

American Dairy Coalition: Community members show billboard sized support for agriculture

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GREEN BAY, Wis. — Farmers and other community members throughout Polk and Burnett counties recently came together to proudly display messages in support for agriculture on five billboards along state highways 70, 35, and 8.

The show of support is in response to the anti-ag rhetoric that has been part of multiple meetings held at the town and county levels. The goal is to counteract the division of communities and misinformation that has been a result of multiple meetings, listening sessions, letters to the editor, and proposed ordinances to prohibit the growth and continuation of agriculture in Polk and Burnett counties. This divisive agenda against agriculture is slowly spreading through local county and town boards trying to establish new rules and ordinances that would seriously hinder the growth and success of local agriculturalists that have spent many generations farming in Polk and Burnett counties. Unfortunately, many of the meetings have lost the much-needed decency and basic rules of order to allow all to be heard as well as to be listened to. The billboards are a visual response to remind people where their food comes from and that FAMILIES farm in Polk and Burnett counties.

As meetings became more combative and letters in the paper stronger, more people have become aware of the battle and have come to support agriculture. With one simple email to local community members, support for agriculture was seen in a matter of hours as donations started coming in to put up the billboards. In a matter of a couple of days, there was enough support to put up four billboards, and when an additional sign became available, another letter went out and the fifth billboard was paid for in short order.

With fewer people growing up on or living on a farm, it is more important than ever to try to connect people to real farmers and the truth about how food is grown and raised today. There is no one-way, one-size-fits-all way to farm. No two farms are the same and farmers use best management practices that work for their individual farms. Why should any farmer be penalized for developing a business plan and following the law, while growing food for an ever-increasing population who is hungry for protein, milk, and vegetables?

The supporters of the billboards are wanting to share the reality of 21st-century agriculture. Wisconsin has 45% fewer dairy cattle than in the 1940s. And in 2020, Wisconsin produced 174% more milk with 36% FEWER cows than in 1930. We have 93% fewer hogs than what we had at our peak. While the number of farmers and animal agriculture continues to decline and populations increase, those fewer farmers are producing more than ever to continue to put food on our tables. Advancements in animal and plant genetics, engineering, technology, and innovation allow us to feed more people using fewer animals, fewer acres, less water, less energy, and fewer resources than before...all while doing a better job of protecting the environment than ever before. Unfortunately, farmers don't have a great history of self-promotion. They spend countless hours tending their animals, crops, bills, participating in church, county fairs, FFA, and supporting their local communities. For most, self-promotion of who they are and what they do is difficult. In order to survive as a business in the 21st century, farming cannot be a hobby, it is a business that does everything it can to benefit both the community it resides in as well as the environment it so desperately needs to survive in order to continue farming. Unfortunately, we are in a communications battle with Google searches and fear-mongering by those that don't understand agriculture or what it means to put your life's work into caring for animals, the environment, and feeding people.

As was recently asked at a local town board meeting, "If you need heart surgery, are you willing to let a dentist do it? If not, why are we going to let individuals who know nothing about agriculture dictate what farmers must do?" Most anti-agriculture activists do not farm, nor have any of them, to date, requested building permits to build the "correct farm" to show everyone how it should be done. Yet, their interest is truly about themselves, and their "vision" of the country. "Who feeds the world?" ... Farmers feed the world, activists feed no one. It's easy to get discouraged by a few loud negative voices. These billboards represent the community support of agriculture and our farmers. May we continue to stand behind them as they grow our food, support our communities, and build

viable businesses for their families today and into the future.

Brad Olson-Polk County Dairy Farmer