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# Sustaining By Advocating – Student Perceptions of Agricultural Advocacy

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# Introduction

- **Production agriculture is a controversial subject (Fraser, 2001)**
- **Agriculturists must learn to recognize and use advocacy and persuasive techniques in response to inaccurate statements**
- **As new technology intensive media emerges, opportunities to increase an audience are expanded (Hon, 2006)**

# Need For Research

- **As the industry evolves, the agricultural workforce must develop advocacy skills to remain globally competitive**
- **Teachers of agriculture should be familiar with student perceptions of advocacy in order to develop advocacy based curriculum**
- **A search for articles with advocacy as the primary subject in the NACTA Journal and other agricultural discipline journals yielded zero results**

# Purpose Of The Study

- **Explore student perceptions of agricultural advocacy**
  - RQ1 – Do undergraduate students pursuing a degree in agriculture hold the same attitudes toward animal agriculture?
  - RQ2 – How do undergraduate students pursuing a degree in agriculture define advocacy?
  - RQ3 – What advocacy skills do undergraduate students pursuing a degree in agriculture perceive to be effective?
  - RQ4 - How do undergraduate students pursuing a degree in agriculture value advocacy?

# Theoretical Framework

## ➤ **Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory**

- **People desire consistency among individual concepts including attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, values, & opinions**
- **Dissonance occurs when information contradicts with one's held concepts, motivating an individual to action**
- **Action can take the form of additional inquiry, or cause individuals to formulate an appropriate response to justify their existing worldview**
- **Bias, opposition, and analyses in cognitive dissonance presents an opportunity for learning (Gorski, 2009)**

# Methodology

- **Undergraduate students ( $n = 15$ ) enrolled in an oral communications course for agriculture majors**
- **Mixed methods approach was a sequential exploratory study with a quantitative → qualitative two-strand design of inquiry (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009)**
- **Animal Attitudes Scale (AAS) (Herzog, Betchart, & Pittman, 1991) was administered to determine attitudes toward animal rights and animal welfare**

# Methodology

- **Student scores were assessed on the AAS to determine if attitudes were more consistent with animal rights or animal welfare**
- **Students assigned to one of two groups - animal rights ( $n = 8$ ) or animal welfare ( $n = 7$ )**
- **Viewed a short video that advocating for issues opposite the viewpoint of the student**
- **After watching the video, students provided written responses to 11 open ended questions**

## ➤ Quantitative

- Independent-samples t-test conducted to compare attitudes in those who support animal rights and those who support animal welfare

## ➤ Qualitative

- Constant comparative analysis
- Inter-rater reliability was established because the researchers coded responses separately
- Emergence of themes



## ➤ Quantitative

- Animal rights *group*:  $M = 50.38$ ,  $SD = 8.62$
- Animal welfare group:  $M = 73.43$ ,  $SD = 8.30$
- Significant difference between groups  
 $t(13) = 5.26$ ,  $p = 0.0002$

## ➤ Qualitative

- Two themes emerged
  - Awareness of Advocacy
  - Value of Advocacy

## ➤ Awareness of Advocacy

- definitions of advocacy differ among students
  - limited knowledge/preparation in coursework
  - need for combining persuasive techniques
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- **"I now have a better idea of how to convey to others the value of agriculturally produced items."**
  - **"Some persuasive techniques that I noticed were the use of visual images to stimulate my emotions, the sound of their voice implying that they were heartbroken over the images and testing, and the way that they seemed to try to make the viewer feel guilty for using animals for human use."**

## ➤ Value of Advocacy

- Strengthened argument, critical thinking and literacy skills
- Importance of advocacy skills in professional futures
- **“It will be a major part considering I want to work between the general community and agriculture...people are going to need justification for the agriculture industry as we become more technological.”**

# Conclusions

- **Not all undergraduate agriculture students have similar attitudes about animal agriculture**
- **Instruction of advocacy at the undergraduate level is limited**
- **Combining emotion, personal stories, as well as images are effective advocacy techniques for this group**
- **Students agree that advocacy skills will be necessary, however, feel unprepared to advocate effectively**

# Recommendations

- **Enhanced curriculum development is necessary to engage students in critical thinking, literacy, and agricultural advocacy skill development.**
- **Further investigation with a larger audience and additional formats of advocacy is recommended to expand the findings of the current study.**

# Recommendations

- **As agriculture educators aim to equip students with advocacy skills, care should be taken to not impose certain views, but to enhance individual perspectives.**
- **Teachers of agriculture should become more engaged in understanding issues and helping the public and policy makers understand agriculture**

# Questions?

➤ **Thank You**