



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

“Advocacy is Leadership”

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Midwest Pork Conference  
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January 31-February 1, 2012  
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Missouri Pork Expo  
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## ADVOCACY is LEADERSHIP

I recently attended an Advocacy and Leadership training sponsored by ELANCO. We learned leadership is influence and Advocacy is part of being a leader.

Farmers have always been leaders, whether it's among their peers or leading the next generation farmers, both grain and livestock, are an integral part of the American dream. Agriculture has made the United State of America great; however, there are those that wish to see conventional and even organic animal agriculture fold. We recognize these groups as PETA and HSUS. Agriculture is how we support our families and bring jobs in to rural economies. Farmers, we have a big role to play today. There is only 3% of the United States population feeding the remaining 97%, and these consumers want to know where their food is coming from and that we are doing a good job. Consumers still trust the American farmer. Sure you see the activist on nightly news or in the newspapers, but studies conducted in 2001 - 2010 show that 95-98% of people are buying non-organic foods. That's about 95% of people are either neutral or fully supportive of using technology to produce their food<sup>1</sup>. I encourage you to read *Making safe, affordable and abundant food a global reality*, by Jeff Simmons with ELANCO. It's packed with information that can be broken down and explained to the non-farmer. The paper can be found by going to this web address: [http://www.elanco.com/images/Three-Rights\\_White-Paper.pdf?path=index](http://www.elanco.com/images/Three-Rights_White-Paper.pdf?path=index)

I'm sure you're wondering where this author is going with this? **ADVOCACY**, the American public does want to know where their food is coming from; this is not something that we can continue to ignore. PETA and HSUS will and is telling the story of agriculture, especially animal agriculture. If we do not stand up and take responsibility for telling the story the American people will lose, they will lose the right to choose between conventional and organic agriculture, cost of food will rise, and people will go hungry.

So what is advocacy and how do I as a farmer become an advocate?

The Webster's Dictionary defines advocacy as the act or process of advocating or supporting a cause or proposal. Take a minute and think about what you could do to support a cause like agriculture? Did you think of getting up in front of large crowds, standing behind a podium, and lecturing on the science and benefits of agriculture? If you did, you are not alone.

This I how I once thought we needed to advocate for agriculture, and to some extent we still do. There are quieter every day and honestly less nerve racking ways to reach the public with our message. Remember the activist, although loud, make up only a very small percentage of the view of the America public. Be realistic in your advocacy. We probably won't be able to change the activist way of thinking, but we will be able to reach out to those moms and dads, college students, and working professionals like us who just want to make sure they are providing good tasting, wholesome, and affordable food to their families. And remember it takes all types of farmers to feed America; you will turn off your audience if you attack other styles of Agriculture. A conventional farmer should not attack organic farming; just explain why conventional farming methods are safe and wholesome. The same goes for organic farmers. We are fortunate to live in the United States of America where choices exist.

Advocacy can start at home by sitting down to a conversation with our friends and families that have moved away from agriculture and addressing their concerns about antibiotics in meat and milk. A simple explanation that milk is tested at the farms bulk tank, prior to being loaded in the tanker, and again at the plant, may make all the difference. The same for meat products, pork, poultry, and beef farmers follow withdrawal times before even sending animals to market, where a random sampling of these animals are done. These people want to feel good when they make choices to purchasing conventionally raised meat and grains that they are not hurting their families. Keep the science to a minimum and use words that they will understand, this is more of an emotional conversation. I know the scientist reading this may have just given an audible groan. As scientists we are logical and shy away from emotional explanations, but in this case we need to flex to our audience.

Another quiet form of Advocacy that is far reaching is through social media, and it's not just for the younger generations, you are never too old to learn. There are about 100 million active people on Twitter and 800 million active people on Facebook. By posting tweets on twitter a farmer in Central Illinois may find a follower in New York City, NY. Before Twitter there would have been no way of reaching this individual with the story of agriculture. Tweets are limited to 140 characters, but it's about tweeting something that will start a



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## Advocacy is Leadership

conversation. If the fashion designer in New York City reads the tweet and tweets back this is where the magic of every day advocacy starts. With smart phones a tweet can be sent from the field. Post a picture of a combine full of grain, or a sow with 14 suckling piglets with the caption "all in a day's work." You will need to go to [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) to sign up for an account and create a profile if you don't already have one.

Another type of social media is Facebook. Facebook is an invitation platform, making it more protected. Go to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) to sign up and create a profile. Privacy settings can then be modified so only those you choose to friend are able to see what you're posting. You can also block people from seeing what you're posting without them knowing. Wall post and pictures can also be added to Facebook.

As farmers we are leaders and it's time to take responsibility for telling the story of American agriculture. To do this we must start the conversations. People want to hear about the families that are producing their food. I challenge each and every one of us to take a look at our busy schedules and find a few minutes each day or week to become an Agriculture Advocate in any way that works best for us.

As Trent Loos said at this year's 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Carthage Swine Conference, "If you can get someone to say 'I've never thought about it that way,'" you've made an impact.

### Reference:

Simmons, Jeff. Making safe, affordable and abundant food a global reality. Elanco 2011.

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