

Keeping Our Social License to Farm

A Proactive Approach

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Washington Agriculture and Forestry Leadership Program

Class XXII, Group 4:

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*This document is available on the Internet at
<http://www.tricity.wsu.edu/aenews/agforestryg4.pdf>*

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Keeping Our Social License to Farm: A Proactive Approach

Executive Summary

The agricultural producers of Washington State need societal support. The voting public determines the policies and regulations governing agriculture and other industries, yet few members of that voting public understand the needs, challenges, and missions of agricultural producers. A grassroots effort to educate the public is a critical step toward garnering their support.

This paper demonstrates the need for an educational outreach effort in our state, reviews other educational programs with similar goals, and sets forth an outline of an action plan, complete with practical funding and implementation suggestions.

*A complete copy of this paper is available in
Portable Document Format (PDF) on the Internet at
<http://www.tricity.wsu.edu/aenews/agforestryg4.pdf>.*

Keeping Our Social License to Farm: A Proactive Approach

Introduction

A *license* to farm? Is yet another regulatory permit on the horizon for farmers? Not exactly. Our title refers to *social license*, or societal support. We recognize that our future in agriculture is dependent in part upon what the public allows us to do. We may have the “right” to farm, but in the end, rights can be eliminated or drastically eroded by a public that doesn’t understand or appreciate the realities of farming.

Farm activities are increasingly under fire from those who wish to control, restrict, or change how we manage our land and resources. Many activities are currently underway that endeavor to protect agribusiness and maintain public support for farming activities. We need to continue these efforts, but we need something else, something even more fundamental—we need an educated voting public. An uninformed public can mandate inappropriate farming restrictions. We must do more than “preach to the choir” and lobby our legislators. We must get our messages in the eyes and ears of a general public that are increasingly removed from the realities of farming and rural life, a general public that increasingly relies on mass media to shape their beliefs about public policy issues.

This document proposes embarking on a significant, long-term public education program designed to reach the non-farming population in our state, particularly the urban-dweller. We want the voting public to better understand the issues agricultural producers face so they are less inclined to support initiatives that hamper our continued ability to farm. In the pages that follow, we build a case for such a program and present a strategy for uniting the agricultural community into a single, effective voice to deliver the message. The end result of this project would be a public outreach effort that would promote our social license to farm.

Recognizing the Need

The Need for Education

The majority of the U.S. population has little concept of the pre-supermarket origins of farm products. They have a romanticized image of farm life and no appreciation for the realities of producing farm products. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), a mere 1.5% of the U.S. population was involved directly in food production in 1999. As our society becomes ever more urbanized, disconnected citizens seem to be reaching out to protect what they perceive they no longer have—open spaces, cleaner environments, and quality products.

The average American's motivation to protect and preserve rural environments is based on good intentions. Conflicts arise when, in an effort to "protect and preserve," the non-farming public tries to regulate and restrict farming activities in these environments. All too often, the non-farmers' good intentions are mixed with inaccurate information and unrealistic expectations. They believe they are "helping," but their lack of knowledge about farm issues and their access to questionable science and misinformation can work against us. With environmental activism on the rise, we must be proactive in the education process.

The Power of the Urban Voter

Not all misinformed non-farmers are urbanites, but urban-dwellers are an important part of the voting public. Anyone doubting the power of the urban voter need only look our state's election results in the fall of 2000. Washington's newest U.S. Senator won by carrying only five of the state's thirty-nine counties. Looking even closer, the district level showed overwhelming support in only the most urban portions of these counties. Similar voting trends occurred on the animal trapping initiative. Regardless of whether or not the voters made the best choices for farmers in these examples, it is clear that the urban voters have most of the power. To instill a fundamental shift in voter thinking, we need to educate urban Washingtonians.

In addition to having a disproportionate amount of muscle in any debate, the urbanites are also the dominant group of ultimate consumers of agricultural products. It is vital to our industry that these customers have appropriate knowledge about farming, particularly the safety aspects of our products. Helping everyone understand at least some of the very good things we do will moderate the misplaced activism that can threaten our livelihood. Our customers must support our activities or we will lose our social license to

farm in an economical manner. Farm activities must be economically viable or the farms will go away with drastic consequences to the economy, farm product prices, and the rural environment everyone wants to protect.

