

FOCUS ON AGRICULTURE

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American Farm Bureau Federation

Personal Communication is the Key to our Future

By Ben LaCross

Never underestimate the power of personal communication. As farmers and ranchers, it's important that we communicate with consumers to build confidence in our products, with policymakers to help influence decisions that will affect our businesses and with each other to maintain a unified strength.

In this era of modern technology, sometimes it's easy to rely on text messaging, emailing or the Internet as a way of communicating with others. While all these methods are great and have their advantages, telling our story is not only limited to Facebook, Twitter and other tech tools. Sometimes, face-to-face time with consumers is just what is needed.

A couple of years ago while volunteering at a local food pantry in Michigan with other young farmers and ranchers, I found myself sorting food with several women who were also there doing community service. As we worked and chatted, one of the women noticed the Farm Bureau logo on my shirt. She asked if I worked for Farm Bureau Insurance. I told her no, that I was a young farmer, along with more than 30 of the other young people at the food pantry that morning.

The woman looked at me and said, "I didn't think there were any young farmers anymore!"

This comment gave me an opportunity to have a direct conversation about agriculture with someone who didn't know much about it. She learned that day that there are young farmers who are committed to producing safe, healthy and affordable food for consumers to enjoy. She left the pantry that day with a better understanding of where her food comes from.

Many times being an advocate for agriculture means talking to our neighbors and the people we come into contact with every day. We don't need to prepare for these occasions other than being willing to share our story. Encourage people to eat what you grow. I have no shame in this. We must give consumers a positive connection to what is on their plate.

As the national Young Farmers and Ranchers chair this year, it is my goal for young farmers to more effectively communicate with policy decision makers. With the farm bill debate looming in Congress, as well as many regulatory actions being decided, how we as young farmers and ranchers communicate will determine our future. Young farmers will have to operate under the laws and regulations passed today for a great part of our farming lives.

We in agriculture are all in this together. It is in all of our best interests to speak as a unified voice for agriculture, whether the topic is regulations on how I grow high quality fruit or if my neighbor can grow biotech grain, or special interest groups trying to tell farmers in another state how to raise their animals.

Communicating with each other is just as important as talking with consumers and legislators. We are only as strong as our weakest link. But working and communicating together, we are unstoppable.