

2017, A Year of Winners and Losers in Agriculture

The last day of 2017. Sigh . . . It's good to reflect where the year started and where it ended on the farm and in agriculture in general. With that reflection, I realized there were some definite winners and losers in agriculture.

Let's take a look. Let's start with the losers since I like to end on a high note.

LOSERS

President Trump and NAFTA - I have to start with this one because if there is anything that causes me to lose sleep, this is it. If we [pull out of NAFTA and our markets go away](#), it will be a disaster for agriculture. As a pig farmer, we export 26-28% of our pork. Mexico is one of our major trade partners. I heard rumblings that Congress is looking at some sort of bailout program if the U.S. does withdraw from NAFTA. Let me just state--farmers do not want a bailout.

Let us do what we do well.

No one in the world produces pork as well as we do here in the U.S. I hold out some hope because President Trump is speaking at the American Farm Bureau National Conference. Would he show up if he decides to withdraw from NAFTA?????

Minnesota State Regulations - Let me just say, farmers are not against regulations. We ARE against regulations gone amuck. Farmers are overwhelmed with regulations in my state. We have the buffer law. The state is looking at regulations on how and when to mow road ditches and when and where we can apply nitrogen. Sometimes I feel these regulations are only for the 1% of farmers not doing what is right. Let's look at the buffer law. Instead of looking at each farm individually to make sure proper buffers are installed and they work as intended, the state chose to make a "blanket" measurement of buffers. There is no research that says the new buffer law will be effective. But what it does do is make people "feel better." In our county, we were over 90% compliant prior to the buffer law. Our county has now employed a person to monitor the buffers. Just. added. expenses. Geesh.

Animal Rights Organizations - These organizations are opposed to raising livestock animals. They promote a vegan agenda. Specifically, I am talking about HSUS, Mercy for Animals and a newer one, Direct Action Everywhere. Mercy for Animals recently took out an ad in the employment website, INDEED, looking for individuals who are interested in working for their organization by gaining deceitful and unlawful employment on "factory farms." Direct Action Everywhere thinks it's okay to trespass on a farmer's property and enter their barns. They also think it's okay to show up at meat packing facilities as animals are unloaded from semi trucks. I can tell you I have witnessed hogs being unloaded at these facilities and it's a very humane process. But we live in a society that has lost it's connection to where their food comes from and that's why these groups exist.

Markets - Commodity prices are low. And they have been all year long. [We just have a lot of commodity supplies on hand](#) and future projections show the same supply levels. Pork production is expecting an increase of about 10% in the coming year. On top of it all, we are competing in a global market so it's not just what we produce here in the U.S. On a personal level, we had a record crop in both corn and soybeans. The solution? More markets. Hence, why I am nervous about NAFTA.

Dicamba - Dicamba is a herbicide that can be applied to soybeans that are resistant to dicamba. Unfortunately, applying dicamba is a challenge because the herbicide has a tendency to drift outside of the property lines onto other farmers crops, thus, causing those soybeans damage. [New in 2018](#) are restrictions for Minnesota's farmers and how the herbicide is applied. Why is dicamba important? Because farmers need different "modes of action" which means farmers need to constantly change which herbicides they use to help reduce resistant weeds.

Health Insurance - Yes, this is not directly related to farming, but it does affect many, many farmers. Because we are self-employed, we need to buy our own health insurance. We noticed this year that we had more choices on health insurance (laws changed to allow coops to offer health insurance), but the bottom line it is the premiums are primarily based on age. Because of my age and my husband's (upper 50s and low 60s), our insurance premiums are going from \$1266 to \$1640 per month with a \$6500 deductible. Not joking. And I am afraid with the new tax reform bill, the premiums will continue to rise because there is the potential the pool will be smaller, which could very well increase our premiums. Don't get me wrong, I am NOT a fan of Obamacare. (In Minnesota, we had health care programs for everyone prior to Obamacare--the uninsured still had access to insurance.)

But really, *an almost \$400 monthly increase?* And with the current commodity prices, premiums take a bigger piece out of the pie. It seems we can't afford the insurance and can't afford not to have insurance. And I don't have an answer. It's just too complex. But it definitely made my Loser list.

And with the current commodity prices, premiums take a bigger piece out of the pie. It seems we can't afford the insurance and can't afford not to have insurance. And I don't have an answer. I wish I did. It's just too complex. But it definitely made my Loser list.

WINNERS

Biotechnology - We plant GMO corn and soybeans. There is no question in my mind the new biotechnologies contributed to a record crop. But I also need to give credit to Mother Nature. She was also friendly to us during the growing season. She put a little fear in us during harvest by delaying our start by 2 1/2-3 weeks. But in the end, she was kind and gave us a fairly long harvest season.

President Trump and Regulations - Farmers are thankful [WOTUS \(Waters of the U.S.\)](#) is getting relooked at. If the original WOTUS regulations would have taken effect, the EPA would have jurisdiction over the water puddles in our dooryard. Government overreach at it's finest. Again, farmers are not opposed to regulations, only over regulations.

Sonny Perdue (Secretary of Ag) - I must admit I do like our new Secretary of Ag (and who doesn't like someone with the name Sonny!). He gets us. And the reason he gets us is because Sonny was a farmer and a veterinarian. He has been in the trenches and understands agriculture. Now, how much pressure and clout does he have with President Trump?

Advocates - I do believe we are making positive advancements in advocacy. I am seeing more and more farmers and ag commodity organizations connecting with consumers. It's a slow process, but accumulatively, we are making progress. We just need to make sure farmers know they need to connect with consumers by sharing their stories--just talking about what they do on the farm and why.

Consumers - There is no better time in history than right now to trust our food supply. We have a safe and affordable food supply for consumers and as a farmer, it is truly a humbling responsibility.

Enjoy your food and think about the farmer that either grew or raised your food! We are so very proud to do so!



Save

Minnesota Farm Living

Connecting consumers with the farmers who grow their food
<http://www.mnfarmliving.com>