Telling the Farmers' Story

The agriculture industry is doing good things for the economy, the environment, and our quality of life in Washington State. If we don't tell the story, no one else will.

Studies show that most non-farmers, urban and otherwise, have some warm feelings for farmers, despite many misperceptions about farm activities. The general public doesn't really think much about agriculture until they are reminded about it, often through a negative news story about an environmental or labor issue. A November 16, 2000, article in the *Capital Press* discussed the positive support for farmers among an Elway Research survey of 500 voters (see Appendix 3). Although the respondents worried "about the effects of some agricultural practices" they generally indicated "support for family farms that protect the environment" and stated that they "appreciated agriculture's contributions to the state's economy." It is in our best interest to build upon this vaguely warm feeling.

Impacts on Legislation and Regulation

Legislators from rural districts understand most of our issues and try to educate that growing percentage of urban legislators who have few, if any, farm constituents. Legislators from urban districts, on the other hand, have little reason to support farm legislation; they are under pressure to support well-intentioned but often misguided or impractical efforts to "protect the environment" from particular farming activities.

Many members of the regulatory community are, themselves, urbanites. As such, it's probably fair to say that some of them are uninformed about farm issues. Many of these individuals came to the regulatory agencies highly motivated to do something good for the world, but if their backgrounds are strictly urban or non-farming, they may not have all the information they need. We have an obligation to the public, the environment, and ourselves to help these regulators understand what is feasible today and how agricultural producers are continually improving our practices.

Building trust between Washington agriculture and the general public will help when we face ballot measures or market challenges in the future because the public will be more receptive to our messages. An educated public is less likely to push for inappropriate legislation and regulation, and more likely to be supportive of efforts to keep Washington agriculture economically viable. Increased public awareness about the realities of agricultural

production will blunt the efforts of environmental extremists and help the voters, regulators, and legislators do the right thing with respect to agriculture and land management.

Building on Our Successes

It must be stressed that the proactive education campaign we advocate is not a substitute for existing activities in support of agriculture. We must continue the positive outreach efforts such as tours, community involvement, legislative involvement, product promotion, and so forth that are now underway. We must also continue to move toward farm practices that conserve and protect the natural resources we depend upon and about which environmental activists and urban populations are increasingly concerned; we must “practice what we preach.” (In fact, a side effect of proudly showing the public some of our best management practices would be the peer pressure created to help encourage those among us that are slower to move toward better practices.)

The combination of continuous improvement in farm practices and educating the non-farming public will, over time, allow us to recapture the “moral high ground” in natural resource conservation that we have lost to the environmentalists in recent years. In time, the increased public trust may even boost the economy by inadvertently promoting the purchase of “Washington Grown” products.

Review of Existing Programs

We began our research by reviewing examples of other programs with goals similar to ours. Those examples proved useful in identifying pitfalls, potential sources of funding, experts, and roadmaps; they also helped us gauge project difficulty. The resources we investigated included:

- Team member personal contacts within industry and academia
- Follow-up contacts from initial meetings with industry leaders
- Industry sponsored seminar speakers
- Newspapers
- WAFEF seminar speakers
- Internal company and academic experts
- Class XXII members and their contacts
- Washington Forest Protection Association
- Other states' leadership programs

Less-Than-Successful Efforts

Inquiries to other states' leadership programs and academic experts yielded little. Most contacts were unaware of any similar project, either previously initiated or currently underway, that resembled our project in their state.

We found a few programs previously initiated within Washington State to educate the public on the positive aspects of agriculture: AgLink, Washington Agriculture Commodity Communicators project, and Bounty of Washington. We interviewed participants in those programs about the purpose, organization, funding, and success or failure of their program.

Of these three programs, AgLink had the weakest connection to our project. AgLink arose from a legislative effort to fund a Yakima Showcase that would exhibit Washington commodities for export buyers. The program was understaffed and failed.

The Washington Agriculture Commodity Communicators project began out of an idea from the Ag Presidents Group. This project was to have joined the communication directors of the various and participating commodity associations in a loose coalition to facilitate communication about agricultural issues. This project seemed to fail because it was not a cohesive effort seriously undertaken by the agriculture industry as a whole. Efforts were still primarily centered within each commodity, resulting in a fragmented voice.

