

Exploring Agricultural Values: A Workshop on Different Agricultural Values for College Students who are Conducting Agricultural Literacy Activities

Introduction

America has split into differing agricultural value groups which some may broadly describe as conventional (i.e., large-scale production practices) and nonconventional (i.e., small-scale, organic) agriculturalists as well as consumerists. These groups have viewpoints, which can cause conflict. This divide has grown as the population has become more diverse and urbanized. Academia and agricultural leaders as a whole recognize the need to educate the general public on what today's agriculture represents. We have several College of Agriculture Sciences programs which focus on delivering agricultural literacy for the citizens of Colorado. Quite a few students in CSU's College of Agriculture Sciences volunteer to work with these agricultural literacy programs. While they typically enjoy this engagement with the general public, they also reported negative and even hostile interactions from people who did not agree with their agricultural values. In response to these concerns we have designed a workshop to address the difficulties of talking to people who have different sets of agricultural values. The workshop was designed to reduce and even mitigate the negative and hostile interactions our student volunteers were occasionally encountering.

Procedures

The major emphasis of the workshop was on how to find common talking points with people from differing value groups. This workshop included an introduction, three videos with discussion, and a summation. The workshop took about an hour. First, students learned that everyone has the right to have their own values, even about agriculture, and their job in promoting agricultural literacy was not to force people to change their values. Second, students were told that they were going to see three videos which might cause an emotional reaction. They were asked to watch each video with an open mind and try to hold back their emotions. They were asked to write down the values, truths, and deceptions they saw in each video.

The first video was a Gatorade commercial. There are a variety of Gatorade commercials which can work. We usually use a commercial featuring Kevin Durant and Dwayne Wade, two professional basketball players. The agricultural value displayed in the commercial was that many people see food only as a source of energy which can help them succeed (i.e., consumerist view). This value is sometimes lost on the participants and must be highlighted by the facilitator. While people who hold these consumerist values about agriculture may have a limited knowledge of agriculture, they have a basic knowledge of food (carbohydrates, fats, protein, etc.), which was exhibited in the Gatorade commercial. This basic knowledge of food was used as an opportunity to discuss the specifics of agriculture, including how production animals put on muscle through specific dietary patterns.

The second commercial was Chipotle's Scarecrow. This commercial typically draws negative reactions from students who are general conventional agriculturalists. I focus the students' attention on the truths and deceptions of the commercial they see. Students are told that this commercial represents only a small portion of Americans (i.e., nonconventional agriculturalists); however, mass appeal of advertising and the subliminal messages behind this commercial provides the students with talking points. Facilitators need to help students to find some truth in the commercial, which usually centers on the acknowledgment that conventional agricultural practices sometimes rely on chemicals, antibiotics, and certain large-scale agricultural practices. Students should not shy away from these points because they seem controversial; rather, they should be honest to people about the logic, benefits, and risks of such practices. The commercial also argues for small-scale farming to produce healthy and enjoyable food. The healthy and local food values can be an interesting talking point for people with different views on agriculture.

The final commercial was Dodge Ram's (2013) God made a Farmer. This commercial often appeals to the students who generally agree with conventional agriculturalist values. Nonetheless, an honest discussion concerning the commercial's truths and deceptions is needed. Students often identify the themes which exaggerate the lifestyles of American agriculturalists. These include the messages that American agriculturalists are rural, Christian, white, and hard working. We utilize these messages as talking

points for the general public. People may have nostalgic views about agriculture, and this commercial reaffirms this misconception.

The last step of the workshop was to compare and contrast the values of the commercials. We try to find common ground, which will help students talk to people who have diverse values in agriculture. For instance, the God made a Farmer and Scarecrow commercials both highlight the benefits of small-scale production and family farming. Students should walk away with a sense of some commonalities across the agricultural values divide. These similarities can serve as discussion points when students are in front of the public and hopefully will help defuse potentially negative interactions.

Assessment

The workshop has been conducted twice for the College of Agriculture and has been well received each time. The workshops last about an hour and each had over 20 attendees. Workshop attendees later reported having more confidence talking to people with different agricultural values. In addition, no negative interactions were reported between students and others with differing viewpoints during our agricultural literacy events. Most importantly, students learned how to initiate critical conversations about what they believe and why, which increases their own understanding about agriculture.

Submitted by:

Michael J. Martin
Department of Agricultural and Natural Resource Economics
Colorado State University
michael.j.martin@colostate.edu