



AWC WEST 2026 Conference Agenda

Hyatt Regency, Calgary, Alberta

March 8,9,10, 2026

Sunday, March 8, 2026

- 11:30 - 7:00 pm **AWC Registration Opens - 3rd floor Hyatt Regency Calgary**
Delegate bag sponsored by Parrish & Heimbecker Limited
Lanyards sponsored by FEAD
WIFI sponsored by CPKC
- 12:00 pm **Registration opens for AWC WEST 2026**
Coffee will be served
- 1:00 - 5:00 pm **Rural Watch: Because No Farmer Stands Alone- Walker Bannerman**
Lauren Van Ewyk, CEO, National Farmer Mental Health Alliance, Courtright, ON
 If your job brings you into regular contact with farmers, or anyone in the ag industry this training is for you. This session ensures participants gain practical, realistic skills to navigate tough conversations and respond in ways that are supportive, respectful, and helpful. This hands-on, discussion-filled, case-study-rich workshop will equip participants with the skills needed to tackle the hard conversations.
- 1:00 – 5:00 pm **Press Play Again – Removing the “pause” and Turning Midlife into Your Most Vibrant Chapter Yet - Herald Doll Room**
Dr. Gail Cunningham, Owner, Certified Menopause Coach, Veterinarian, Mom, Wife, FarmHer, Jackie of all trades! Touch of Humanity Inc, Kelsey, AB
Jilisa Chenard, RN, Mom, wife, Certified fitness and nutrition coach as well as an eating disorder recovery coach.
 Get ready for an honest, energizing, and interactive workshop that takes the mystery (and stigma) out of perimenopause and menopause. We’ll help you understand what’s really happening in your body—the basics made simple—and unpack The Big 5: Sleep, Stress, Nutrition, Movement, and Treatments. Expect a very real conversation about your pelvic floor, sexual health, and yes, your vagina. You’ll be in your chair, on the edge of your seat, and out of it too, as we show you practical strategies you can start using the moment you leave. Come for the evidence-based insights, stay for the laughter, connection, learning and empowerment.
- 12:00 Noon **Registration opens for FEAD Table Talk Conference (Female Entrepreneurs in Agri-Food Development)**

12:00 - 5:30 pm

FEAD Table Talk 6.0 – Stephen Room AB

Table Talk with FEAD is a semi-annual mini conference that is curated to create community and collaboration for food founders and leaders. We strive to connect the community by providing resources, connections, and support programming to secure the economic future for food founders in Canada.

Event Link: <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/1980576712262?aff=oddtcreator>

3:00 pm

Coffee Sponsored by FEAD

4:00 - 10:00 pm

The Notables: Celebrating & Cultivating Inspiring Women in Agriculture - Imperial Ballroom 1,2,3,4,6,8 Grand Foyer 2 Presented by AFSC

Join us for a special celebration that serves as a prelude to the Advancing Women in Ag Conference.

This event brings together outstanding women in agriculture - honoring the notables of today and the legends of the past who have paved the way for Alberta's agricultural future. We will proudly recognize the 2026 Women in Ag Award winners and their exceptional contributions to Alberta's agricultural landscape.

Tickets available at <https://advancingwomenconference.ca/2026west/registration/>

7:00 - 8:30 pm

Student Sponsor Networking Reception - Herald Doll Room The Importance of Networking and Building Strong Relationships Iris Meck, Conference Director, Iris Meck Communications Inc., Calgary, AB All students and sponsors welcome.

Monday, March 9, 2026

7:30 - 8:00 am

General Registration, Continental Breakfast and Networking – Grand Foyer 1

8:00 - 9:10 am

Stream A Workshops

Workshop 1 – Stephen Room AB

Rooted in Strength: How Rural Women Redefine Work and Motherhood – Just Don't ask me "What's for Dinner!"

**Dr. Gail Cunningham, Owner, Certified Menopause Coach, Veterinarian, Mom, Wife, FarmHer,
Jackie of all trades, Touch of Humanity Inc., Kelsey, AB**

This will be a look at real life stories and strategies for working women in rural areas with limited support systems for childcare, their own health and other needs. Ever wonder why when someone asks you "whats for dinner?" it makes your head want to explode? That's decision fatigue. It is real. We carry a big load during the hours of the day and week. Real strategies of how to cope, make each day better and when to get help.

