

Women in Agriculture: "Telling our Story"

Women in agriculture have always been important to the family farming business. One chief aspect of our farming businesses that isn't about markets, balance sheets, or profit and loss statements is the necessity of telling our story. I truly believe women have a special perspective in agriculture and we need to step up and share our farming stories.

Last February I had the privilege of speaking to Annie's Project in Mankato about how I tell my farming story. It was a fun evening where I talked with other women about my experiences in Social Media and encouraged them to find their niche in telling their story. I shared with them when I started to blog, it took me a long time before I thought of myself as a blogger. I went from an timid, insecure and "I don't think I can do this and no one will read it" blogger to having one of my blogs printed in the Minneapolis Star Tribune. In other words, if I can do this, you can too.

Why do we need to tell our story? Consumers truly want to know where their food comes from. And, frankly, they deserve to know. With only 1-2% of us who farm and with the average consumer 2-4 generations removed from the farm, it's important we bridge that connection between agriculture and consumers. If we aren't telling it, someone else is. In years past (before the Internet), consumers had no way to gather this type information, or at the very least, it was very difficult. The vast amount of information now available to us, literally in mere seconds, has changed our society. Consumers are now connected to people and information in ways we never dreamed of in pre-Internet days.

So how do you "tell your story?" First, the good news. You have many choices in how you want to tell it. The basic way is simply talking to family and friends. It can be talking to fellow church members or parents of your children's friends. It can be neighbors, your doctor, a business owner or a storekeeper. It can be people who you camp with, or someone you meet while on vacation or the taxi cab driver. In other words - it can be *anyone*.

Another important and fun way to tell our farming story is through social media. Social media gives us the advantage of reaching more people on a larger scale. My advice is to start slow and use your favorite social media program. If you love taking pictures or video, use Instagram and YouTube and show pictures/video of what you do on your farm. If you like the social interaction of friends and family, use Facebook or Twitter and share information and answer questions about your farm. Do you like writing? Start a blog and talk about your farm. The important part of using social media is the "social" part. Interact with your followers, share your farm experiences and answer their questions.

Sharing your story through social media opens a multitude of opportunities. Opportunities such as agricultural leadership. Agricultural leadership is not limited to officer positions in ag organizations, but rather, leadership is also using our voice through social media by participating in various on-line agricultural discussion groups. And these discussions are based on sharing what we do on our

farms and why we do it and in turn, we learn from others on their agriculture stories and perspectives. And through these interactions, you will develop friendships with some really important people in the ag world. To be honest, it's an awesome experience.

The opportunities really are limitless. Once you start sharing your story, you will be amazed at the opportunities that will come your way.

During a recent ag webinar, the phrase "*masses of communicators*" was used. In years past, agriculture relied on commodity organizations' leaders to be our voice. No more. Yes, our leaders are important but we need more than one voice. We need ALL of our voices.