

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

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In a world full of stereotypes, I can tell you that I fit the basic white girl stereotype, to a tee. I love drinking iced coffees, going to church, carrying my Stanley cup, and putting my hair up in scrunchies instead of hair ties. Most of all, I love posting on social media. My most recent social media post was filled with pictures from our last softball game of senior year. While many people use social media to show off to their friends or say farewell to a chapter in their lives, there is another reason we can use social media. Using social media as a platform to advocate for important issues is the fastest way to reach people. As of 2024, there are 5.17 billion social media users which is 63.7% of the global population (Jones, 2024). The average time people spend on social media everyday is two hours and twenty-four minutes (Howarth, 2024). Think of all the time we have as agriculturists to promote agriculture. The American Farm Bureau conducted a survey and determined that 58% of Americans know nothing about farming or ranching (Murphy, 2024). By using social media to advocate for ag education, we can bring more people to our industry.

Just thinking about using social media more makes me think of my grandma. I can hear her voice clear as a bell, “Jessie Laurel you will turn off that phone right now and go outside!” My grandma is not a fan of cell phones. We can all agree that older generations do not see the potential social media offers to the agriculture industry when social media has so much to offer. Did you know that 89% of marketers choose Facebook as their platform (“50+ Must Know”, 2024)? They do so for good reason. There are 3.07 billion Facebook users worldwide (Kumar, 2024). 80% of marketers use Instagram, which has 2.4 billion users worldwide (Mortensen, 2024). TikTok is much smaller than Facebook and Instagram with 1 billion users. These three platforms offer billions of people the opportunity to teach people about agriculture. With Facebook and Instagram, we can make posts that consist of photos and captions and share them

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with our friends. Using TikTok to post videos with captions of what we do in agriculture can help inform people about our industry. When we use social media to show everyone what agriculture is, we can recruit more people to our industry.

While it's easy to understand why social media is the best place to promote agriculture, how we promote agriculture is more difficult. We may ask ourselves questions like; What parts of agriculture are we going to promote? What will we post on social media to promote these parts of agriculture? What is the end goal of our promotion? I believe that it would be most beneficial to promote ag education on social media. Did you know that last year, Missouri did not have enough ag teachers to fill every available position (2024)? With ag programs coming to our schools such as Ag Ed on the Move, we need more ag teachers to teach these programs.

In order to recruit more people to teach ag by using social media, we need to post about what interests them. I recently interviewed an ag teacher from Mount Vernon about his views on promoting ag education. Mr. Shepherd told me that kids aspiring to be ag teachers need to see what ag teaching is all about. He said, "This is what's fun about ag teaching, when a kid finally understands what you're saying. They can apply this instead of doing fluffy junk that doesn't matter." When we post on social media, we need to post about real agriculture. In a society full of cheez-wiz welding, we need to show the good, the bad, and the ugly to our students. Giving our students a real ag education will motivate them to become ag educators. Mr. Shepherd also told me, "Being an FFA advisor is only part of it, you're really hired to be an ag teacher. If you don't know or learn something about agriculture, you're going to be a bad teacher." By using social media to show these facts to our community, we may recruit more people to the ag industry.

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When we promote ag education on social media, we need to have an end goal in mind. I believe our goal should be to recruit more ag teachers. While showing the community plain, unedited agriculture is a good way to recruit ag teachers, there's more than one way to skin a cat. I believe that showing the community the impact our ag teachers have on our students may just help some people join us in the teaching industry. If we urged our students in agriculture to post about their ag teachers on social media, we would see a difference in our school systems. As a student in agriculture, I can tell you that Mr. Rujawitz has changed my life for the better. While he's taught me how to persevere and to work hard, he's also taught me how to be a good human. By watching Mr. Rujawitz in the way he acts, he's taught me how to be patient, how to ask questions, and how to make someone feel loved. If I were to make a post like this on social media, we can hope that at least one person would consider becoming an ag teacher. Being an ag teacher is not just a job, it's a lifestyle.

Knowing how to use social media is so important. Being able to use it properly allows us to share with our community what we are passionate about. Today, we are passionate about ag education. The importance of ag education speaks for itself and our need for ag teachers is unending. When we promote ag education through social media we need to show the good, the bad, and the ugly. By being raw with our viewers, more people can understand what we are promoting and will want to join our industry. When we become vulnerable and show our community how important our ag teachers are to our students, not only will people sympathize with our teachers more, but more people will want to become educators.

As members of the ag industry and the teaching industry, we need to advocate for ourselves through social media to draw more teachers and students to agriculture. In a world of

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stereotypes, let us strive to be labeled as raw, kind, compassionate, patient, hard-working, and joyful. In a world of stereotypes, let us be labeled as ag educators.

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