Workshop 2 - Neilson Room 2

Rewriting the Script: AI as Your Strategic Partner

Nisha Soundararajan, Director, Digital Solutions, Baker Tilly (Calgary), Calgary, AB

This presentation reframes AI as a high-level strategic ally that enhances leadership judgment. It explores the essential case for adoption, discussing how intentional integration allows leaders and their teams to streamline decision-making and focus on high-impact work.

Workshop 3 – Neilson Room 1

Breaking Free: Boundaries to Thrive Not Just Survive

Jennifer Keable, Burnout Prevention & Well-Being Expert, The New You, Calgary, AB

Learn the three types of boundaries that define how you work, live, and lead- and the one that makes lasting success possible. Discover your unique boundary style and learn a practical four-step process to create boundaries that empower, connect, and sustain you.

Workshop 4 - Neilson 3

Strong Women, Strong Farms. Protecting Women in Agriculture

Meghan Castle, Associate Financial Advisor, Co-operators, Innisfail, AB

Nicole Galbraith, Financial Advisor, Galbraith Insurance & Investment Group Inc., Thorsby, AB

This presentation highlights the essential - but often unprotected - role women play in agriculture and explores how financial protection strengthens their health, income, leadership, and long term security. Women contribute critical labor, decision making, and management across farm operations, yet many do so without formal safety nets, leaving families and farms exposed when illness, injury, or loss of income occurs. The goal is to ensure women in agriculture are seen, valued, and protected, so the farms they support today remain strong for future generations.

Workshop 5 – Herald Room

Family Fusion: When Love is a Choice

Lauren Van Ewyk, CEO, National Farmer Mental Health Alliance Inc., Courtright, ON

Family is not always cushy and easy. Our lives and businesses are complicated, which means that our family relationships can also be complicated. Join Lauren as we learn how to communicate clearly, set boundaries when needed, and communicate our needs in a way that ensures our businesses and families can thrive.

Workshop 6 - Doll Room

Better Career, Better Human

Darlene Wilson, Senior Manager Corporate Brand and Communications, AFSC, Lacombe, AB

In a world of technical expertise, the most valuable professionals aren't those with the best hard skills, they are those with the best human skills. Learn how to leverage curiosity, communication, and courage to elevate your career and show up as better human - one who can intentionally stay in the tough kinds of conversations we find ourselves in today. Bonus: Take home resources that you can use right away.

Workshop 7 - Bannerman Room

Rooted in Resilience: How to cultivate optimism (even during tough seasons)

Trish Tutton, Mindfulness Teacher, Trish Tutton Speaker and Mindfulness Teacher, Canmore, AB

In day-to-day business- managing land and people to navigating markets and changing weather- it's easy to focus on what's NOT working because the challenges don't take time OFF. But research shows that when we train our brain to focus on what's good - amidst the hard - our intelligence, creativity and energy levels rise. It's not about thinking positive - it's about building the mindset and habits to help us face reality with resilience and resourcefulness.

Workshop 8 – Walker Room

The Breakup You Didn't Choose: Losing a Role, Not Yourself.

Siobhan Chinnery, Resilience Advocate & Transformation Expert, Bee Grateful Management, Calgary, AB

The Breakup You Didn't Choose explores the often-overlooked grief that comes with career loss or transition when identity, belonging and purpose suddenly shift. It's about finding the strength to rebuild with confidence and rediscover who you are beyond the title.

9:10 – 9:25 am

Coffee Break

9:25 – 10:35 am

Stream B Workshops

Workshop 1 - Stephen Room AB

Rooted in Strength: How Rural Women Redefine Work and Motherhood – Just Don't ask me "What's for Dinner!"

Dr. Gail Cunningham, Owner, Certified Menopause Coach, Veterinarian, Mom, Wife, FarmHer, Jackie of all trades, Touch of Humanity Inc., Kelsey, AB

This will be a look at real life stories and strategies for working women in rural areas with limited support systems for childcare, their own health and other needs. Ever wonder why when someone asks you "whats for dinner?" it makes your head want to explode? That's decision fatigue. It is real. We carry a big load during the hours of the day and week. Real strategies of how to cope, make each day better and when to get help.

