

Why Should I Trust You?

Building a brand for knowledgeable advice and protection, agrologists help provide a solution.

By AgriBiz Communications Corp.—on behalf of the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists



Kara Annand PAg and (right) husband Wade Annand PAg of Ag Grow Consulting in Nipawin, Saskatchewan, provide science-based agronomic advice that helps growers grow their business.

As the business adage goes, “A brand is a promise. A good brand is a promise kept.”

Few things impact your business quite like the state of your reputation; therefore, the ability to build and maintain trust and respect is imperative. Within the agriculture industry, the science and technology behind growing crops evolves continuously so remaining current and connected helps ensure the best advice and information is being shared with clients and employers.

As ag retailers endeavour to learn about new products, procedures, and methodologies, it helps to have a solid network of educated and experienced minds for support and consultation. The ability to provide farmers with well-thought-out advice builds trust and loyalty, making it advantageous to ensure your network includes agrologists.

The profession of agrology encompasses a wide range of practices related to agriculture, bioresources, food and the environment. To be considered a professional agrologist (PAg) or technical agrologist (TechAg), individuals must obtain a four-year science degree or diploma in agriculture, food, a related environmental program, or one approved by the admissions and registration committee, and reach several milestones in an articling program. Provincial licensing and regulatory bodies protect the agrology “brand” by ensuring those calling themselves agrologists have the appropriate credentials, experience, and ongoing professional development.

Those serving the agriculture industry as retailers or

consultants build their reputation on the trust that results from honesty and genuine investment in serving those who come to them for advice.

Whether on staff or independent, agrologists possess a great deal of knowledge, expertise and credibility that can increase profitability and help when things go sideways, as explained by two Saskatchewan agrologists.

Kara Annand PAg of Ag Grow Consulting based in Nipawin, Saskatchewan, and forensic agrologist, **George Lewko PAg** of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, have long histories of supporting producers and the overall agriculture industry.

While Ag Grow Consulting offers independent, science-based, unbiased agronomic advice to help growers increase their bottom line, as a forensic agrologist, Lewko provides independent, science-based, unbiased analysis of issues and events in third-party investigations. Both grew up on farms, attended university in pursuit of more science-based knowledge and training, evolved their careers to support the agriculture industry in different ways, and have been long-time licensed with the **Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists (SIA)**. Both share their perspectives on the value of building trust, relationships and networks.

Following convocation from the **University of Saskatchewan College of Agriculture and Bioresources**, both Kara Annand and her husband, **Wade Annand PAg**, began working in the ag industry and pursuing their professional agrologist (PAg) desig-

nations. Prior to launching Ag Grow Consulting in 2008, he farmed and worked for Dupont for a couple of years, and she worked for a local ag retailer for eight years.

According to Kara Annand, “It was a really good learning opportunity. When I refer to a certain product, it helps that I physically saw the product in the shed and know its size and formulation. I understand why we recommend one product over another and can perhaps address concerns that growers may have. I also got to know a lot of growers in the area whether they were coming in to pick up product or popping in for coffee. I developed some great relationships. [But] I didn’t get to be in the field as much as I wanted to which is why I decided to pursue working as a consultant.”

Annand explained that there are three reasons why growers hire the PAg team at Ag Grow: “There’s just so much information and it’s constantly evolving—the ag industry, technology, everything out there—so they hire us as someone else to work with them and keep on top of their business. Secondly, there are lots of farmers wanting to retire or pass along the farm. Hiring us provides an opportunity to share some knowledge and experience.

“Thirdly,” she continued, “farms are growing in size. They are huge business operations. Growers are hiring specific people for specific avenues and aspects of their business so Ag Grow has been hired as their agronomist.”

Ag Grow looks at the same fields for the same growers every single week. It offers field scouting, soil testing, variable rate mapping and soil testing, and tissue testing. They also have a research plot farm and a service called *Ag Grow Advantage* that allows access to the research farm data.

The Annands also developed an agronomy app called **AgScouter**, launched after three years of test-

ing. The *AgScouter* app was “built for agronomists by agronomists” to increase efficiency and communication among growers and the agrologists working with them.

Sharing tools and knowledge is one of many reasons that Ag Grow has a trust-based reputation that increased the size of its consulting business to include PAg in multiple locations.

