



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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Most everyone knows that I love to stop in the morning to various coffee shops (watering holes) where I might find area farmers. It is good to find out what the current issues are with them as well as a good chance to put out flyers and information on my extension programs. But more importantly it gives me the chance to answer or take in questions that they have about what is going on in the agriculture world. I probably get more quality “office time” with producers long before I get to my actual office. It seems that the local co-op, convenient store/gas stations is a collective office for farmers, come rain or shine, or break from the rigors of the farm. It can be very educational to drop in on one of those sessions.

The dialogue at any place where people gather is what makes rural Nebraska what it is and of course I find it interesting, entertaining, stimulating and many times very humorous, but most of all I get a glimpse into what their world is like. It is not a far cry from how I grew up being the son of a farmer from a very long line of farmers and stockmen so it is like second nature for me. You get to see the farmer/rancher in their working clothes, their moods, their highs and lows, good prices or bad, very tired or full of vim and vigor. You get to hear the rain report, the latest “farmer gossip” and perhaps the latest “bad joke” but you also get to see what can irritate a normally laid back farmer. Let’s center on that this week.

We spent a couple of mornings lately talking about things that irritate farmers and something came up that I was a little surprised about, but it did bring back some memories. I will just simply say it in one word “salesmen”! I found it humorous to hear local farmers call them “tractor riders”, “combine jumpers”, “truck sitters” and “time killers”. They especially were irritated because the prime season it seems for salesmen to hit up the farmers comes at inopportune times like during planting time and especially at harvest time on the combine or even in the truck waiting in line at the elevator. It was fun to hear some of the solutions to this pesky problem including ejection seats instead of buddy seats, grease on the steps, salesmen bumpers, one bucket seat in the grain truck, and my favorite - a “salesmen repellent button” on the dash.

This topic really registered with me because my dad (May he rest in peace!) was an easy target for all kinds of salesmen. I do remember wondering what was taking him so long to plant, harvest, or check the cows and sure as Church on Sunday he had been talking to a salesmen. It didn’t matter what they were peddling – feed, seed, mineral, lubricants, encyclopedias and particularly life insurance; Dad would always listen and sometimes would buy --- and especially it seemed from life insurance salesmen. I always wondered if because of the stress of farming, and raising 10 kids, he felt his life was going to be short and wanted to make sure that we would be able to eat, or maybe at least go to college and support ourselves. Unfortunately many of those “paid up” life insurance policies went defunct during the 80’s and all the time and money that was spent was for naught! Oh, I know my dad liked to talk and maybe found the salesmen as a diversion from his tasks.

The difference however from then to now is that our tractors and combines didn’t have cabs and air conditioning so the meeting was at the end of the turn row next to the road or under the shade of a stray tree. It is a different world today in many ways and how salesmen find farmers isn’t much different really from 50 years ago other than sales person will now climb aboard a combine or tractor and ride with the operator in order to sell chemicals, fertilizer, tractors etc. I know those salesmen think it shows ambition and professional conduct but I am here to tell you that it is a source of irritation to many farmers in today’s high impact world. They really don’t cherish giving up the jump seat or “buddy chair” or to hear all about the newest varieties, benefits of a certain feed or especially the new “moon dust” that will contribute to the bottom line of the operation. Quite frankly farmers are not flush right now with the dollars that were there a couple of years ago.

Most of the farmers I know are pretty much laid back and polite, but if there is one thing sure to annoy most farmers, it’s the ‘hard-sell’ of a product that they ‘have to buy’ because of all the things they ‘should be’ doing differently or they may not be “sustainable”. People in town certainly know about door-to-door salesmen and usually the word gets around in a small town and the lights go out and nobody’s home. It is not quite as simple on the farm. It seems salesmen have figured out that there are times when they know they are going to have a captive audience with the farmer and they take advantage of that occasion. From the coffee shop discussion the preferred method is coming out to the field, climbing up on the combine or tractor, utilizing the jump seat and selling their wares on the go. You might read the following blog entry from an entirely different point of view. I found it rather amusing and interesting: www.uptownsheep.com/uptown-girl---a-working-farm-wifes-blog/to-the-woman-riding-in-my-husbands-combine I have to admit that I never thought about that!

Oh, I know many salesmen in the realm of agribusiness and they for the most part are great people, and they - just like the farmer, are trying to make a living. Many of them had a couple of great years during that \$8 corn and \$17 beans era and making sales was relatively easy, especially just before the end of the year. Now all of a sudden the sales are a lot harder to come by; so in order to survive they are relegated to techniques like I described above. It may surprise you, because I think for instance that seed salesmen (man or woman) that actually comes out and spends 45 minutes in the combine checking yields, discussing how well the crop grew, etc. are doing more than their job requires. Their job is to get the farmers to buy the seed. They don’t have to make trips out to check up on things after their job is done. Probably in reality the ones that do make special trips are the good ones, and I don’t fault them for trying to do their job. But I do understand the irritation!!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or UNL Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, UNL Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>