

Let Your Voice Be Heard - "Day on the Hill"

Do you belong to any commodity groups? Groups such as Corn Growers, Soybean Growers, Pork Producers, Dairy, Beef or farm organizations such as Farm Bureau or Farmers Union? If so, you may have noticed that many of these groups participate in "Day on the Hill" events. I attended one recently with the Minnesota Pork Producers Association.

What is "Day on the Hill?"

A Day on the Hill allows farmer members of commodity or farm organization groups to meet with their respective representatives/senators. We talk about issues that affect us personally, agriculture in general or our farms. These meetings allow our representatives to hear concerns directly from us and not just from lobbyists. Don't get me wrong, lobbyists have a purpose but they truly love to hear specifically from their constituents.

What does a "Day on the Hill" look like?

Typically the commodity/farm groups meet ahead of time somewhere at the capitol or near the capitol. The commodity/farm organization leader speaks to bills that are before the legislature. Background information is given to the group so we can speak to how these bills affect us personally. These "background" sessions are very helpful because as farmers, it's difficult for us to keep abreast of what is happening at the capitol. In fact, you may even receive a cheat sheet to assist you during your visit. You may also be given some current farm facts that you can leave with your representative. Just like farmers who may not know everything going on at the capitol, our representatives don't know everything that affects our farms.

Time for the Visit

You will probably be split into groups based on who your representative is. For our first visit, we had five people. Please be dressed in business attire. Appointments are typically lined ahead of time. Don't be late, but also be prepared to wait. Our representatives are very busy. When it's time to meet with your representative, introduce yourself and shake their hand.

Now it's time to visit.

Depending on who your representative is will dictate which topics you will want to address. Through Minnesota Pork, here are just a few topic areas we talked about:

Truck Wash Exemption - Seeking to exempt on farm truck washing from the open-air swine basins. Truck wash basins are regulated by MPCA and are not comparable to open-air lagoon

systems. Extra regulations are not needed.

RFA Funding - Continued funding of the Rural Finance Authority which helps the Beginning Farmer program. We know it's very difficult for beginning farmers to start farming. This funding program will help.

Rural Mental Health - We support increased mental health counseling by hiring an additional counselor. The farming economy is tough right now, which leads to mental health issues. This is probably one of the top priorities for the ag sector currently.

MPCA Fee Increases - We don't support an increase in fees. MPCA is seeking an additional \$6.5 million in funding. What was truly eye-opening is how much Minnesota's Pollution Control Agency charges farmers (through fees) compared to neighboring states. Minnesota is **SIGNIFICANTLY** higher. I would like to see them do a more efficient job with the fees they already receive. Maybe just like we do on the farm?

Veterinary Diagnostic Lab Funding - This diagnostic lab is managed by the University of Minnesota and they are experiencing a \$500,000 shortfall. The diagnostic lab funding is very close (not physically, but rather to the services they provide) to our farm as we have been having some health problems with our pigs. We have sent numerous pig tissue samples to the lab for diagnosis. Only with a diagnosis can we treat the animals effectively.

We didn't discuss all the areas but we did talk about issues that affected us personally. It's those issues they want to hear. But perhaps just as important as the discussions is the fact that we took time out of our schedule to visit with them. *Buidling relationships*. They could also ask us questions about issues (which they did). And it's also good for them to know we are "watching" them. What they do matters. And lastly, it's a time for us to tell them *thank you*. They really do work hard for their constituents.

The Outcome

I know I don't attend enough of these "day on the hill" visits but I always learn something and I do believe our representatives learn something too. It's important that we be involved in our government because just sometimes (and we know from experience), government passes bills that will affect us in a negative way. And maybe not intentional. Sometimes people just don't know what they don't know. *That's why we need to be involved*. And we become a contact person for them if they have any questions.

I must admit that not all visits were as amicable as ours. We are very fortunate to live in an area where our representatives are very farm friendly. With gratitude, I say thank you to [Representative Bob Gunther](#) and [Senator Julie Rosen](#). We also stopped to say "hi" to Representative Rod

Hamilton. He was not our representative and we did not have an appointment, but he was thrilled to see us and as with the other two--very farm friendly. We simply said . . . **Thank you.** I get that is a challenge as the rural area is outnumbered by urban Minnesota. ***That's we need strong farm voices in Minnesota.***

I would love to hear about your experiences visiting with the people who represent you. Did you have a similar experience? Did you or they learn something with the visit?



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