The Bounty of Washington project was the most ambitious and best coordinated of those we evaluated. Its mission statement reads:

"Bounty of Washington will promote the contributions the natural resource industry makes to Washington State's economy, environment and quality of life. We will bring together all sectors of Washington's renewable natural resource industry to produce and promote an annual report, foster better intra-industry communication, and begin building a stronger, positive voice and image for the industry as a whole."

This mission statement gave the project a good starting point; its overall aim was to unite the industry so it could speak with a single voice. The educational method the organizers chose was the presentation of economic data showing the value of agriculture.

The Bounty of Washington project seemed to fail for several reasons. First, presentation of economic data fails to engage consumers. (It worked no better on a larger scale, when Monsanto tried this approach with the GMO issue.) In addition, the Bounty program suffered from a divided constituency; the players themselves could not agree on how to manage the program. Finally, we believe the campaign strategy firm hired by the Bounty program officers lacked sufficient experience in the specific methodologies employed.

Current Programs Show Promise

Our research yielded two examples of successful (or at least very promising) public education campaigns with similar objectives to the one we propose. Lessons in organization, consensus-building, fundraising, and implementation can be drawn from these examples.

Example 1: "Keeping Agriculture Viable in Oregon"

A few years ago, a group in Oregon started a program to educate the public on the benefits of agriculture. These Oregonians realized it was critical to avoid the infighting and fragmentation that leads to failure of many such projects. Accordingly, a group of agricultural leaders, in collaboration with business leaders and the Oregon Department of Agriculture, organized a summit that included virtually every leader in Oregon agriculture, not just representatives of a few commodities. They hired a professional facilitator to function as a neutral moderator to keep the attendees focused and on track. The resulting project was called "Keeping Agriculture Viable in Oregon (KAV)." The KAV management committee included leaders from the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Beef Council, Oregon Potato Commission, Oregon Wheat Growers League, Northwest Food Processors Association, Oregon Wine Advisory Board, Oregon Association of Nurserymen, Oregon Dairy Women, Oregon Department of Agriculture, and Oregonians for Food and Shelter.

Because it was such a large and complex undertaking, the KAV committee spent two years doing research and planning under the direction of the Agri-Business Council of Oregon, an organization representing over 750 organizations and businesses. (The Agri-Business Council now manages the KAV program.) Actual implementation of the program began in 1999. The Executive Summary of their three-year Strategic Plan indicates they:

“...seek to unite agriculture’s diverse voices and leverage its combined resources to effect statewide awareness. Taking this a step farther, the goal is to motivate Oregonians—rural and urban, consumer and legislator, student and business leader—to actively support Oregon agriculture by buying local products and considering the industry’s needs at the ballot box and in the policy arena.”

Their marketing slogan, “Oregon Agriculture. Everywhere. Every Day.®” signifies the importance of agriculture and its connection to Oregonians in all walks of life.

KAV’s Oregon public information campaign primarily utilizes TV advertising, supported by print advertising including reminders on milk cartons and grocery bags. They have worked with all forms of media to develop positive agriculture-related stories and to reach urban consumers in as many ways as possible. The campaign will eventually include farm field board advertising, transit advertising, and movie theater advertising. Outreach materials have been or are being created including industry kits, media kits, an exhibit booth, brochures, and posters available for use at fairs, festivals, farmers’ markets, supermarkets, and tourism centers.

We believe the success of this program has been dependent upon the inclusive scope of the initial summit and the subsequent unification of the entire state’s agriculture industry behind the project. Funding and implementation were also well conceived and well executed: grant monies and other funds were successfully collected and a respected advertising agency was hired to initiate and manage the advertising effort. The final critical step was the identification of a respected program manager, the Agri-Business Council of Oregon, to coordinate and manage the project effort. These steps together keep the multitude of ag voices focused on saying the same things at the same time to the urban consumer in a way that actively promotes general good will for all of agriculture.

Example 2: “Wood is Good”

The entire wood products industry, throughout the world and especially in North America, is highly analogous to the farm industries in that an uninformed or misinformed public is increasingly dictating its management

practices. The North American timber industry has been largely silent while other interests have effectively convinced the general public that cutting trees and using wood products are bad for the environment. Like the farm industry, the timber industry has spent their small investments in public relations “preaching to the choir.” Both industries have incorrectly assumed/hoped that common sense would prevail at some point without a proactive effort to educate those urban dwellers not directly involved in either industry.

