

A Time For Speaking Out

Farmers, Ranchers
Are Increasingly
Being Recruited For
Advocacy Roles

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

Farmers and ranchers, as a whole, tend to like quiet lives. They're not much into politics and would rather leave the lobbying to farm organizations like the South Dakota Farm Bureau or Nebraska Cattlemen.

But increasingly, agricultural producers are being called into advocacy to protect their way of living and doing business. Those who refuse threaten to have their rights taken away by lawmakers who aren't educated on how their decisions can affect citizens who are involved in agriculture.

"When most people think of influencing regulation, they really think of lobbying," said Amalie Lipstreu, policy

"Personal stories are the single, most effective tactic. ... Personal stories, plus why the issue matters to you."

AMALIE LIPSTREU

program coordinator for the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association in Columbus, Ohio, during a farmer advocacy training webinar held in September.

But she said advocacy is just as vital to shaping agricultural policies.

"Democracy is not a spectator sport," Lipstreu said.

Advocacy is the active promotion of a cause or principle, she explained. Unlike lobbying, advocacy does not have to involve confrontation or conflict, though it does include actions that lead to a specific goal.

There are a variety of advocacy strategies, from talking one-on-one with politicians, testifying in state legislature and litigation to educating community groups, hosting speakers or independent film showings, and writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper. Advocacy also includes attending rallies, blogging or even just being on the regulations team of a local Natural Resource District or another agency. Just about any activity that is done to promote a certain cause is included in advocacy, Lipstreu said.

With today's media-saturated age, law- and policy-makers — not to mention any reader, listener or viewer of messages online or through traditional media outlets — are bombarded with communications advocating for one thing or another.

"While advocacy is getting louder, it's not necessarily getting more effective," Lipstreu said, who recommended that farmers interested in advocacy have the most sway with lawmakers simply by making phone calls or sending personal emails to lawmakers.

"Personal stories are the single, most effective tactic," she added. "Personal stories, plus why the issue matters to you."

Politicians respond best to people they have a relationship with, Lipstreu said, so she also suggests advocates take the time to not only thoroughly research the issue they want to promote, whether that be boycotting the construction of a pipeline or protecting crop subsidies, but also to research what issues are important to their state



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Commentary

Winter Is Near; Take Time To Rest And Reflect

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

I finally turned on the heat this morning. I woke up to a chilly 65 degrees in the house. Now, I know that some of you may consider this quite reasonable, but for my arthritis, this is much too cold for me! I checked the temperature outside, and it was a cool 36 degrees at 7:30 a.m. There was even frost sparkling on my west windows. I regretfully told my children to pull out their winter coats to wear to school.

Summer is over.

The corn fields around us have all been harvested. The leaves are nearly all gone from our trees. The squirrels are en masse on our front yard, feasting on the thousands of walnuts in our black walnut grove. The chickens have begun to molt, and the kids' 4-H rabbits are grow-



Rita
BRHEL

ing their winter pelts.

My parents, who graze their rams on our pastures, came yesterday to load up the rams. Our pastures are just about spent for the year. The rams were so eager to find better

forage that they gladly loaded the trailer, quite a change from their typical reluctance to even change paddocks.

The mornings are difficult to wake up to. It's so dark at 7 a.m. that the kids think I'm waking them up in the middle of the night, groaning and begging to be left

alone so they can sleep. I keep telling them, just a few more days and the time will change and then we should be waking up in the light of dawn again.

I was surprised to see the frost on the windows this morning. It heralds that soon I'll be breaking frozen poultry and rabbit waters, a ritual that will go on every day until next spring's thaw. It's a ritual that no one looks forward to, and one that rules our weekend plans, including around holidays as we need to be sure we're gone visiting friends and family no longer than what's needed to be sure the animals are well-fed and watered. This means no overnight trips and any day trips need to be finished in time to drive back and get home before sundown.

But our lifestyle is worth this inconvenience. We enjoy our ani-

mals and eggs and family farming lifestyle, so that the livestock's needs must dictate our schedule a bit in the winter is a small price to pay for what we receive in return.

I like winter for its coziness. I like summer for its warm weather and the ample time we can spend outside, but in the winter, it is nice to have the family come together, cuddle on the couch for a movie, eat chili and drink hot cocoa, and play board games.

I don't like winter for its tendency to freeze livestock waters and because the chickens stop laying eggs for a time. But nothing is perfect, and overall the positive outweighs the negative. Plus winter is only temporary. Give us six months, and we'll be excited to see the first dandelions popping out of the ground.

I don't like to see the pastures

empty, the sheep gone. But the grass needs rest. Overgrazing does nothing good for a pasture.

Now that winter is near, it is time to rest and reflect. This year, my oldest daughter had an extraordinarily successful first year of 4-H. We added a new paddock to our pasture, and were able to support a higher stocking rate, mostly due to the very abundant June rains. The live bird auction ban, due to the Avian Influenza outbreak, put a kink in things, but we were still able to sell quite a few laying hens and ducks through private sales, and our farm-fresh egg sales bounced up in response to the bird flu news. Our garden was productive, though our pumpkins suffered from vine borers. Our trial at a milkweed plot for monarchs went well.

Overall, the year was a good year.

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