Workshop 2 – Neilson 2

Public Speaking 101: Tips for getting our messages heard

Kimberly Lyall, Keynote Speaker, Kimberly Lyall Leadership Speaker and Strategist, Lethbridge, AB

Does the thought of speaking in front of an audience make you want to run for the hills? Kimberly will share with you the tips and tricks you can use to feel confident, have your message heard and have fun while doing it.

Workshop 3 – Neilson 1

AI in the Value Chain: Business Skills for Adoption From the Farm Gate to the Customer

Dr. Wendy Cukier, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Ted Rogers School of Management at Toronto Metropolitan University; Founder and Academic Director, Diversity Institute; Academic Director of the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH); and Academic Research Director of the Future Skills Centre, Toronto, ON

As AI becomes a standard part of business operations, leaders need more than tool awareness. They need practical adoption skills and governance instincts, plus an inclusion lens that ensures AI supports fair opportunity and better outcomes. This session offers a clear leadership toolkit, with examples spanning sectors including agriculture and agri-food.

Workshop 4 – Neilson Room 3

Strong Women, Strong Farms. Protecting Women in Agriculture

Meghan Castle, Associate Financial Advisor, Co-operators, Innisfail, AB

Nicole Galbraith, Financial Advisor, Galbraith Insurance & Investment Group Inc., Thorsby, AB

This presentation highlights the essential - but often unprotected - role women play in agriculture and explores how financial protection strengthens their health, income, leadership, and long-term security. Women contribute critical labor, decision making, and management across farm operations, yet many do so without formal safety nets, leaving families and farms exposed when illness, injury, or loss of income occurs. The goal is to ensure women in agriculture are seen, valued, and protected, so the farms they support today remain strong for future generations.

Workshop 5 – Herald Room

The Visibility Trap: How To Be Seen Without Burning Out

Nafisa Mahabub, Program and Operations, FEAD/ Saskatchewan Food Centre, Saskatoon, SK

Many entrepreneurs feel pressure to be constantly visible - posting more, networking harder, and always staying “on” - yet still struggle to see meaningful results. This session explores how to escape the visibility trap by building a more intentional, sustainable presence that drives real opportunities without sacrificing energy or well-being.

Workshop 6 - Doll Room

Navigating Working Life As Spouses

Nicole Davis, Strategic HR Consultant, Uncommon Farms47, Calgary, AB

Running a farm with your spouse blurs home and work. This session offers practical HR tools to align on purpose and roles, reduce conflict, and protect both the relationship and the business.

Workshop 7 – Bannerman Room

Financial Succession Planning – Part 1

Sandra Macenko Merkley, Senior Wealth Advisor, Scotia Wealth Management, Calgary, AB

Stephany Laverty, Senior Policy Analyst, Canada West Foundation, Calgary, AB

Lauren Poitras, Business and Family Wealth Specialist, Scotia Wealth Management, Calgary, AB

Maggie Dalke, Estate and Trust Consultant, Scotia Wealth Management, Calgary, AB

Farm succession planning isn't just about paperwork; it's the blueprint that ensures your family's hard work continues to thrive, loved ones are secure and a lifetime of hard work leaves a lasting impact rather than a looming question mark. Please join our excellent team of specialists as they tackle current trends in agriculture and the impact for family farmers.

Workshop 8 – Walker Room

From the Classroom to your Career: your roadmap to applying for your first job.

Erin Stuart, Search Consultant, Grasslands Recruitment Specialists, Kimberley, BC

You are enjoying university or college - but now it is time to start thinking about that first job! This talk will give you the roadmap to building your resume and online profile, preparing for your interview(s), and showing up to those interviews with confidence.

10:35 – 10:50 am

Coffee Break

10:50 – 12:00 noon Stream C Workshops

Workshop 1 - Stephen Room AB

Networking time

Workshop 2 – Neilson 2

Public Speaking 101: Tips for getting your messages heard

Kimberly Lyall, Keynote Speaker, Kimberly Lyall Leadership Speaker and Strategist, Lethbridge, AB

Does the thought of speaking in front of an audience make you want to run for the hills? Kimberly will share with you the tips and tricks you can use to feel confident, have your message heard and have fun while doing it.