The wake-up call for the timber and wood products industry was aggressive advertising by the steel and concrete industries in concert with media efforts by environmental preservationists. These parties claimed that using wood was bad for the environment and that using steel or concrete products was better for the environment. These messages are illogical under any objective scrutiny, yet they have proven effective in molding public opinion.

Public opinion surveys taken for the Wood is Good campaign have shown that 57% of the public think wood is not a good building product; 75% think trees are being used faster than they are growing; 48% believe we will run out of trees during their own lifetime; and 52% of the public feels guilt over using forest products. These statistics, based on false information, have alarmed the forest products industry. It is not hard to imagine how the forest products industry will fare whenever the public has the opportunity to influence or control forest practices. Without a proactive marketing campaign to change public opinion, the North American forest products industry will continue to suffer, as will the environment as consumers use more steel and concrete building products.

A consortium of wood-based companies has recently joined forces to promote the use of wood products in North America. Their marketing campaign will communicate the benefits of wood to builders, retailers, and consumers. This effort will inform the public on the health of the forest resource and why wood is the natural and best environmental choice. The basic messages are (1) that forests are abundant, healthy, and growing, which make wood our most sustainable choice of building material and (2) that wood is a better building material.

Like the agriculture industry, the forest products industry is very diverse, geographically dispersed, and competitive. Due to the leadership of several of the major producers and the urgency of the project, about 65% of the North American wood producers have invested in the three-year campaign initiative scheduled to begin in early 2001. This campaign will cost approximately \$45 million. Coming on the heels of a financially difficult year for the wood products industry, this represents a sizable commitment, but it can only be considered a pilot project when compared to the \$150-million-plus annual

advertising budgets of other industries (including steel) trying to change national public opinion. Supplier groups are also being approached for annual contributions. The Wood Promotion Network believes that after one year of effort they have a critical mass of support and the leadership necessary to carry the project forward. Long-term funding will be critical to achieving results.

The Wood Promotion Network is not a new association; it is doing its work out of the offices and with the support of its members. The Wood Promotion Network hopes to effectively fill the information void through the combined efforts of the largest possible coalition of North American interests behind a coordinated and targeted pro-wood campaign. While they are promoting wood as a product they are indirectly promoting the public benefits they provide, just as farmers should be promoting the public benefits they provide.

Because of the overwhelming evidence that television is the most effective and cost-efficient medium for influencing public opinion, much of the wood products industries' outreach effort will utilize television. And because a professionally conceived and executed message is critical for success, organizers have selected the same agency that conducted the very successful "Got Milk?" campaign.

Our Plan of Action

From the successful and less-than-successful efforts of our predecessors, we have learned several important lessons. Any industry outreach effort must have a broad, industry-wide base of support and the industry must agree on a unified message. The campaign must be professionally managed, conceived, and executed. Funding must be sufficient, well thought out, and not left to chance.

A Possible Road Map

The following steps, adapted from those developed by Don Stewart when he was affiliated with the Washington Association of Conservation Districts, represent one possible sequence of events. Detailed discussion of some of the more critical aspects follows.

- 1) Create a steering committee of advocates or adopt an interim management group to carry the message inside the agriculture community and to support any needed legislation to facilitate this project.
- 2) Take the message to as many members of the Washington agriculture community as possible, via a summit or presentations (see Broad Support, One Voice).
- 2) Once there is general support, write up a proposed commission marketing order or other organizational structure sequence showing in full the purposes for the proposed commission or organization (see Management of the Education Effort).
- 4) Develop a suggested method for assessing and collecting the long-term financing (see Funding Ideas). Simultaneously, begin soliciting short-term start-up funds through donations, grants, and/or legislation.
- 5) Draft a budget including maximum and minimum contributions needed from a typical producer in each group.
- 6) Agree on a threshold level of statewide participation and on a minimum budget that would be needed to create a credible program. Reaching this threshold would determine whether the idea proceeds or is dropped.
- 7) Identify a loan source(s) to the commission or organization, which would be repayable if the commission or organization forms.

- 8) Perform the necessary steps to finalize the legal structure of the organization. In the case of a commission structure, submit the money and the petitions to the Department of Agriculture for processing and for the conduct of hearings, negotiations, and elections.
- 9) Prepare and execute an effective election campaign among all participating commodity groups. Several of these steps could be avoided if a cooperative agreement could be reached among existing agricultural commodity commissions where each would contribute appropriately to achieve the stated goals.
- 10) Form a permanent organization to administer an effective educational effort that benefits the farm community (see Media and Message).

