



Discussion Topic

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A monthly resource for the Community Action Groups of Michigan Farm Bureau

QUESTIONS

1. List a few of the most common false impressions people have about agriculture and discuss how to set the record straight.
2. What can your community action group do to reverse negative perceptions and “put a face” on agriculture?
3. Develop an image you believe farmers should be identified with. Overall-wearing, tobacco-chewing hard worker? Suit-and-tie professionalism? Describe him/her from head to toe.

Agriculture’s image: What should it be?

In an age when ignorance of agriculture among the food-consuming public has reached dumbfounding levels, many agriculture organizations have found themselves spending their resources reacting to and correcting misinformation.

Mainstream media portrayals of farming nearly always contain gross errors, and it doesn’t help when anti-farming special interest groups try to pull themselves up by putting farmers down.

In a nutshell, agriculture has an image problem.

Even when there is no truth to accusations against agriculture, farming, at least according to four Michigan ag groups, needs to polish that image.

In response to that need, the Michigan Ag Council was formed last year. The partnership between Michigan Farm Bureau, GreenStone Farm Credit Services, the Michigan Soybean Promotion Committee and the Corn Marketing Program of Michigan developed and launched the Power of Green campaign, which reveals facts about Michigan’s second-largest industry through posters, brochures and theatre spots. It also has begun county-specific campaigns through theatre advertising, radio broadcasts and full-page print advertising focusing on local people who produce the food.

“The ads are formed around local farmers,” said Dennis Rudat, an Ag Council leader and director of Michigan Farm Bureau’s Information and Public Relations Division. “They put a face on the issues for people who might not even know a farmer, but are having their opinions formed by misinformation from anti-farming special interest groups with a social agenda.”

Originally formed to counter environmental misinformation, the Council has grown to develop educational materials for classrooms, and is expected to have the Michigan Pork Producers Association, and the Michigan Milk Producers Association in the fold soon.

“One of the nice things about the Council is that there is no staffing,” Rudat said. “The partners have put up all the money, and individual staffs have developed all the materials and paid for campaign costs. The Council does no political lobbying. Its lone purpose is to promote agriculture.”

Soon, Rudat said, the Council hopes to begin working with a major retailer to include pictures of local producers at point-of-purchase advertising displays.

“We need to make sure consumers know who grows their food to counter lack of public knowledge and the disconnection many people have between farmers and food,” Rudat said.

For more information about the Michigan Ag Council, visit miagcouncil.org