

Why Farmers Need to Tell Their Story

The disconnect between farmers and consumers has never been greater. It seems every day there are numerous examples of just how disconnected they are. Perhaps a couple of current national situations shows the disturbing consequences of the disconnect and how it affects farmers here in the Midwest.

California Proposition 12

During the last election, the citizens of California voted on Proposition 12 and overwhelmingly approved it by a margin of 63% to 37%. Proposition 12 bans the sale of eggs and meat in which livestock are confined in areas smaller than a California specific measurement. It applies to livestock raised in both California and other states and goes into effect in 2020. As a result, farms that use individual gestation stalls for sows would be outlawed.

How does this California law affect farmers in southern Minnesota? Many of the sows are housed in gestation stalls and would not meet the new space requirements, therefore not allowed for purchase in California. The argument about the correct space requirements for sows has long been researched. First and foremost, there is no perfect sow housing. Each method, whether it's group housing or [individual gestation stalls](#) each has its own advantages and disadvantages. People can be reassured in that both housing methods are approved by the American Association of Swine Practitioners and the American Veterinarian Medical Association. Farmers covet and utilize their veterinarian relationship as their animal care experts. The determining factor on animal welfare relies on the people who take care of them.

One must also wonder why these types of questions are on ballot initiatives. Does the average Californian citizen have enough farming knowledge and expertise to vote on these initiatives?

North Carolina Nuisance Lawsuits

Another area that should cause the farming community great concern are the numerous egregious nuisance lawsuits against family farms occurring in North Carolina. Anti-agriculture activist groups have launched baseless attacks against North Carolina family farmers by posting numerous billboards along highways.

Recently, out-of-state lawyers came to local farming communities and signed hundreds of people up to sue hog farming neighbors for being a nuisance (“offensive odors”). The Texas trial lawyers asked fellow North Carolina neighbors to: *‘Sign here, we’ll file the lawsuits, we’ll pay the bills, and if we win you’ll get part of the money.’*

All farms that have been sued have complied with all regulations. The result of these lawsuits were millions of dollars awarded. In fact, during a North Carolina trial in August, 2018, over \$470 million were awarded in odor nuisance damages against one hog farmer—all while following all regulations. State punitive caps have limited the actual monetary awards but the lawsuits have destroyed family farms.

So why is this a concern for farmers in Minnesota? If this can happen in North Carolina, why not Minnesota? Minnesota and North Carolina are ranked two and three in pork production in the U.S., only behind Iowa. Farmers in the Midwest can’t rest on their laurels thinking this will never happen to them.

With both of these troubling events and what appears to be efforts, intentional or not, in shutting down America’s farmers. I can’t help but think, “where exactly do we want our food to come from?” Do we want U.S. farmers to raise our food or will we depend on foreign food imports?

How Do We Fix the Problem?

How do we fix these problems? What do farmers need to do moving forward? What do consumers need to do? A good first start is for farmers to tell their story and having consumers reach out to those that raise their food.

So how do farmers tell their story? It's actually fairly simple. Farmers need to talk about what they do and why they do it. They need to be honest, genuine, and transparent. And they need to talk to everyone. Farmers need to realize It's okay to show the struggles right along with the successes on their farms. "Telling their story" should be part of their annual business plan. [If farmers want to continue raising food here is the U.S., it's paramount they start telling their story.](#)

Consumers also have a responsibility to reach out to those who grow their food if they have questions. Google University is just not as reliable as farmers themselves. If both farmers and consumers communicate with each other, many of these issues can be avoided.

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