

How to Sell the Agriculture/Rural Story

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2018 Legislative Agriculture Chairs
Summit

January 7, 2018

With These Numbers Should We Have to Sell America's Agriculture and Rural Story...

<u>Millions of Tonnes in:</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2013</u>
Corn	256	354
Cattle (meat)	12	11.7
Cow's Milk	77	91
Chicken Meat	14.7	17.4
Soybeans	67	89
Pig meat	9.1	10.5
Wheat	64	58
Cotton lint	4.0	2.8
Hen eggs	5.2	5.6
Turkey meat	2.5	2.6
Sorghum	10.4	9.9

With These Numbers Should We Have to Sell America's Agriculture and Rural Story...

<u>Major US Crops in US\$ Billions</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>2014</u>
Corn	\$24.4	\$52.4
Soybeans	\$17.7	\$40.3
Wheat	\$8.6	\$11.9
Alfalfa	\$8.3	\$10.8
Hay (non-Alfalfa)	\$5.1	\$8.4
Sorghum	\$1.4	\$1.7

In 2014 agriculture products contributed \$1 trillion to America's GDP

With These Numbers Should We Have to Sell America's Agriculture and Rural Story...

US Livestock and Poultry Inventory in Millions

	1997	2002	2007	2012
Cattle & calves	100	95	96	89
Hogs & pigs	61	60	67	66
Sheep & lambs	8	6	5.8	5.3
Broilers	1214	1389	1602	1506
Laying Hens	314	334	349	350

Don't these collective numbers make the point for the value of agriculture and rural America? No they don't.

Why?

Thus Even With the Obvious Importance of Agriculture, We Have to Rebrand It and Rural America...Why?

1. There are fewer farmers and ranchers to tell the story of the value of Agriculture and of Rural America:
 - a. As of 2012 less than 2% of US population directly employed in Agriculture – 100 years ago 38 % of the population was directly involved.
 - b. In 2012 there were 2.2 million farmers, in 1912 there were 29 million farmers.
 - c. In 2012 there were 2.1 million farms in the US, in 1912 there were 5.8 million farms.

2. People from all walks of life, not just farmers and ranchers, are moving out of rural areas to urban areas – 100 years ago, 1 out of 2 Americans lived in rural areas; today almost 6 out of 7 Americans live in a non-rural jurisdiction.

This impacted other areas of the rural economy. For every 10 farms or ranches that close one main street business closes in rural America.

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3. In rural areas, median family income is 25 percent lower, and the poverty rate is 28 percent higher than in metro areas. In fact, rural counties make up 95 percent of the persistent poverty counties in the United States.
4. Congress and the White House over the past several generations has dictated that USDA prioritize farm support programs over rural development programs – only 2-5 percent of USDA's budget went to rural development since 1996.
5. Since 1994 only 1/10th of 1 percent of total per capita federal spending was spend on community development in rural areas.
6. Since 1994 the federal government has spent twice to as much as five times as much per capita community development money in metropolitan areas as it did in rural areas.
7. Finally, with economic opportunities moving to the coasts, automation replacing people power, corporate farming on the rise and farm ownership moving to the corporate board room instead of the family farm, the list goes on and on...

But you get the point, the value of Agriculture and of Rural America to our nation needs a rebranding.

How to sell the Agriculture/Rural Story

1. Creating A Message that Works: Studies show that when selling any product, the sales point or message will be most powerful if it is a clear, simple, memorable statement of what you are selling or promoting. And if possible consider a message wherein the audience has buy-in or where the audience can define the product on their terms.

Remember you are trying to sell agriculture and rural America to people who don't understand it like you do – or worse – they misunderstand it.

In addition, you normally don't want your agriculture and rural message to contain too many components because studies suggest, multiple components in a message can actually have the components diluting one another making them less effective and making the message less memorable:

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We have also found that too often messages, in an attempt to make them simple, short-change the product that is being sold or promoted.

For example several years ago, a political client of my company asked us to test people's perceptions about Agriculture in particular and rural America in general. His intentions were selfish, he wanted to see how he should talk about rural America and agriculture to non-agricultural or rural audiences after he courted them heavily in the Iowa presidential caucuses.

