

Top 5 Ways Young People Can Become Ag Advocates

Guest blogger - Kristeena Patsche

Ag Advocates

I often get asked why I decided to go into agriculture. Yes, I grew up on a farm but my thoughts were to become a nurse. It wasn't until I attended an agriculture leadership conference my senior year of high school (despite not wanting to go) that I realized how many negative things were being said about agriculture.

I was shocked. I was almost offended that someone would say those things about people just like my mom and dad.

Leaving the conference, my passion for what I wanted to do made a 180-degree turn. I was ready to be an advocate for not only agriculture, but farmers, just like my parents.

Having just turned 25 years old, sometimes the term advocating can be intimidating. I often question myself – why would anyone listen to me? I've learned to step back, remember the reason that sparked my interest and not let that word scare me.

Advocating revolves around having a conversation.

With that, here are the top five things that I ask of other young people in agriculture and what they can do to become an advocate.

1) Join a group.

Whether you are in high school, college or graduated, there are so many options to get involved. Joining a group or organization is a great way to learn more about agriculture and find your interests.

The best part about joining clubs or organizations is that you meet others with the same passion as you. It is sometimes scary going to a meeting and not knowing anyone but the earlier you can get involved, the better. The opportunities and experience you gain are unbelievable.

Once you graduate it is just as important to stay involved. Many of the county ag commodity organizations are looking for new volunteers or board members. This is a perfect way to learn from the “veterans” and these organizations would love perspectives from young people.

Also, don't be afraid to reach out to state organizations. Meeting and networking with leaders in agriculture is a great way to get your foot in the door and see how they got to where they are now.

2) Use social media as a platform.

Social media is a great way to connect with the non-ag community and have conversations about agriculture. It wasn't until a couple years ago that I realized social media is made for more than sharing every detail about my day.

One thing that I have done is created a professional twitter account to use for advocating. I realize that not all my friends want to see tweet after tweet about agriculture.

This doesn't mean I won't share certain things on my personal account or reply to anti-ag tweets. Everyone will have a different opinion on whether you should have a separate account but I find this is what works best for me.

The most important part of using social media is to never be afraid to have a conversation about agriculture. Whether you see a post with misinformation or someone questioning an agriculture practice, don't be afraid to respond. Just remember to do it respectfully instead of defensively.

Also, pictures and videos from the farm, an agriculture event or something you are in learning in class can go a long way. These all initiate a potential conversation.

Young people have the advantage of growing up tech savvy. It's time we use it to promote our industry.

3) Be ready to talk.

It doesn't matter where you are – be ready to *speak up and have a conversation*. My part-time job I work on weekends allows me to be around people continuously. I usually will overhear a conversation about something they saw on television or heard on the radio about agriculture and nine times out of 10, it has some sort of misinformation.

Take it upon yourself and speak up. Most of the time, they aren't saying those things to hurt agriculture but instead, that's the only resource they have had. Start the conversation with your own personal story. I find myself using the phrase, "On our farm..." quite often.

4) Listen

This is probably one that I struggle with the most. When you find someone that has a different view

than you, listen to their concern. In order to understand their apprehension, we have to hear them and be able to relate instead of attacking.

One tip that I was taught is to find the *commonality*. For an example, we all eat. We all want a safe, quality product. Relay that message but follow up with how you, your parents or neighbors ensure that happens.

5) Be yourself.

Advocating revolves around having a conversation. In order to have a meaningful, effective conversation, just be yourself. Use your own personal experiences and know IT'S OKAY if you don't know every answer. Being truthful goes a long way.

Being an advocate doesn't mean you have to be in front of hundreds of people talking about agriculture. It can be the littlest things from sharing a picture of your tractor ride to talking to someone at the county fair. With farmers being the minority, it takes *all of us*. We are all in this together – from young to old.