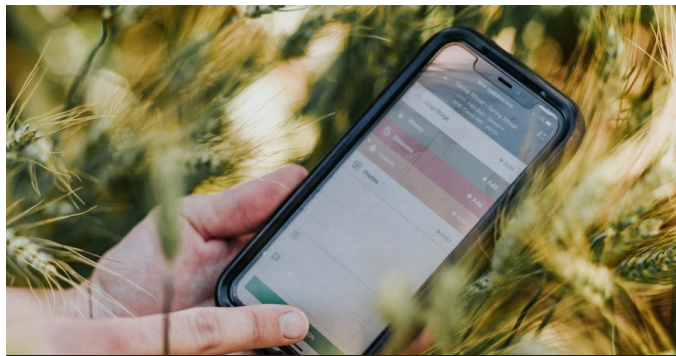
Annand said she is committed to providing professional advice to growers “to help them make decisions but also give them more time so they can do more on their farms and put their energy where it’s needed,” adding that she is a proponent of networking and supporting articling agrologists as they forge their career paths.

According to Annand, “Building relationships with the growers and reliability is how we gain trust. It takes time and you go for the small wins. We have been so lucky that a lot of the agronomists we hire are from the area. We have growers that want to work with us, but I want to have the right person in place. I don’t want to just load an agronomist up with 50,000 acres. We try to find a balance, so the farmer gets great service, and the staff doesn’t get burnt out.”

When asked what she likes most about her job, Annand’s passion is obvious. “I love being outside and I love working with growers. I treat their farms like my own. When they grow 90-bushel wheat, I feel like I have had somewhat of a hand in helping them, so that’s a win. On the same token, if they get hailed out or it’s a drought, I feel horrible for them too,” she revealed. “I’m pretty invested in their farm because I see it so often and Mother Nature rules over everything.”

As we look toward the new crop year, farmers hope for the best and prepare for the worst. The number of insurance claims significantly increased in 2021 because crops were worth that much more and premiums had not been adjusted to reflect the value. It also increased the requests for forensic agrology services.

George Lewko PAg also began his post-university career working for a retail outlet and progressed from being an articling agrologist (AAg) to achieving professional agrologist (PAg) standing. While he has been a PAg since 1994, he is also a forensic agrologist. Lewko completed, and now teaches, courses on pesticide application and forensic agrology, with a depth of knowledge that makes him a valuable ag industry resource.



The AgScouter app was developed by the Annands for Ag Grow Consulting.

His extensive science background is evident within minutes of asking about his career path.

“Some people can tell you point A to point B, but I can explain to you why it’s actually point A to point Z, and go through all those steps,” said Lewko.

“One example is fertilizers,” he continued. “If you add nitrogen, you get a bigger yield. I can tell you why you get a bigger yield because each crop requires so much nitrogen per bushel. The same thing happens with chemical applications. When you’re selling chemicals, it’s important to know what you put on last year so you’re not stacking products that may cause issues.

“It’s important to consider crop rotations and know the full history so you can consider resistance. I also consider future issues. As an agrologist, I’m worried about what will be grown next year and what was grown the year before and the year before because there may be some carryover. And with a drought last year, there is definitely some carry over,” he said.

Lewko relies on soil testing for historical data and does backcasting to determine if there is an old issue, an attention to detail and curiosity about filling in all the blanks that make him an asset in disputes, as requests for his forensic agrology services almost doubled last year.

Because Lewko works for insurance companies, chemical companies, lawyers, and producers as a neutral third party, he’s not an advocate for one over another. It’s his job to figure out what happened, and report based on the scientific findings.

When he goes into a field, Lewko focuses on collecting data which he puts through several checklists before reaching any conclusions.

As an examiner, he includes all elements and explanations of why they are or are not relevant in a dispute. All information is confidential, and he sends samples away for testing if a dispute proceeds to litigation; however, it is rare that claims go to court because his investigations are so thorough. Civil litigation has the potential to be both time-consuming and expensive so a forensic agrologist offers an option that encourages mediation.

Local agrologists may not want to become involved in conflicts as they may know both parties while a forensic agrologist offers a completely neutral, science-based study of a situation.

As with professional agrologists, forensic agrologists are specialists within their scope of practice. Lewko noted that a forensic agrologist typically has at least 10 years of experience in the field before taking

specialized courses. The career requires the ability to conduct a comprehensive investigation and properly document findings in a scientific manner that clearly lays out evidence and conclusions.

Lewko’s practice focuses more on agronomic practices, vegetable production, crop protection, pesticide use, fertilizer applications and mediation while other forensic agrologists have expertise in animal welfare, environmental, oil and gas, soil reclamation and watershed management. The SIA website is a good source for forensic expertise (www.sia.sk.ca).

“I can probably find someone if I don’t know the answer.”

