

## Lawmakers, not newspapers, write farm bills

By: Phillip W. Hayes, North Bridge Communications

Most big-city reporters don't know the difference between sweet corn and corn sweetener. Yet, somehow they all think they're experts when it comes to farm policy.

An examination of the country's top newspapers shows that 19 of the largest 20 publications have actively editorialized against current farm programs. Headlines like "Prairie Plutocrats," "Welfare Reform for Farmers," and "Put Agribusiness on a Diet" seem to spring up weekly.

It gets worse. Those 19 papers reach 18.2 million readers every day. And thanks to the Internet, it only takes seconds for editorial pages from Manhattan, New York to find their way to Manhattan, Kansas.

Every time one of these hit pieces appears, farmers call to ask how we're going to respond. They are understandably mad--mad about the continued inaccuracies in reporting and going mad over the growing pile of negative news clips.

When I tell them we're not going to do anything because nothing we do will make a difference, they seem puzzled. But directing your energies elsewhere is the best action in these cases.

Trust me, taking one on the chin was hard lesson to learn.

I used to spend hours battling editors over one-sided stories. I'd show them USDA figures to contradict false claims. I'd ask growers to open up financial records to prove most farming operations were closer to Main Street than Wall Street. I'd pen response letters that might wind up buried with 10 non-related letters on a rarely-read back page.

Nothing worked. It became painfully obvious that the results weren't worth the investment of time or resources.

That's why I now urge farmers to find better uses for their pent up aggression. Write a letter to Congress. Pick up the phone and call your Senator. Contact your local paper and author a positive story describing what farm policy means to your community, then send that article to Capitol Hill.

Jockeying with journalists from urban centers for hours is as pointless as screaming at the sky when it rains during harvest. But spending just a few minutes corresponding with a lawmaker can leave a lasting impression with someone who matters.

Lawmakers want to hear from everyday people because everyday people sent them to the nation's capital.

In the coming months, expect the negative "corporate farm" and "subsidy" headlines to intensify. Opponents of agriculture are spending millions of dollars on glitzy public relations campaigns that are aimed at the Heartland.

The media coverage from Metropolis won't be pretty, but you can take comfort in one thing: Lawmakers, not newspapers, write farm bills.

And Capitol Hill is where agriculture's attention should be focused.

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