Workshop 3 – Neilson 1

Networking time

Workshop 4 – Neilson Room 3

Building Your Team, Brick by Brick

Shanyn Silinski, Senior Strategic Partner, Olds College, Acme, AB

Building a team is serious, but there is always room to get creative and have some fun along the way.

Workshop 5 – Herald Room

Own Your Voice: Building a Personal Brand That Feels Aligned, Credible, and Sustainable

Lindsay Toth, Membership & Marketing, FEAD Canada, Saskatoon, SK

Your personal brand is how people experience you before, during, and after every conversation, online and offline. This session helps you clarify what you're known for, how you show up consistently, and how to build visibility without burnout or performative marketing.

Workshop 6 - Doll Room

Navigating Working Life as Spouses

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Workshop 7 – Bannerman Room

Financial Succession Planning – Part 2

Sandra Macenko Merkley, Senior Wealth Advisor, Scotia Wealth Management, Calgary, AB

Dorothy Thengs, Co-Owner, Manager, Grace Feedyards Ltd., Sundre, AB

Maddy Marchese, Director, Scotia Wealth Insurance Services Inc., Calgary, AB

Jenna Will, Lawyer, Rath Law Office, Medicine Hat, AB

A thriving farm business requires as much strategic planning as it does daily management. With impending retirements and rising land values, pro-active customized succession planning is your best tool to minimize tax liabilities and maximize wealth transfer. Please join our excellent panelists with first-hand knowledge of bridging the gap between building wealth and passing it on.

Workshop 8 – Walker Room

Want Career Growth? Turn Your Experience Into Opportunity

Erin Stuart, Search Consultant, Grasslands Recruitment Specialists, Kimberley, BC

You are enjoying your role, but it is time for the next step. Perhaps a restructure or reduction in force has you looking. Either way, this talk will give you the roadmap to getting your resume, online profile, and interview skills ready.

- 12:00 - 1:00 pm **Lunch Break – Imperial Room Foyer 4**
Sponsored by FCC
- 1:00 – 1:15 pm **Opening comments Dianne Finstad, Communications Specialist, Red Deer, AB**
Welcome and greetings
- 1:15 - 2:00 pm **The Energetic Advantage: Managing Energy for Sustainable Performance**
Jennifer Keable, Burnout Prevention & Well-Being Expert, The New You, Calgary, AB
In a world that rewards output over sustainability, this session introduces a smarter approach to performance—one that treats energy as a strategic asset, not a personal afterthought. Participants will learn how to intentionally direct, protect, and renew their energy using a practical framework that supports high performance without burnout.
- 2:00 - 2:40 pm **Leader Panel discussion:**
Building Teams and Cultures that Stick
In a fast-moving world, company culture isn't built by chance; it is crafted with intention. The panel will explore how executives and owners can shape resilient and productive teams where employees feel seen, supported and motivated. How to build a company culture where people want to be part of it, for the long run. What it takes to create a workplace where everyone can thrive, and no one gets left behind.
- How to foster a workplace where people feel valued and connected?
 - How do you promote your purpose, mission and vision so that you can get buy-in from your employees?
 - How to develop a long-term culture that stays true to your values even under pressure.
 - How to lead with flexibility? Using situational leadership to tailor your approach to individual needs and strengths.
 - Practical strategies to energize your team and align culture with everyday behaviors.
 - Strategies to maintain employee loyalty. (Or is there such a thing anymore?)
 - **Shelly Harvey, Director, West Coast Operations, Parrish & Heimbecker, Limited, Vancouver, BC**
 - **Melanie Ducholke, Chief People Officer, AFSC**
 - **Lindsay Toth, Membership and Marketing, FEAD/ Saskatchewan Food Centre, Saskatoon, SK**
 - **Amanda Crook, Agronomy Manager, Western North America, McCain Foods, Burdett, AB**
 - **Carla Gammond, HR Manager, Bunge Canada, Sturgeon County, AB**
- 2:40 - 3:15 pm **Coffee and Networking Break – Foyer 2,3,4**
Sponsored by Scotiabank
- 3:15 - 4:00 pm **Bloom Through the Dirt**
Siobhan Chinnery, Resilience Advocate & Transformation Expert, Bee Grateful Management, Calgary, AB
Bloom Through the Dirt™ shows how adversity can be our greatest fertilizer for growth. In this session, learn how to cultivate resilience, nurture connection, and rise stronger than before.
- 4:00 - 4:30 pm **Winning When the Game is Stacked Against You: Creating Opportunity Through Tenacity**
Laura Mock, Director, Cultivator Powered by Conexus, Regina, SK
This talk shares a personal journey of building a career, pursuing education, and stepping into a leadership role as a single mother in a male-dominated industry. Through relatable storytelling and insights, it explores how perseverance, a commitment to values, continued learning and self-advocacy can help women create opportunities and lasting impact- even in a system that wasn't built for them.
- 4:30 - 5:15 pm **She Leads, She Grows: Stories from Ghana**
Nelly Elinam Kurd-Marckay, Quality and Food Safety Manager-West Africa, Bunge, Tema, Greater Accra, Ghana
Zachariah Adomako, HR Business Partner, MEA, Bunge, Tema, Greater Accra, Ghana
She Leads; She Grows: Stories from Ghana celebrates women who are shaping the future of agriculture through leadership and innovation.

