussions around diversity. Some people think that it is not important, however, research clearly shows that it does and that the results are positive.

4. **What inspires/motivates your work?**

Family motivates me. My parents were partners in the farm and dealership business and in my mother's restaurants. While she worked in her restaurants, my father washed the dishes and did many other things to support the restaurants success. I witnessed that growing up and continue to do so. Now, if I see that fairness is not there, I try to change it. I try to replicate the fairness and partnership I saw in my family.

5. **You attended the CAHRC's business breakfast held at the AWC East Oct 2018. Please, tell us why and how you became involved.**

I was asked by Debra Hauer and Portia MacDonald-Dewhirst from CARHC, just like many other boards or groups people were asked to be involved. It was a good idea. I had been wondering about involvement outside of work and CSTA. So, when they asked me, I said yes. People don't necessarily offer to volunteer for organizations, rather they wait until they are asked. Once in, they work well for the organization. It was a great experience being the only man in the room and to see what women experience so many times.

It is good to be working within a diverse group and for diversity. If everybody in a group are the same, they would end up doing the same as before. This is an opportunity for me to advance diversity through CARHC. When they asked me to get involved it made sense to me because CARHC is a good partner for CSTA and have helped us with our work with diversity. I wanted to make sure to contribute to them. Also, CARHC has many resources, can help all agriculture organizations make progress.

6. **Please comment on what's been going on with women in ag up to now? What's going on now? What do you see happening in the future?**

There is much going on. I particularly like the conversations on how to raise the level of leadership. Still, lots to be done to make more progress. I think it will continue to improve and organizations/companies will make sure they are talking about the need to have a more diverse leadership team, so they can be better. We need to make sure we have the leadership level necessary to make progress. The facts on diverse leadership being more effective are clear.

Regarding the future, I think that having a national voice is important. Groups such as MAAF, AWN, and others continue to grow and share resources which, leads to having a unified voice on major and common topics. It does not have to mean stopping all the great groups that are doing great work today. However, I think if there was a way to bring them together more often, like CAHRC did, and find a way to be united it will help make more progress.

CSTA is going through a similar process. The initiative is called "seed synergy". The initiative involves 6 organizations talking about coming together as one group because they have same ultimate goals.

7. **You played a role in the Monsanto/Bayer merger, one of the largest in the world. Do you see a possible connection between gender issues and the merger? if so, how?**

I didn't play a major role. There is a connection between the merger and diversity in the sense that diversity is a strong focus in both companies and what make them strong. I played a role in advancing diversity in CSTA through the operation, and in leadership. I also took part in training about "unconscious bias". I went into it thinking, "I don't have a bias because of my upbringing but will do it because that's what we are doing now". However, I found that I do

have it. This discovery makes you feel bad but you are not bad. You have it because we are human. The training was also great because it helped me understand that was something I could manage, and was normal. What's important is that we can manage it to make progress.

8. As a man involved in the women in ag initiative, you are a trailblazer. What is it like? What do others say? Did you see yourself taking a leadership role in this field before?

I don't see myself that way. I see myself as someone who likes to see progress on important topics. Other people thank me for doing this, both men and women. I am more interested in what others don't say. For instance, we did diversity training at CSTA. At the end of the session, participants were asked their thoughts about it. Approximately 20% said they were neutral, meaning that they didn't believe in working on the diversity gap. They thought that we spent too much time talking about it. To me, what we did at CSTA is learning for ourselves and we can use to help other organizations. Any role I played in that, for me, it's great progress on this topic. We can show others how to make progress, and they in turn, the same for others.

9. What are you doing now? Why?

My wife and I are getting adapted to be empty nesters. It certainly is a weird feeling as we had been busy with our kids' many activities, from hockey to orchestra, and at one time highland dancing and bag piping. We went from being busy all the time to nothing now. The last child, my daughter, left this past Sep. Like I said, we are still adapting.

10. What would you like to leave behind you after retirement?

I am not sure I want to retire, hard to say. I'll probably never retire and will volunteer whether in industry or my community.

11. What do you think are the most important characteristic good leaders should have?

Being authentic. People can see if you are not authentic or have an agenda. They need to trust you. Leaders need to stay focused on the topic and the actions needed to make it happen and work for people.

12. What do you think is necessary to engage industry in gender conversations and make progress the women's file in Canada? What do you think are the priorities?

Making it a priority is a priority. Companies/organizations may have a long list of things to do and diversity may seem hard to do. Some people think that it will happen on its own. Not so, it has to be a priority. The start is the hardest part, that is, to make diversity a priority. However, after that, people are empowered, come together and begin to work. Many want to help as well.

When I became the CSTA president, I made the decision that we would work for diversity. I didn't ask anyone. I just did it, that is, made diversity a priority. CSTA had talked about making it a priority before, but we needed to just do it. I am hopeful that other organizations and leaders will also move it from something we need to, to starting. The first step seems big, but it is not as hard as you think and there are lots of resources and people to help.