

What others think and say can hurt us

Frank A. Gasperini, Jr.
National Council of Ag Employers

Although many of us fear agriculture is being left behind in the current



Gasperini

race to the 2016 national elections, there remain huge misinformation campaigns aimed at the public who continue to spread slanted, questionable, and just plain wrong information about our practices in the process of feeding a growing world. In the Washington, D.C., television market the past two weeks I have seen advertisements for and against genetically modified (GMO) and country of origin labelling, for and against renewable energy standards, and for and against general support of agricultural programs. From the employer side, even more troubling has been a series of articles which started as a series in the publication "Buzzfeed," spread like a stomach flu through other activist media on both sides of the aisle, and has re-ignited public concerns that agricultural workers are generally mistreated and paid ultra-low wages.

This sort of activism is stirred up cyclically, usually with an improving overall economy as we are experiencing now because with better economic conditions Americans traditionally fund and participate in more activist causes. Unfortunately they are too easily led to bad causes.

The apple industry has a strong record of proactive work to inform the public and protect the image of your products. New York Apple Association's Core Report, political work, active participation with other associations, and other hard work to educate people. The National Council of Agricultural Employers thank you for working closely with us and with other groups to be not only good stewards of your employees, but also for actively participating in helping all of us communicate that being an agricultural employer, and an employee, are honorable, ethical, and mutually beneficial relationships.

A year or two ago we wrote the following talking points for NCAE members to use when members of the public ask about our working relationships. They are still valuable in today's environment. You may wish to adopt these for your own associations and businesses in order to be prepared. Where it says "our members" or "we" you can use the name of our own business, ranch, or farm.

Our members do, and always will support and promote the premise that the only sustainable, equitable, and fair employment model is a mutual

exchange of values in which the employer and the employee benefit and are better off at the end of each season than they would have been without the mutual relationship.

We recognize that in any mutual exchange, there can/will be certain outlier individuals who may attempt to manipulate the equation in ways that specifically, and potentially unfairly, advantage themselves at the expense of the other party. There are current laws, rules, and ethical considerations in place at the federal and state level that when fully employed are intended, and are well able to protect both sides from abuses; and to prevent future abuses by those outliers who do break the rules. We completely support full and predictable enforcement of these laws and rules and, by virtue of the fact that we spend the resources of time and money to join and participate in our industry's professional and trade associations, demonstrate that we are also deeply committed to the ethical considerations as well. U.S. and state labor laws are clear, most were written to address and prevent the kind of abuses being alleged, we fully support and obey these laws and regulations and expect others to do so as well. We expect federal and state authorities to deal with those who break our laws and regulations.

It is unfortunate that those who have the interest and vast resources available to make movies, place media advertisements, raise funds from the public and the government, and

promote causes nationally choose to do their work from one-sided pre-conceived standpoints rather than reaching out to groups such as NCAE and the many other ethical and professional associations and businesses who represent agriculture nationally, regionally, and in the states to seek mutual grounds for discussion and forward movement.

Our members are, have been, and expect to remain leaders in sustainable production practices including employer/employee relationships; sound, legal, and ethical employment and management practices; safety and industrial hygiene, and commitment to lifetime and lifestyle participation in feeding both America and the world the safest, most diverse, most abundant, and most affordable food supply the world has ever known. These values cannot exist when one side victimizes, or demonizes the other, they occur when people of good-will and high-ethics work together to make American farms work in ways that leave all parties better off at the end of the season than they would have been without each other's contribution.



The author is Executive Vice President of the National Council of Agricultural Employers (NCAE.) NCAE is the national trade association representing Agricultural Employers in Washington, D.C. Visit NCAE's website at www.NCAEonline.org for more information and continuing updates.