Broad Support, One Voice

Success of this campaign will be dependent upon widespread involvement and support of Washington's agricultural industry. There are several approaches that could be taken to bring all of the agricultural groups together to "speak with one voice."

We could hold a statewide summit, using a professional facilitator to present this idea to all of the commodity groups, research commissions, growers, and food processors. In order to succeed, such an undertaking would require the leadership and assistance of the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) to host the summit, provide the facilitator, and convince the agricultural leadership of the state they need to give this summit their greatest attention. If the summit succeeded, a committee of dedicated individuals within the agriculture industry could be chosen by the participants to proceed forward. A liaison from WSDA to this resulting committee would greatly assist in keeping focused and legitimizing this project.

Another approach would be an appeal to individual agricultural groups (commodity commissions, food processor associations, conservation districts, etc.) one at a time by making presentations at various meetings. This approach would require several dedicated individuals familiar with the project to make the presentations as well as solicit short-term funding. WSDA's support and advice would be critical for the success of this approach as well.

A third approach would be to select an interim management organization to assume the project. This interim group would then proceed to either host a

summit or make individual presentations to appropriate agriculture groups. We actively solicit any advice WSDA could offer us in identifying an appropriate organization for this approach. In addition, we would want to tell this group what backing WSDA would be willing to offer them.

Regardless of the approach ultimately chosen, a group or organization would eventually be designated the project manager.

Management of the Education Effort

The education effort we propose would be important to each agriculture group in our state. It would need to be managed professionally, with fair representation among the many disproportionate agriculture groups.

The success of the recent “Forest & Fish” legislation was largely due to the strength of the Washington Forest Protection Association (WFPA) and its ability to lead the numerous small non-industrial timberland owners to consensus positions. The Forest & Fish legislation was driven by the fear of repeating the “spotted owl” issue that caused a massive upheaval in the forest products industry earlier. Many compromises were made on all sides to avoid the “train wreck” the WFPA foresaw. The anticipated disaster had little to do with bad forest practices and more to do with years of neglecting public opinion; we were losing our social license to farm timber and we risked much more onerous regulations if compromises were not made.

The jury will be out for several years on whether the Forest & Fish legislation was ultimately good for tree farmers. Many individual non-industrial timberland owners are still, understandably, struggling with fairness issues. It is obvious this legislation would never have succeeded without the leadership of the major timber companies. Nor would it have succeeded without the substantial television public relations campaign (see Media Selection) which built enough public support that many legislators in metropolitan districts were able to support sound legislation despite loud opposition from some of their more extreme constituents.

The Washington agriculture community is much more diverse than the forest products community, and agriculture does not appear to have a single organization with the financial resources and leadership to conduct an effective statewide public campaign. To avoid some of the pitfalls and territorial issues inherent with such a diverse group, we recommend that this program be administered from an office not directly tied to a specific commodity group.

A short list of existing organizations that may be suitable for serving the management function is provided, along with brief observations about some,

below. This management role could either be permanent or temporary if another umbrella organization was created for the specific purpose of managing this project.

The Washington Ag Presidents Group

This group has a great deal of influence from a leadership perspective.

Northwest Ag Information Network (Aginfo.net)

Reports on ag news nationally and locally.

The Washington Agriculture and Forestry Education Foundation

This is an educational organization and this project is an education endeavor. The WAFEF has 23 years of trust established with all the agriculture groups. The WAFEF has an established network of industry leaders.

The Washington Association of Conservation Districts

This statewide, grassroots organization is currently involved in many of the industry changes that help the environment.

The Northwest Natural Resources Institute

It is already devoted to providing educational opportunities for the public. Has a wealth of “hands-on” examples that are suitable themes for TV spots.

The “Farming and the Environment” Project

This coalition of farmers and environmentalists, with a steering committee of ten, formed about eighteen months ago. It receives most of its funding from the Bullitt and Kellogg foundations. The goal of the group is to determine how best to make farming profitable while safeguarding the environment.

The Washington State Commission on Pesticide Registration

WSCPR commissioners are appointed by the Governor and represent many agricultural commodities and state agencies dealing with agriculture.

