COMMUNICATING ABOUT ANIMAL BIOTECH: Lessons from Two Decades of Crop Biotech Communication

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place” George Bernard Shaw

Any mention of GMO evokes strong emotions and varied opinions

THE MISSES

1. Process versus GM product attributes
   • No balance between what the public wants to know versus what they need to know

2. Knowledge deficit theory
   Factors affecting acceptance:
   • Cultural beliefs
   • Ethical values
   • Lack of inclusivity

3. Use of technical jargon
   • Impeded correct interpretation of technology
   • Heightened anxiety on useful innovations

4. Over-claimed benefits
   • GMOs will feed the world
   • GMOs are a silver bullet to ending hunger and poverty

5. Scientists and regulators sat back allowing ‘others’ to miscommunicate
   • Created room for misinformation, half-truths, myths and mistrust to spread

LESSONS AND STRATEGIES

Lesson 1: Trust is king!
Without public trust, potential of new bio-innovations will not be realized!

Strategy:
• Develop responsive messages that affirm stakeholders’ values

Lesson 2: Address stakeholder complexity

Strategies:
• Conduct stakeholder analysis and netmapping to understand various needs and/or concerns
• Manage stakeholders with conflicting expectations

Lesson 3: Frame animal biotech narrative

Strategies:
• Apply storytelling techniques when communicating with non-technical audiences
• Use appropriate images

Lesson 4: Understand the gap

Strategies:
• Simplify language to suit target audience
• Begin with the bottom line “So What?”

Lesson 5: Leverage credible experts as spokespeople, show integrity and shared values – Scientists can no longer sit back!

1. Connect animal biotech interventions to sustainable development goals
2. Start from evolution of genetic improvement, not revolution. This will help manage stakeholders expectations
3. Demonstrate benefits and values that align with public desires
4. Share analogies and visuals that people relate to when communicating about animal biotech

GETTING IT RIGHT: BEST PRACTICES