- 5:15 - 5:30 pm **Day Recap**
Dianne Finstad Communications Specialist, Red Deer, AB
- 5:30 – 7:00 pm **Reception and Networking - Foyer 2,3,4**
Sponsored by McCain Foods (Canada)
- 7:00 - 10:00 pm **Banquet - Imperial Ballroom**
- Opening comments Dianne Finstad, Communications Specialist, Red Deer, AB**
Welcome and greetings
- Denise Faguy, Director, Marketing and Operations, Farms.com, Guelph, ON**
Iris Meck, Conference Director, Iris Meck Communications Inc., Calgary, AB.

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

- 7:00 am **Luggage room – Stephen Room B**
- 7:00 - 8:00 am **General Registration Continues and Buffet Breakfast - Imperial Ballroom Foyer 4**
- 7:00 – 8:00 am **AFSC/The Notables – Private event, by invitation only - Stephen Room A**
- 7:00 – 8:00 am **AAFC Roundtable - Private event, by invitation only – Herald Doll Room**
- 8:00 – 8:15 am **Welcome Message**
Dianne Finstad, Communications Specialist, Red Deer, AB
- 8:15 – 8:45 am **Leading from the EDGE**
Kimberly Lyall, Keynote Speaker, Kimberly Lyall Leadership Speaker and Strategist, Lethbridge, AB
When life gets tough and you feel like you are losing yourself, a reset is needed. Kimberly’s EDGE framework provides a simple and practical tool to help you grow through tough times and find joy while doing it!
- 8:45 - 9:30 am **GRIT: What is it? Why do we need it? Who has it? How to get it?**
Anne Miner, President, The Dunvegan Group/ Founder of Women with GRIT, Woodstock, ON
GRIT is a term rarely applied to women, and yet without it, little can be accomplished. Angela Duckworth defines GRIT as passion and perseverance in pursuit of a long-term goal(s); GRIT is not a trait, it is not something you are born with, it is a skill that can be learned and applied. Learn about GRIT and how it can support your success in pursuit of long-term goals.
- 9:30 - 10:00 am **Building a more resilient food system in Canada**
Ebony Verbonac, Partner, Western Agribusiness Leader, KPMG LLP, Lethbridge, AB
Join Ebony Verbonac, a seasoned Tax Partner and Agribusiness Sector Lead with over 20 years of experience advising producers, processors, and agribusiness leaders across Western Canada, for an engaging presentation on *Building a more resilient food system in Canada*. She will explore the key themes from KPMG’s latest research, highlighting how Canada’s food sector can strengthen resilience, embrace innovation, and adapt to shifting economic and environmental pressures. Ebony’s deep industry insight and practical, client focused perspective make this session a valuable opportunity for anyone looking to better understand the future of Canadian food systems
- 10:00 - 10:30 am **Coffee and Networking Break – Foyer 2,3,4**
Sponsored by Bunge
- 10:30 - 11:00 am **Sunshine. Soil. Soul.**
Lori Kinnee, Founder, Rancher By Lori, Ten Bar Cattle Company Ltd., Fairview, AB
A personal journey of burnout, what the land teaches us about resilience, renewal and real capacity. An invitation for women in agriculture to build forward without burning out.

