

Opinion

THE NORTON
TELEGRAM

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Farmers, ranchers: Tell your story!

Insight
John Schlageck

Each day, farmers and ranchers pull on their boots, roll up their sleeves and go to work outside rural communities across Kansas. They perform a litany of chores — feeding and doctoring livestock, cultivating their crops, pulling maintenance on machinery, paying bills — you name it and farmers and ranchers do it.

While all of these activities are necessary, agricultural advocacy has become a farmer and rancher's most important chore. Farmers and ranchers have an obligation to provide the public with an understanding of their profession.

Never has it become more important to help consumers understand how important agriculture is to the well being of our economic future.

Without continuing success in the farming and ranching sector, consumers will be in danger of losing the high-quality, affordable food so many expect and take for granted.

How do farmers help consumers understand their profession?

It begins with the commitment of farmers and ranchers to tell their side of the story whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself. Whether you talk to grade-schoolers, service clubs or state legislators, remember to practice the art of relationship building between rural and urban, between agricultural producers and consumers of agricultural products.

When you have an opportunity to talk about production agriculture, do just that — talk about agriculture. Leave the other so-called “hot” topics of the day alone. Let someone else talk about them.

With less than two percent of our population engaged in food production, do not miss an opportunity to tell your story. If you are asked to comment about a recent election, talk about it with an agricultural flavor.

Talk about how you believe your elected official will be able to work with you to make sure our state and nation makes energy development, rural transportation and finding new markets agriculture's top priorities.

Give people a glimpse into your profession — a subject that affects your bottom line and one that affects the well being of your family, their families — everyone. It's easier than you might think to initiate a conversation about farming with your urban cousins.

Begin with a common denominator when talking to city folks. Start by discussing with them the fertilizer they buy

for their gardens is no different from what you, as a farmer, put on your crops. The rose dust, herbicide or insecticide used to control scab, crabgrass or mosquitoes is similar to the plant protection chemicals you use.

Sometimes common ground revolves around nutrition. A good analogy could be the parallel between a person's need for health food and a plant's need for a well-balanced diet.

It's easy to move from nutrition to some of the more difficult challenges facing agriculture. Topics on everyone's mind today include safe drinking water, availability of credit and fiscal responsibility.

Today, many people are concerned about chemical run-off into rivers, lakes and streams. As a farmer you cannot afford to overuse these expensive chemical products.

Tell them that. Let them know you, more than anyone else, are concerned about the land where your family lives and works.

Public understanding of how a modern farmer runs his/her operation is only half the challenge. Perhaps equally important is the need to be sensitive to the concerns of the community.

Remember that people, most of them living in towns or cities, are the ones who call for regulations and new laws. It is this public that will enforce them.

In the end, ironically, it is the public who will suffer if the laws have a negative effect on our food production and consumption system.

Tell your story — the story of agriculture. No one else is going to. An employee of Boeing or Frito Lay is not going to talk about farming and ranching when they have an opportunity to speak to the public or the media.

Let consumers know the value of food. Tell them how you go about producing the healthiest, best tasting food anywhere in the world. It's a story only you can tell and tell well.

This is your livelihood. You are food producing specialists. You must tell your story.

(John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.)

(e-mail)

To... the Northern Valley Lady Huskies, on your conference basketball tourney title. *(called in)*

To... **Steve Cummings**, on your Geography Bee victory. We hope you make it to state! *(e-mail from classmates)*

(To submit a name or names, simply e-mail tom.d@nwkansas.com, call 877-3361, fax 877-3732, mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave 67654 or drop by the office. No charge. Birthdays and anniversaries also accepted. Thanks for you continuing input. - td)



To... **all area Girl Scouts**, good luck with your annual cookie sales. *(e-mail)*

To... **First State Bank**, on your inaugural of Sen. John McCain into your “GALLERY of Also-Rans.” *(called in)*

To... **Norton High's** Scholars Bowl Team, on your league championship!

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STAFF



*Congratulations to
President
Barack Obama
our nation's
44th President.
January 20, 2009.*

May the hand of God guide you
through the challenges ahead. -td

Family reunion talks result of surprise party

We managed to pull off a “semi” surprise birthday party for my brother, Bob. He knew an after-church reception had been planned. What he didn't know was his Kansas brothers and sister would be there. Our sister, Kathryn, in New York couldn't make it, but she sent her love. It was so much fun to see each other.

It was our first time together since our brother, Don's funeral. When we lined the “boys” up for their traditional group picture, there was a big gap where Don should have stood.

Bob's two daughters, Sharon and Jennifer (Ginger) drove in from Chicago. We came to realize that we had not seen them since our mother's funeral 11 years ago. That's too long. That realization is what prompted a discussion about a family reunion.

We're looking ahead to a date in 2010 so everyone can plan vacations in advance. We already have the venue in mind. Now, we just need to decide if we'll do our own cooking or let the staff do it for us. I'm voting for a split: we'll do breakfast and lunch, let the staff do dinner. Dick's wife, Donna, is the ringleader and I'll be her No. 1 assistant.