So we focus group tested what people from around the country felt agriculture and rural America meant to our country – and while the findings helped the candidate talk about this – the findings gave us dramatic insight into the nation's perception of agriculture and rural America.

The initial findings were not necessarily that surprising, but they pointed to warning signs that need to be addressed.

This essentially is what we found:

How to Sell the Agriculture/Rural Story

- a. Significant percentages of non-rural people believe that rural America and agriculture were one in the same – that is, people who live in rural America are pretty much all somehow working in the food production industry.
- b. Yet, a significant portion of people believed that current agriculture practices were not working because they actually were not putting food on America's table – grocery stores were.
- c. A significant percentage questioned the cost of food, and the quality of food products – citing studies that claim our food is harming us – lack of nutritional components, food safety, fats, chemicals as well as studies that show increased food insecurity in America.
- d. Others blamed agriculture for the American obesity epidemic – they did not distinguish between producers and processors.
- e. Somewhat alarmingly, we found that most Americans simply take food and cheaply priced food – for granted.
- f. But then we also found this: significant percentages of people *didn't* see rural America as providing a vital need for our nation in food production, but rather, saw rural America as a backward place culturally and socially, and instead had a negative perception of rural Americans as a gun toting, church going, undereducated segment of our society.
- g. Finally, when we asked people to rate the importance of agriculture and rural America to their lives, a majority either felt it provided very little to them or worse, had a negative impact on our country.

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These findings suggested to us that Agriculture and rural America had two major problems:

1. People had no real idea of the value of rural America and agriculture to their everyday lives, nor did they understand how difficult it was to provide cheap and good quality food for them. (In 1916 Americans spent 33% of budget on food, in 2016 it was 16%). This presents both a problem and an opportunity.
2. Agriculture and rural America was in need of a rebranding and a broadening of what both meant to America's history, culture and present role in shaping our nation.

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These findings suggested the need for two fairly obvious options:

1. Americans needed to be educated as to what Agriculture and rural America gives them starting with the fact that it provides the best and cheapest food supply in the world and what that means for their health, well-being and overall quality of life.
2. We need to broaden the perception as to what Agriculture and rural America really does for all of our country and what Agriculture and rural America means to this country's culture and history.

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To try to operationalize these options, we gave groups open ended alternatives to perceptions these non-rural Americans had about what rural America meant to our society. One option in particular seemed to hit a nerve with groups. We simply asked groups to tell us what we meant when we posited the following declarative:

“Agriculture and Rural America: It’s More Than Just the Food We Eat”

With this message we were trying to do two things. First, to change the dialogue as to the long standing notion that agriculture and rural America only provide our food – remember we have work to do to educate people about the cheap, healthy food supply they get because of the efficiency of Agriculture and rural America today.

Second, we wanted to offer a message wherein people believed they came to conclusions regarding rural America even though we were providing the content.

By the time people were finished with this rebranding if you will, a very different perception of Agriculture and rural America was developing:

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Because while this messaging slogan “*Agriculture and Rural America – It’s More Than Just the Food We Eat*” offered what most people think when they think agriculture – food – it also suggested agriculture and by association, rural America, provided us with much more than that.

Specifically, we asked about rural America’s and agriculture’s historical and on-going role in the following *value driven* perceptions:

-Values

-Nostalgia

-Work Ethic

-Honesty

-Culture

Americana

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These branding messages regarding the historical and cultural importance of Agriculture and rural America to people's lives generated a reversal of people's perceptions and when asked after this exercise for their feelings toward rural America and agriculture, people's perceptions moved to a net positive with an average change of 18 percent positive.

Remember that this is one simple test, but it is insightful as to how we should be branding Agriculture and rural America.

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So, to recap, the first rule of messaging is to make it memorable and believable and let the audience buy into it.

This type of branding is probably utilized much more than you think: Consider:

Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again"

Or

Barack Obama's "Change You Can Believe In"

How to Sell the Agriculture/Rural Story

2. A second rule in messaging is to make sure you select the right “words” contained in your message.

Look again at Trump and Obama’s messages.