A new commodity commission created when long-term funding is established.

Any one of these organizations could be suitable for interim or permanent management of the campaign. With appropriate additional resources, most of the existing organizations listed could manage the logistic side of this effort with basic office services, at least initially, though creation of a new commission or organization offers some distinct advantages in singleness of purpose. The supporting agriculture groups would provide the leadership and decision-making body.

Funding Ideas

An effective effort could not get off the ground without both start-up and long-term funding. Short-term “seed” money would be needed to unify enough of the agricultural community to make the effort possible. Long-term funding

(three years or more) would be necessary to ensure the effort is sustained and effective. While it is theoretically possible to successfully organize such an effort with minimal start-up funds, utilizing volunteer and “in-kind” resources, our research indicates this is not a position of strength from which to start. Our research also indicates that a minimum of one million dollars per year would need to be allocated toward a long-term campaign in order to reach enough of the population to make a difference.

Short-term startup funds could be solicited from the following sources:

- In-kind resources from leading agricultural organizations and individuals
- Donations from agricultural organizations, suppliers, and individual agricultural companies
- Grants from sources such as
 - Washington State Conservation Commission
 - USDA
 - Washington State Dept of Agriculture
 - Washington (or National) Farm Bureau
 - Legislature

Long-term funding is a different matter. The above sources are not appropriate because they are not likely to be sufficient or sustainable. In our view, the only way this program will succeed is with broad support from a majority of the agricultural community, the beneficiaries of the program. It appears the only viable method of raising sufficient and sustainable funding is to create something like a commodity commission that is voted on and approved by each commodity group. Funds would then be collected and held in escrow until the program was begun. If the program received insufficient support, it would be abandoned, and funds returned to investors.

If the program received broad support, its costs would be more bearable, in the range of less than 1/10 of one percent of the \$5.3 billion annual gross sales of farmgate production in Washington (1999 data from Washington Agriculture Statistics Service). If, for example, everyone participated by agreeing to assess themselves 20 cents for every \$1000 of sales we would exceed the minimum budget of \$1 million dollars/year. Using this same example, a farm with \$1 million of annual sales would contribute \$200/year. Less than 1/10 of one percent compares well to charges from existing commodity commissions, which are in the range of one to four percent. Some commodity groups may choose to fund their share of this program through existing commissions. If, on the other hand, a majority of industry does not agree to support this program the costs can quickly become too burdensome.

Once funding was in place and the program proved viable, economies of scale and synergies would be considered. For example, it may be cost effective to

pool resources with a neighboring state. There may also be some benefit worth consideration of a joint campaign with the Washington Forest Protection Association.

If this program were successful, it could serve as a pilot to a national program sponsored by national organizations such as the Farm Service Agency, Farm Bureau, the USDA, or some combination of these or similar agricultural organizations. The education of urban and/or non-farm populations could be a national program that sets a general tone and theme on issues relevant to all of agriculture, with individual states (or even commodity groups) creating issue- or commodity-specific campaigns.

Media and Message

The experiences of others have shown that professional management of any information campaign is vital. Actual selection of media and message content will be the purview of a professional advertising and public relations agency. That being said, we have some general thoughts and observations based on our research and the considered opinions of our group members.

It seems likely that the primary vehicle for educating large numbers of the general population will be television. We envision the centerpiece of the outreach program to be a series of short TV spots, each highlighting an issue threatening our ability to continue supplying products, while also mentioning some of the good things farmers are doing to help the environment. Not only is TV likely to be the most effective and cost-efficient way to reach significant numbers of those who are or will soon become voters, it is also a good medium for making the public aware of sources of more detailed educational materials and programs.

