

Top 7 Myths About "Big Ag"

Big Ag. You hear it all the time. But who is Big Ag? Everyone has their own opinion on what Big Ag is but, unfortunately, many of those assumptions are not correct. From a farmer's perspective, let me tell you what you need to know about "Big Ag."

MYTH: Big Ag = factory farms.

FACT: Critics of modern ag choose to use the word "Big Ag" intentionally because they don't want their readers to think about the people behind the farms. They only want readers to think modern agriculture is about uncaring, money hungry, greedy companies who raise as many animals as possible, in the least amount of space and with little to no attention in dirty hell holes. The fact is, modern farms are run and owned by family farms--98% of them to be exact. And these farm families do really care for the land and their animals. In fact, many of them will tell you they were "born to farm" and are truly blessed to be farmers.

Farms do look different than years ago. Using modern barns and new technology helps greatly reduce or eliminate many stressors. Stressors such as weather, proper nutrition levels, predators and animal social hierarchy.

MYTH: Big Ag doesn't care about the environment.

FACT: All livestock farms are required to develop a manure management plan. The plan requires farmers to secure enough land to apply the nutrient-rich manure. In fact, many farmers who do not own livestock, will pay livestock farmers for manure if it's available. Manure is an asset that is listed on my balance sheet. This is just an example of how valuable the manure nutrients truly are. Farmers use precise application methods determined by soil and manure tests to target appropriate nutrient levels that is applied to cropland. Farmers understand a targeted method is important as they don't want to waste the nutrients or don't want to risk not applying enough because the manure nutrients are next year's plant food. A great example of sustainability

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MYTH: Big Ag is killing small town America.

FACT: Agriculture is important to America and actually more important to rural America. Small businesses, excellent schools, life style and family values are all the result of a vibrant rural

America. There is a resurgent in many rural towns--many young family members are returning to their hometown to raise their families. Yes, rural towns are changing but the change can be embraced as a positive for communities.

MYTH: Big Ag requires farmers to play by "their" rules.

FACT: There is room for all types of farmers. Many farmers choose to grow their farms because of factors such as economies of scale, technology, expertise, knowledge and family members who want to return to the family farm. Frankly, we are just able to do a better job than years ago. Farmers are not required to work with larger companies--it's a choice they make. For those that don't want to work with larger companies, there is a growing market for locally grown, farmer's markets and niche markets.

MYTH: Big Ag is responsible for polluting our waters.

FACT: Water quality is important to farmers. A recent report on water quality from southwest Minnesota showed higher levels of phosphorous, nitrogen and E. Coli. It is true that nearly all waters in southwest Minnesota failed to meet all of [MPCA's](#) standards, but many of them are as clean today as they were in the mid to late 1800s. MPCA's standards are part of the problem in that they are poorly understood and in many cases unattainable. Nitrogen levels are one example. There is no science basis for the MPCA's acceptable levels.

A positive note from the very same report shows that long-term monitoring by MPCA (1963-2009) shows reductions in phosphorus levels and trends in sediment levels are down 58% from 1995 to 2010. This indicates that efforts by farmers and SWCDs to reduce erosion have been successful, and more recently efforts to manage nutrients more efficiently are working.

MYTH: Big Ag is opposed to buffer strips.

FACT: Untrue. Farmers realize the importance of buffer strips. Farmers just want to do a better job in determining the appropriate size and location of those buffer strips. Most farmers don't accept the haphazard one-size-fits-all solution. For example, in Minnesota, the governor proposed a standard 50' buffer strip on all waterways. Water quality is important to all of us, farmers included. We just need to be smart about how we achieve it.

MYTH: Big Ag is not concerned about sound science, but rather, it's all about the money.

FACT: This is almost laughable. Farming is all about science - we deal with it every single day. We work with veterinarians, agronomists and animal nutritionists who give us expert advice on how to

operate our farms. Farmers do need to see the "proof in the pudding" when regulations are being proposed as opposed to ideologic regulations. Famers want science and facts. Period.

Farmers, not Big Ag, is who grows the vast majority of the food. Farmers are families who want nothing better than to leave their farms in a better condition than when they started farming. I, as a farmer, live here too. We eat the same food we raise and grow, we drink the water and breathe the air. We truly do care about our environment.

Yes, the farming community can improve and we will - just like we have done for generations.

Yes, most of us rely on science and we are not ashamed of that.

Yes, our farms have changed. But our VALUES HAVE NOT CHANGED.

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