In Trump’s, the two most important words were “America” and “Great”

In Obama’s they were “Change” and “Believe”.

This was not an accident.

These words are known as “aspirational” words and people love them.
Why?

How to Sell the Agriculture/Rural Story

Aspirational Words that Test the Best in Messaging:

Hope

Trust

Values

Pride

Love

Believe

Honesty

Imagine

Courage

Empower

Confidence

Pride

Inspire

Integrity

Opportunity

Liberty

Freedom

Honor

Determination

Goodness

Happiness

Passion

Compassion

Dedication

Optimism

Strength

Faith

Dream

Humility

Endurance

Spirit/Spirited

Possibilities

There is a pretty good chance that if your message is centered around one or a couple of these themes, people will like it and connect to it more readily than if it doesn't.

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3. A third rule in messaging is to create messages that express the following because “values” messages are more powerful than those that message to policy positions or descriptions:

1. Values
2. Character
3. Aspirations
4. Culture

(Culture can include: Hometown, family, grandparents, children, country, but also sports or entertainment icons)

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4. Develop a message that makes Agriculture and Rural America relevant to the rest of the country again.
5. Develop a message wherein the rest of the country will feel threatened if rural America and Agriculture do not just survive but thrive.
6. Remember too that your message should always play to the emotions of your audience.

Finally then, how do you determine the right words to use, the right values to discuss, what message would make Agriculture and rural America more relevant to America and how to make Americans understand that the success of Agriculture and Rural America is indeed important to their own success?

How to Sell the Agriculture/Rural Story

You have to conduct extensive research into every segment of American society to see what messages work best, what education needs to be done, and how you should talk about Agriculture and rural America in order to promote it.

You do all of this through the following:

- Survey Research – including focus groups, polling, market testing, etc.
- Audience Identification
- Educational Programs

How to Sell the Agriculture/Rural Story (Personally)

--To start, study suggests that messages AND messengers are the most powerful when they are wrapped in emotion and passion – simply put, if you don't believe what you are saying, no one else will either. So, whatever you are saying, you have to *sell it* by showing you believe it – and passion and emotion are believable.

--From extensive research dating only about 20 years ago, we know that over 90 percent of people, after they hear a speaker don't remember what the speaker said – they remember *how the speaker made them feel*.

As legislators, communicators and leaders in your industry, you communicate with audiences every day. Studies show that most of you and leaders everywhere believe that the words you use are the most important component of your communication presentation.

The fact is, we now know that is wrong.

How to Sell the Agriculture/Rural Story (Personally)

So if it is not the words we use that connect us to our audience – what is it about our presentations that do connect?

55 percent of your audience connects with you via your body language.

38 percent connect with you via your voice.

Only 7 percent of your audience connects with you via the words you speak.

How to Sell the Agriculture/Rural Story (Personally)

How to use emotion in your presentation:

Face: Up until 2014 the scientific community recognized six basic emotions emitted through the human face: happy, sad, surprise, anger, fear and disgust.

Through computer modeling in 2014, an additional 15 different emotions were identified – and since then, study overwhelmingly suggests that the more different emotions we use in a presentation, the more believable that presentation will be.

How to Sell the Agriculture/Rural Story (Personally)

- These 15 new emotions (excluding the 6 basic ones) are:

--Happily surprised

--Sadly fearful

--Sadly surprised

--Fearfully angry

--Fearfully disgusted

--Angrily disgusted

--Hatred

--Indignant

--Happily disgusted

--Sadly angry

--Sadly disgusted

--Fearfully surprised

--Angrily surprised

--Disgustedly surprised

--Awed

How to Sell the Agriculture/Rural Story (Personally)

Voice:

Study suggests that the human ear can only absorb about 5 words at a time yet human presentations normally run 8-12 words at a time before the speaker pauses – that is way too fast.

Voice allows the speaker to slow down and make her\his words work (connect) by changing the inflection, volume, tone and emotion and passion contained in it.

We also know that passion and emotion coupled with variations in voice, elicit hand and facial gestures.

When you have these three legs of the communication stool – hands, face and voice – working together, your presentation will capture your audience and will make your message believable.