Besides selecting the most appropriate media, professionals are also needed to find the most effective messages to present and the most persuasive way to present them. There are many credible messages about our environmental stewardship that most reasonable environmentalists should support. We are still many steps away from selecting the actual content of any information campaign message, but the topics could include any of the following:

- Importance of farmers to total state employment, including employment of those in farm support services
- How science is improving farming methods affecting
 - soil and/or water conservation
 - fertilizer and nutrient management
 - productivity
 - food safety
- GMO potential benefits to world health and nutrition (probably

- best done at the national level)
- Qualifications to be effective farmers (science and technological skills required to produce safe, economical food)
 - Diversity of Washington's 200+ food, feed, and seed crops – second only to California in diversity
 - Farmers as stewards of the rural environment
 - The role of farmers in the social fabric of their communities
 - Conflicting and burdensome regulations faced by farmers
 - Reasons for farmland conversions to developments and why that's bad for the environment
 - "Happy Chickens" (connections between productivity and humane treatment of animals)
 - Fair trade vs. free trade
 - Farm subsidies (probably too risky?)
 - Growing dependence on imported agricultural products
 - Advantages of locally grown agricultural products
 - Are Washington farmers an endangered species?
 - Farm sizes and variety of ownership types
 - Farm product price volatility, trends, and farm prices as percent of supermarket prices
 - Consumer demands for low price, high quality, safe food products (home grown vs. imported?)
 - Subject to funding considerations, specific commodity issues could be addressed at some point under this common TV theme. Such issues could include:
 - Wheat farmer efforts to reduce stubble burning
 - Dairy, beef, and poultry farm efforts to keep animal waste out of streams and to reduce odors
 - Tree fruit industry labor issues
 - Water and the Columbia River irrigation system

Once primary messages are chosen, there remains the question of how best to present them. Those of us close to the issues want to use facts and logic to make our legitimate points. Unfortunately logic doesn't work in mass media; advertising professionals have to find the emotional chord that reaches the audience. The design and management of these emotional yet informative messages requires professional communications expertise to ensure the messages are effective with our target audience, while being judicious with hard-earned marketing funds.

Based on our collective experience and the advice of those we have consulted, the following general guidelines appear appropriate:

- 1) Keep it simple and short (thirty seconds).

- 1) Create positive perceptions grounded in fact with minimal or no statistics.
- 1) Have one main theme for each advertisement (i.e., employment, economic benefit, food safety, community, farm practices, regulation, buy locally, or some current topic affecting agriculture such as water and fish).
- 1) Use speaker(s)/narrator(s) who are credible to the urban audience (perhaps a spokesperson similar to Bill Nye, “The Science Guy”).
- 1) Make a positive connection between non-farm citizens and farming in every spot.
- 1) While the issues we face are serious to the farm community, eye-catching humor shouldn’t be ruled out if it gets the message across without demeaning the competence and good intentions of farmers.
- 1) Initial ads should tend towards the soft sell, “warm fuzzy” approach. Save the harder-hitting, more controversial topics until surveys confirm the target audience is responding positively.
- 1) All ads should tie in with a common, short, memorable theme line such as “Washington Grown. Naturally.” Or “Washington Farmers: Better Products, Better Methods.” Or “Every Day is Earth Day for Washington Farmers.” The slogan should communicate that Washington farmers and their products are good for consumers, better for the environment, protective of our land and streams, science-based, and socially important.
- 1) Each ad should show a website address for more information about its topic and links to other agricultural sites for information on products, tours/tourism, education, speaker bureau, etc.

We have collected videotaped examples of soft-sell infomercials currently being aired in Oregon by the Keeping Ag Viable steering committee of Oregon’s Agri-Business Council in Portland. Thanks to the Washington Forest Protection Association and Alex McGregor, we are providing, also on videotape, examples of draft spots to show some rough ideas of what Washington’s thirty-second spots could resemble.

In conjunction with the primary vehicle of television promotion, the campaign should include a website with a readily identifiable URL such as www.agforestry.org. While short TV spots can be very effective and cost

efficient, they are not appropriate for detailed discussion. Those wishing to learn more specifics relating to a particular TV spot can visit the website to see facts and figures, articles written by industry professionals, and other messages that would educate them about farms and farm activities. This website should also provide links to all other agriculture-related web pages, especially those in Washington State, including such information as specific commodity contacts, speaker bureaus, and agricultural tourism.

Other educational and promotional vehicles such as the following should be evaluated by marketing professionals for possible inclusion in the outreach program:

- 1) Printed slogans on a variety of agricultural products in cooperation with our processors, (similar to Oregon's "Oregon Agriculture. Everywhere. Every Day." on milk cartons and grocery bags).
- 2) Displays at farmers' markets (especially those in urban areas) and at fairs (particularly the Puyallup fair, which is attended by many urban dwellers).
- 3) Public relations efforts (media kits, fact sheets) distributed to generate positive media coverage (radio, newspaper, magazine, television).
- 4) Radio public service announcements and/or paid advertising.
- 5) Documentary and feature coverage (e.g., *Full Bloom* is a farm program that is currently televised in California, Arizona and parts of Oregon. The purpose of the program is consumer awareness and education. The California-based film crew traveled to Wenatchee to interview Dole about Cameo apples.)

