

Should We Make Ag Education Mandatory In Our Schools?

As I sit here, catching a breath from the harvest we just completed, I can't help but reflect on some uncomfortable thoughts I have been having. To be honest, I am exhausted. And I am not talking physical exhaustion, but mentally exhausted. And when you reach the end of this post, you will understand why I am asking whether we should make ag education mandatory in our schools.

Let me lay the groundwork.

Raising Food Is Hard

Raising food right now is hard. Like reeeaaallyyy hard. We just finished our harvest and saw a significant drop in yields (corn and soybeans) here in south-central Minnesota. I am going to estimate probably about 30% down. Combine that with low commodity prices—there's not much to smile about. And the hogs have their own issues with viruses such as [PRRS](#) and low prices. Much of the low prices can be attributed to the tariffs, where we lost major markets, and higher yields in other parts of the country.

The weather this past growing season has been something we haven't seen in a very, very long time. It started in April with a 20-inch snowfall and a winter that did not want to leave. We mudded the crop in. All of it. We struggled with planting in a timely manner. We struggled with applying fertilizers and herbicides. And it rained. And rained. And rained. All summer long. Numerous drowned out spots in the fields and water-stressed plants. And the rain continued into fall. We had an early snow in October to remind us who was really in charge. I don't know one farmer that did not say, "this year just. needs. to. end."

Elections

So I am not going to talk about the general election, but I do want to talk about [Proposition 12 in California](#). Proposition 12 restricts how livestock animals are raised. It not only restricts California farmers, but also the entire U.S. farming population. Right now, when Proposition 12 is enacted, Californians are not able to purchase pork that comes from my farm. The biggest issue is the banning of gestation stalls. Check out "[Why We Use Gestation Stalls](#)" if you are wondering why they are used.

Here's the part I just don't understand. Why was this put on a ballot? With no offense, what do people in Los Angeles know about midwest farming practices? It would be like me voting on whether a medical doctor should use a certain medical procedure. I don't want to make that decision. I am not qualified to make that decision. That is why we have doctors and why they have

the education/training they do. Farming should be no different. Make no bones about it, the end result will be higher food prices in the state of California. And, yes, there is a population base that will probably not even notice—those that have plenty of exposable money. Those that will suffer will be the low-income people. And my heart goes out to those people – the people no one listens to.

Why Do I Advocate?

Which brings me to advocating—making connections with consumers, sharing what we do on the farm and why. I am going to be honest, I am mentally tired. With the long, hard year we have had, coupled with the lack of understanding of what we do day in and day out. The sacrifices we make. The long hours. The struggles. Farmers are not looking for a pat on the back or a #thankafarmer hashtag. Farmers also don't want people, whose closest connection to farming is shopping at their local grocery store, to think they know more about farming than farmers who stress over sick animals and how they can make them feel better or farmers who watch their crops deteriorate, knowing it's completely out of their control.

Are we, the less than 2%, making a difference? After this week, I can't help but think we are losing the battle. Thoughts of packing up and holing up in some forest somewhere just to get away from it all crossed my mind more than once. But, after posting my struggles with my followers, I received some wonderful comments that made me think maybe I can dig deep, muster a little more and keep going. Comments such as:

Nicole Anderson Peterson Galatians 6:9-10 "So let us not grow tired of doing good, for if we do not give up we will reap the harvest. So then, as often as we have the chance, we should do good." Don't give up!



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Nahema B'dance I'm not a farmer, but I do work in the applied sciences. So after the 2016 election, out of alarm, I started following various pro-science groups. Then yada-yada, I found my way to you and Farm Babe. Now I am pro-GMO. I happily buy the nonorganic dairy and (and often frozen - egads!) veggies. So, you and Farm Babe and several others made a difference in my life. Don't give up!



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Debra Johnson Do not give up! You are a beacon for the rest of us and have such a talent for writing!



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Virginia Berger A couple of years ago, a non-farm friend thanked me for sharing FB posts about farming/food facts. It totally came out of the blue. So hang in there, you never know who's listening.

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Shari Lynn Farmers need to educate kids! I have a feeling the older generation is to far gone. I have helped spread the message to some people. We will keep trying

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Ellen Hatfield-Nicholson Please, don't be discouraged. Yes, it is frustrating, infuriating but we have to carry on. You never know the affect of your words and actions. Just have faith that you are spreading the light. Thank you for your posts. I never cease to be informed, educated and touched by your Work.

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essa Zaluckyj Even if just 1 person learns something about farming, then its worth it.

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Nicholson I know, some days you wonder how you tell your story so they truly understand...but we h trying...

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ard Heisler The voices against Ag are loud and overwhelming but imagine how much worse it would be if we weren't speaking up.

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Robert Learmont It does make a difference, and you are not wasting your time. You cannot make someone care, but if they learn enough, they will care.

I look back to when I came up home here for our Itasca County fair - I was disheartened when our demolition derby was cancelled for weather, and there were so many angry people saying that it was the only thing worth going to. So few people use it as a forum to discuss things that matter - my dad was in the hort building taking with a local schoolteacher / FFA guy about ag education. People really need to understand that it is serious when the last two dairy farms in our county have gone out of business in the last year, etc etc, but they do not know enough to care.

Unfortunately there may be a generation that we lose - a generation that thinks milk comes from a carton, that thinks electricity comes from that plug in the wall, that thinks gasoline comes from a pump - but the more we can reach about where things really come from, the more future generations will be able to care.

I really don't know where I am going with this. But we need people like you advocating for ag (and we need similar people in many other industries too).

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Comments like these were a breath of fresh air, which I badly needed. I am human. I have struggles. I love what I do but it can be so disheartening some days. Which brings me to this point – there is another option to help with educating our population. I believe part of the answer is ag education in our schools.

Ag in the Classroom

And why do we need ag education in the classroom? I am passionate that people need to understand where their food comes from. And what better way to start addressing this than the classroom. There are [programs available where schools](#) can incorporate an “ag-based” lesson into their curriculum. Just think about having a hands-on math lesson, estimating and counting pumpkin seeds or measuring the circumference of a squash. Just think if we can have students who are ag literate, we can maybe eliminate some of the issues and struggles we have today. We don't know who these students will be when they enter their adult world. Maybe that one connection they had in school will make a difference in how they perceive an issue that relates to their food or their world. Or maybe another ag connection that will open a world to them about wanting to be part of agriculture as they enter college or the job world. Or maybe they will be our next governor and president. Wouldn't it be great to have leaders that understand agriculture? Something we so desperately need, not only in our state, but across the U.S.

Farmers are trying to reach out to our communities, but there are just so few of us. And you can't believe how hard it is to know that as we try and connect with communities, sharing what we do and why, that we have people who are making decisions for us that don't understand our world. I can only dream of a world where advocacy is not needed because people have a good understanding of agriculture and "get" farmers.

I still have hope. I still have passion. I will continue to put one foot in front of the other.

I have no other choice.

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