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



The possible number is staggering. Six remaining Kelley kids; five spouses/friends; 26 grandchildren; countless great-grandchildren; and innumerable great-great-grandchildren.

I don't want to wait for another funeral to see everyone again.

-ob-

My sister-in-law, Donna Kelley's stepmom, Eva, fell Friday morning and broke her hip. She was taken by ambulance to Hays for surgery Saturday morning. Surgery was postponed until Sunday morning and Donna got a call that Eva had suffered a heart attack after the surgery. Donna and two of her sisters plus Eva's granddaughter are staying with her until Wednesday.

Eva has been Donna's other Mom for many years and I've joined their family for lots of Thanksgiving or Christmas

dinners. She always made me feel welcome. While family was gathered in the waiting room, I learned something about Eva I never knew. She is deathly afraid of water.

Her son, Dennis, said when he was a little boy his dad wanted to take him fishing. Eva said, “He can go fishing — just don't let him get close to the water.” We all had a good laugh.

-ob-

Before I left to go to Bob's party, I baked Jim a three-layer German chocolate cake. It was a cake mix so don't give me too much credit. Anyway, I called him late Saturday night and asked what he had eaten for supper. Cake and a glass of milk was his answer.

Sunday afternoon as we were leaving McPherson I called him again to see how he was doing. He informed me he had eaten cake for breakfast. He said it had also been his late night snack the night before, too.

“I don't care if I don't see another piece of cake for quite awhile,” he concluded.

I guess that means I'll have to cook a real meal tonight.

Tacos it is!

Oath administered, now the work begins

This past week I had the honor of being sworn in as a member of the Kansas Senate. I was proud to have my wife, Kay, and my Mother along with one of my sisters, five of my children, and 10 of my grandkids standing so proudly in support.

-so-

Many challenges face our state, and that will demand honest solutions. This funding problem didn't happen overnight, and will definitely be a long time fixing. Spending reductions must be fair and must include all parts of the budget. The unavoidable spending cuts will be hard to do, but they must be implemented. We must make sure there is minimum disruption to Kansans who rely on state services. We must act swiftly and decisively in making these reductions.

The Kansas Legislature needs to make adjustments in its spending habits to fit within the revenues of this great state. There will no doubt be a lot of finger pointing and “I told you so” remarks, but in the end I would hope that the final legislative actions will best serve all Kansans.

-so-

The past eight years has been a proud and humbling experience as I strive to serve the people of Kansas. I've enjoyed the interaction with my constituents, and I respect the comments I receive. Now, more than ever, I need your advice, prayers, and feedback on all issues.

-so-

I have a new secretary this year and hope you will take the time to contact her and meet her. I was fortunate to have had Mary Rowson the past six years, and I be-

Senate Doings Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer



lieve my new secretary, Judy Crapser, will be very capable and reliable, as well.

-so-

Budget: Governor Kathleen Sebelius presented the annual State of the State address on Monday, Jan. 12. She presented her budget Tuesday, Jan. 13.

Senate Bill 23, the Governor's rescission bill, for FY 2009 was introduced in the Senate Ways and Means Committee on Tuesday, Jan. 13. Hearings for SB 23 took place. The committee has begun working the bill and it may be up for floor debate this week.

Carbon Tax and Cap-and-Trade Policies: The Joint Committee on Energy and Environmental Policy met on Tuesday, Jan. 13 to discuss Carbon Taxes and Cap-and-Trade Policy options. Moderated by Sen. Carolyn McGinn, panelists Amy Blankenbiller with The Kansas Chamber; Brad Harrelson with Kansas Farm Bureau; Nancy Jackson with The Climate and Energy Project; Tom Thompson with Sierra Club; and Woody Moses with Kansas Cement Council, discussed the impact, benefits, and limitations of such policies and taxes.

The Kansas Legislature is not planning on taking action on the Carbon Tax or Cap-and-Trade Policies in the near future,

but discussion is expected to increase at the Federal level once President-elect Barack Obama takes office.

Floor Action: This week the Senate passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 1601, the Joint Rules for the House and Senate. The Resolution sets the major deadlines for the legislative session. However, the House of Representatives has yet to vote on SCR 1601. As a result, important dates and deadlines for the session have not been confirmed.

The governor's proposed budget is a failure of leadership. It does not offer a way out of the state's current financial problems. Even if adopted as presented, the state's budget still would not balance in the short-term, the long-term imbalance in the budget would not be corrected, and the governor would leave office with budget deficits as far as the eye could see. Kansas needs a more-responsible approach that will actually address the problem, not just patch over it.

And the ultimate irony: The governor's own budget projections show her leaving office with \$6.1 million in the bank (ending balance) for the FY 2011 budget. That figure is about half of the \$12 million that Governor Graves left at the end of his term of office — an amount that Governor Sebelius repeatedly criticized when she began her first term as governor. Under this budget, the governor would leave the state in a worse financial position than she found it.

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