Over time, our goal with the outreach campaign is to establish enough good will and trust to elicit more favorable attitudes and behaviors from the public and their legislators, effectively counteracting those who would intentionally or inadvertently force us out of farming.

Summary and Sponsorship

This project would be the most significant undertaking ever made by the Washington agriculture community as a whole. It will be doomed from the start without a sound road map and vocal support from the leaders of the major agricultural groups. Leaders must be convinced that

- they are at significant risk if they do nothing;
- they stand to significantly gain by increasing the general public's awareness of farm contributions;
- this program will be effective in making positive changes in public perceptions of farms, farming activities, and farm products;
- the improved perceptions about our industry will translate into more favorable treatment in the legislature and the marketplace;
- the funding mechanism is appropriate, fair, and feasible; and
- the time is right.

We believe this program is needed, is affordable, and will effectively change public perceptions to the benefit of farm economies in Washington State. We believe such a program is three or four years overdue and that nothing less than our social license to farm is at stake. We are asking for your sponsorship to carry this program forward with your constituents and those of your peers.

References

Agri-Business Council of Oregon, 1200 NW Naito Parkway, Suite 290, Portland, OR 97209. “Keeping Agriculture Viable in Oregon” Committee, Mary Stewart (503-241-1487) or Marcus Simantel (503-648-0925). URL: www.aglink.org.

Bounty of Washington, a 1996–1997 effort to promote the contributions the natural resource industry makes to Washington state’s economy, environment and quality of life. We interviewed one of the steering committee members, Karla Kay Fullerton of the Washington Cattlemen’s Association, PO Box 96, Ellensburg, WA 98926 (509-925-9871). Others on this committee were Steve Appel, Dan Coyne, Dennis Fiess, Ann Goos, Alex McGregor, Tom Myrum, Dave Roseleip, and Randy Smith.

Daniels & Associates, 1143 West Roanoke Street, Centralia, WA. 98531. A working paper on “Mounting a Campaign to Promote Production Forestry,” Jess Daniels (360-736-1228).

Northwest Natural Resources Institute, 801 W. Riverside, Spokane, WA 99210 (509-459-4108). This educational organization’s focus is on the science behind the management of our region’s natural resources. Although its exposure is mostly in the Spokane area and very “hands-on,” the principles and information provided in a variety of programs and brochures could be utilized in a less detailed statewide program reaching many more people.

Washington Agriculture & Forestry Education Foundation, Class XX Public Policy Project: Washington Agriculture Model for Agriculture Environmental Coalition, June 11, 1999. Kurt Isaak, Mary Raines, Chris Bieker, Steve Mader, Steve Pedersen, Jim Thompson. URL: www.agforestry.org

Washington Association of Conservation Districts, Draft Concept Outline: “Washington Agricultural Conservation Commodity Board,” Don Stewart, now with the American Farmland Trust, (253-446-9384).

Washington Forest Protection Association, 724 Columbia St. NW, Ste 250, Olympia, WA 98501 (360-352-1500). Mike Munson, a speaker at the Shelton seminar, reviewed their entire public relations program with us. It is heavily dependent on TV, combined with numerous other print media and direct educational efforts such as Project Learning Tree. Mike is now with South Seattle Community College (206-768-6875). Cindy Mitchell is the current WFPA Director of Communications.

Washington Association of Wheat Growers, 109 E. First Avenue, Ritzville, WA 99169. Gretchen Borck provided information on AgLink,

Bounty of Washington, and the Washington State Ag Commodity Communicators Project (509-659-0610). URL: <http://www.wawg.org>.

Wood Promotion Network, 4628 Morris Avenue South, Renton, WA 98055
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Appendix 1 Document Reviewers

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Class XXII, Group 4**

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Appendix 3

Farming and the Environment Project

**A Washington State Public Opinion Survey
conducted by
Elway Research, Inc.**

*(This document may be found on the Internet at
<http://www.tricity.wsu.edu/aenews/elwayreport.pdf>)*