

# BEING WILLING TO AGVOCATE

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**AGRICULTURE:** something that means so much to so very few. Keegan Kautzky, Director of National Education Programs for the World Food Prize Foundation, posed an excellent question at the 2016 AgCareers.com Ag & Food HR Roundtable: “Agriculture is key to solving the world’s greatest problems, and it is not revered as it should be. How do we change that narrative?”

Those who work in agriculture or aspire to, know the countless benefits it produces and the fulfillment it brings. Because those of us who are employed by the industry are so passionate about it, it can be difficult to have an effective conversation with an individual that doesn’t understand agriculture without emotions getting involved. How can we set the record straight? How can we encourage others to pursue agriculture as we have (and we so desperately need others too as well) when they are uninterested or misinformed?

Treat this AgCareers.com Ag & Food Career Guide as your toolkit for being an Agvocate. Understand why it is important and beneficial to advocate for both the agricultural industry and agricultural careers, how to go about advocating, and the best resources for sharing agriculture with others.

## WHY AGVOCATE

Have you ever overheard conversations that made you wonder if more people today think their food comes from the grocery store than the farm? Or have you had someone tell you that your favorite food is not okay to eat because of the chemicals or antibiotics they’ve been “contaminated” with?

“Most of today’s population is at least three generations removed from the farm, yet we have seen an influx in interest in the food we eat,” said Riley Pagett, Director of Advocacy and Government Relations for the National FFA Organization. “We know that when this

heightened interest arises after quite literally generations of disconnect from the farm and food business, more consumers make grocery store decisions based on the picture of farming and food that is painted for them by misinformed special interest groups.”

Misconceptions about food and farming can be dangerous, as they spread quickly and threaten the reputation and wellbeing of the agricultural industry. Negative opinions and false information can lead to both legal and economic issues for industry employees.

Furthermore, agriculture being cast in a negative light can be attributed to the very real agricultural labor shortage. A 2016 study by Purdue University found that in that year alone, “an average of 35,400 new U.S. graduates with expertise in food, agriculture, renewable natural resources, or the environment are expected to fill 61% of the expected 57,900 average annual openings.”

“It is important that agricultural professionals advocate for food and agriculture because it’s not only where we work, but it’s something we believe in,” Pagett said. “If we are not telling our story or advocating for ourselves, someone else will—and unfortunately, we might not like it. Advocating for food and agriculture is crucial always, but especially in a time when so much misinformation is so readily spread in the public square.”

## APPROPRIATE APPROACHES

It’s easy to get worked up about negative portrayals of agriculture, the industry we know and love, but it’s harder to effectively advocate for it. It might be intimidating to speak up, or it may be difficult to get involved without anger.

“No matter the form, the most important step to advocating for food and agriculture is to engage in a dialogue

with others, even if they might disagree with us,” Pagett said. “When we engage with others and have conversations, rather than arguments, with them, we become more credible and we create an opportunity to educate someone about the world we believe in.”

If you find yourself in a conversation with a misinformed consumer, first ask them where they heard this information. Next, listen to their perspective and why they feel the way they do. It does no good to rush into a rant about why they are wrong. Typically, there is a very emotional root to their opinion. Finally, after you’ve listened to them and asked questions, calmly and rationally share your own perspective.

Again, listen, ask questions, then share your perspective and expertise.

Pagett shared various examples for advocating for agriculture outside of conversations:

- Reading accurate agricultural books to elementary school students
- Meeting with local groups about agricultural jobs in the community
- Writing or tweeting to legislators to inform them about an upcoming vote on agricultural policy
- Participating in National FFA’s #SpeakAg dialogue on social media
- Participating in #AgChat discussions on Twitter
- Speaking to clubs and organizations in your area about your agricultural career or the industry

“These conversations help us bridge the gap between producer and consumer, and as a result creates a healthier discussion across the nation and our world,” Pagett said.

No matter how you “advocate,” sharing your passion for our industry can make lasting impacts for our future.

## RESOURCES

One of our core values at AgCareers.com is “bleed green.” We are passionate and committed to what we do: agriculture. Part of that includes promoting excellent careers in agriculture. Share these resources with your peers in order to create a positive and motivational dialogue around agricultural careers.



## AGCAREERS.COM CAREER PROFILES & INFOGRAPHICS:

The AgCareers.com Career Profiles were created as a resource to increase learning and understanding around the great variety of opportunities in agriculture and food. Explore more than 250 different careers organized by pathway. Our infographics were modeled after our Career Profiles and provide a more visual and shareable form of them. These are great tools to share with youth.



## CAREERS IN AGRICULTURE DIGITAL

**E-BOOK:** We created the Careers in Agriculture digital e-book to promote agricultural careers. This publication features interviews with agricultural professionals, industry leaders, and advocates concerning the various challenges facing the agricultural workforce. Find versions with or without the Career Profiles included.