

## Advocating for the Beef Community (Part 2)



I took a quick trip to Petit Jean Mountain last week to visit with other Arkansas Young Cattlemen about becoming better leaders in our community. Daren Williams from NCBA came down and shared a bit about the MBA program and gave tips on media and consumer relations.

As members of the beef community we have been facing controversy for quite some time, from several angles. Consumers want to know more about us, our practices, and that we are working to address their concerns. If consumers have a question, it is a topic of concern. Grassroots advocacy is one of our best methods to approach these concerns; meaning each individual needs to share their story.

Story telling always has been, is, and always will be our most effective method of communication. And consumers view individual farmers as a trusted source for information. This is why blogging and community outreach are some of our most important tools when it comes to advocacy.

It all starts with knowing what message we have to share. Consumers want to know the *what* and the *how* - What do we care about and how are we capable of addressing these things. Consumers are not with us 24/7, so unless we share our story they will not learn more about us.

*We need to let consumers know that we care about the safety of our food supply.* In doing this we need to drop the us vs them mind-frame. We're not 2% producing food for 98%. Rather, we are 2% producing for 100%. Let our audience know we are consumers too. We produce food for ourselves and our families and care just as much about food safety as them.

*We need to let consumers know we care about animal welfare.* Not only is animal care *not* an option in food safety, but we see it as an obligation. This food ends up in our freezer, our work impacts not only our bottom line, but animal health as well. We set standards for ourselves and must follow these standards better before someone else steps in and sets them for us.

We need to let consumers know we care about our environment. Our environment is not only our livelihood, but future generations will also be dependent upon these same resources. Cattle producers are sustainable. Farms that have been operating on the same ground for more than a century are proof of that. But we're not defending the status quo here. We are making constant progress to reduce our impact on the land and we need to lead by example in these efforts. Each year we are producing more with less.

We need to let consumers know we care about our health. Our health is influenced by what we eat, just like every other consumer out there. Only difference between us and most, is that we are producing the beef. So naturally we have a vested interest in our work. Beef is a part of healthy diet and we need to familiar with this information so we can *sell* our product when the conversation comes.

If you even made it to this point in the post, you may be asking how you'll ever use this information. It's not all about knowing the facts (actually let's avoid spouting facts or bragging about our work), but more about knowing what topics are relevant and will resonate with consumers. These topics just brush the

surface of the stories we have to share with consumers, but I hope they'll give you an idea of where to start. I gave you the “what” now you need to give your own “how” and that’s where sharing your own story comes into play.

I have at least one more part to this short-series from my time with Daren Williams. In the next post I'll share a bit about how to communicate our story and tips on sharing with the media.

In the previous two posts ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)), I have discussed tips from my discussion with Daren Williams, Director of Communications with NCBA. Story telling is the most effective method of communication and we have a responsibility to communicate our story of production agriculture to the world.

In Part 2, I gave a challenge to create a 30-second elevator speech. How did you do? Maybe you're actually in an elevator, or more likely in line at the Wal-Mart register. A conversation comes up and the other leaves a window of opportunity for you to give a plug for yourself and agriculture. What would you say? It is important to have something in mind. Mine would be something simple, along the lines of “I come from a family of Arkansas cattle ranchers who raise the beef that ends up on your plate.” If it looks like someone who may be a social media user, I may add “I also help farmers and ranchers learn to use Facebook and Twitter to bring farm life to town.”

Starting the conversation is only the first step. Whether the conversation be in a grocery store or in front of a media reporter, you have to keep a specific message in mind. Who is the audience? What questions will be asked? Take time to write down any questions that may be asked in that situation. Keep in mind the message you want to convey. Will your message be relevant or resonate with the audience? Keep your message simple and trimmed to two or three key points. During media interviews think in soundbites and headlines that will be easy to use in a news story.

*“It's always a risk to speak to the press; they are likely to report what you say.”*  
–Hubert H. Humphrey

The conversation includes more than just your message. The words you say can have an impact on how well the message is received. Groups appealing to consumer emotions are good at painting a picture with using words, and this is something agriculture needs to be observant of as well. Avoid industry lingo when talking with non-Ag consumers. Words like *producer* or *industry* may better be replaced with *farmer* or *community*. Notice I used “Beef Community” in the post title. Does it paint a different picture compared to “Beef Industry” for non-Ag consumers?

Be careful when using education, facts, and statistics. Remember, consumers trust farmers and ranchers as individuals. They are looking for our stories of food production, not a walking book of statistics and definitions. It is important to know the nutritional power of beef (provides 10 essential nutrients, provides 50% of daily protein in one serving, or 29 lean cuts), but if I want to know these facts, I will make an effort to look em up. It is ok to work them in as a part of your message, but don't make them your message.

Whatever your message, however you communicate your message, be passionate about it, make it your personal story, and have fun making those connections. If you are truly passionate about being a part of the beef community, in front of a camera or in line at the grocery, sharing your story should come easy.

What did you take from this short-series of posts about advocating about the beef community?