He explained that he has seen a lot over the years and acknowledges that every producer has a reason for doing what they do, so it’s important to ask the right questions.

“People will look at things and try to tweak them. I’ve run into situations where someone has made a poor recommendation. For example, a product may work on one crop, but decrease the yield of another. Sometimes when a plant is under stress, you can add a safener and that’s just a knowledge thing. It’s important to understand the science and the chemistry,” stated Lewko.

Regarding the importance of staying current, Lewko added: “When I was selling chemicals, there were always classes and training. When I’m teaching a forensic agrology course, I’m also learning from the people taking the course. I’m always looking for new ways to do things. I ask questions and I talk to people with different experiences and knowledge. Sometimes, I find journal articles [on a specific issue].”

Staying current and having a broad knowledge base is critical in the development of protocols. To that point, Lewko underscores the value of networking among other professionals.

“I have a contact list of around 1,100 on my phone and I can probably find someone if I don’t know the answer. A nice thing about the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists is there are a lot of people I can phone—if I don’t know the answer, they will, or they’ll be able to get me to the person who does.”

Access to a network plays a role in Lewko’s commitment to maintaining trust through honesty.

“It’s pretty simple,” he intoned. “Tell the truth. And sometimes ‘I don’t know’ is the truth, ‘but I’ll

look into it' is an answer. People understand that. It helps to know who to call, and a network is a strong tool.

Approach situations without any bias and be truthful."

Within the SIA Code of Ethics is the explicit expectation that agrologists "share knowledge and experience with other agrologists, mentor new members and contribute to building a strong network of professionals."

Both Wade and Kara Annand have been active in their regional branch and encourage their staff to take on roles and organize activities for their agrologist cohort. Lewko is the past president of the SIA and performed duties as president of his regional branch twice. He has helped instruct the SIA Professionalism and Ethics seminar which is a required course for all articling agrologists and articling technical agrologists. He has been active on both the Professionalism and Ethics Committee and the SIA Discipline Committee.

Not only do Lewko and the Annands benefit from the networking that membership in the institute fosters, but they give back to the profession and mentor the next generation of agrologists.

The exchange of money for a product or service is something of a leap of faith so everyone wants to minimize risk. And when things don't go as planned, it's important to know that there is a safety net.

Agrology is a licensed and regulated profession that requires ongoing professional development and adherence to a strict code of ethics. Professional and

technical agrologists are only permitted to practice in fields that reflect their qualifications, and their opinions and advice must be based on science, expertise, experience, and best practices, as well as a clear understanding of their employers' objectives.

One of the key reasons for the existence of provincial agrology institutes is the protection of the public and employers of agrologists. Each field of practice requires high levels of education and practical experience. The regulatory bodies ensure those calling themselves agrologists meet the stringent requirements. Furthermore, only licensed agrologists are eligible for professional liability insurance—and that is a significant safety net when offering advice to growers.

Both the Annands and Lewko have built their businesses—and reputations—on providing reliable, trustworthy, science-based information and advice. As long-time members of the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists, they have developed solid networks of not only agronomists but also other agricultural specialists in relevant scopes of practice.

Whether you are an ag retailer, producer, environmental organization, or food processor, consider your network and how it reflects your standards for trust, knowledge, work ethic and professionalism. Each member contributes to your ability to keep promises made and build a successful brand. ♣

Agribiz Communications provides management, marketing and communications services to agriculture and food organizations across North America. www.agribiz.ca.

CAAR News

Faster Internet to Improve Canadian Farming Communities

The Government of Canada recently released its rules for the upcoming 3800 MHz Spectrum auction, and has chosen to implement spectrum caps and strong deployment conditions. This spectrum will be key to delivering both 5G and rural wireless broadband, and CAAR hopes it will be used properly to improve farming communities and businesses. It also means that multiple carriers will have access to the spectrum to be competitive, thereby avoiding a single carrier monopoly. This will increase both the speed and availability of mobile and internet service across Canada and ultimately help the agricultural sector as farm technologies continue to advance.

Deadline Extended for AAFC Emissions Doc

The deadline to provide feedback on the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada discussion document: Reducing emissions arising from the application of fertilizer in Canada's agriculture sector has been extended until August 31, 2022. The entire Canada agricultural retail industry will be impacted by emission changes. CAAR members are urged to provide a response.

CAAR Membership Dues Are Due

Despite the deadline passing, it is still not too late to get your memberships dues in with CAAR. With several advocacy issues ongoing to protect the industry, every member makes a difference and strengthens the voice of CAAR. Contact us at info@caar.org. ♣