11:00 - 11:45 am

Leaders Panel Discussion – Their Story

Brenda Ralston, RDAR Research Scientist, Livestock Health, Lakeland College, Rocky View County, AB

Robyne Davidson, Pulse Research Scientist, Lakeland College, Lacombe, AB

Laura Brown, Owner, LLB Angus Farm Ltd., Erskine, AB

Powerful women take the stage to share the real stories behind their success. They'll speak candidly about the challenges and obstacles they've faced, the opportunities they chose to seize, and the risks they were willing to take. More importantly, they'll reveal the skills, tools, and mindset shifts they put into practice to move forward with confidence and purpose. Their journeys aren't perfect - they're honest, practical, and proof of what's possible.

11:45 - 1:00 pm

General Lunch & Student Sponsor Lunch – Imperial Ballroom Foyer 4 Sponsored by FEAD

1:00 - 1:30 pm

Power Skills: Unleashing Your Potential for Influence and Impact

Debbie Thompson, President & CEO, Olds College of Agriculture & Technology, Olds, AB

As organizations and individuals, we often put tremendous emphasis on technical skills. Although technical skills are critical to success, what we hear over and over is the value and importance of 'power' or, more commonly known, soft skills.

1:30 - 2:00 pm

Smart Strategy: How AI is Powering the Business of Agriculture

AI is no longer just for the field- it's revolutionizing the business behind agriculture. From supply chain optimization to market forecasting, financial planning, customer insights, and product development, agri-businesses are using AI to stay competitive and agile in a rapidly evolving global market.

- What AI platforms do you use in your day-to-day work, why and how
- How AI is transforming logistics, distribution, and inventory in agri-business
- Leveraging AI for sales trends, customer behaviour, and demand forecasting
- AI-driven tools for financial analysis, risk assessment, and decision-making
- Enhancing marketing and customer engagement through AI insights
- Skills women need to lead in the AI-powered future of agri-business
- Real challenges and barriers to implementation- and how to overcome them
 - **Nafisa Mahabub, Program and Operations, FEAD/ Saskatchewan Food Centre, Saskatoon, SK**
 - **Nicole Hayes, Director, Innovation Hub, FCC, Regina, SK**
 - **Dr. Wendy Cukier, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Ted Rogers School of Management at Toronto Metropolitan University; Founder and Academic Director, Diversity Institute; Academic Director of the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH); and Academic Research Director of the Future Skills Centre, Toronto, ON**
 - **Ashley Smith, Product Manager, SeedGrowth, Broadacre Insecticides and CP Licensing Canada, Bayer CropScience, Okotoks, AB**

2:00 – 2:30 pm

Coffee and Networking Break – Foyer 2,3,4 Sponsored by Bayer CropScience Inc.

2:30 – 3:00 pm

How to succeed in Male-Dominated Spaces

Mariah Moen, Director of Agriculture, Uniking Canada, Saskatoon, SK

Empowering women to advocate for themselves in agriculture - from sales and business to everyday life. How you can balance professionalism, family, mental health and career – Mariah will give you tips to navigate through all of this from her experience.

3:00 – 3:30 pm

Harvesting a mindset to thrive: simple strategies for long-lasting success in the agriculture option.

Trish Tutton, Mindfulness Teacher, Trish Tutton Speaker and Mindfulness Teacher, Canmore, AB

Soil is the foundation underneath it all. You might not see it day to day- but it determines EVERYTHING: yields, water retention, disease resistance, and long-term success.

No matter how good the seed is or how hard you work, depleted soil limits growth. A depleted MINDSET is the same. When your mindset is supported, just like the soil, everything grows with less effort (your career, business, skills, attitude AND resilience to the challenges you face).

3:30 – 3:45 pm

Closing Comments

