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SPEAKING UP: Troy and Stacy Hadrick are on a mission to win over consumers, one person at a time. They are teaching other producers how to speak out.

Passion for ag

By LON TONNESON

IF Troy and Stacy Hadrick never spoke to the media again, never helped someone at a meat counter select a steak or never told the person sitting next to them on an airplane that they raise cattle, you'd understand.

The Hadricks, of Vale, S.D., were part of *The New York Times* "Power steer" article in 2002. They say the article depicted the U.S. cattle industry as a giant, evil, inhumane, greedy machine that abuses animals and pollutes the environment.

Author Michael Pollan bought a calf from the ranch operated by Stacy's father and uncle — Ed and Rich Blair — and followed it to a Kansas feedlot and a packing plant. Pollan spent a great deal of time with Troy, who showed him the family's 11,000-acre ranch. They squeezed into the chore tractor

Key Points

- The Hadricks encourage producers to speak out.
- Individual stories can reach consumers.
- The Hadricks hope to undo damage caused by article.

together to feed cattle, and Troy e-mailed Pollan over the winter and spring, telling him how his calf was growing.

"We had high hopes that the consumer would have an opportunity to learn about all of the great things the beef industry has accomplished," Troy says.

But Pollan — who has become a leading food industry critic — "twisted their story to fit his agenda," Troy says.

It even got personal.

"I was especially struck by [Troy's] relationship to the animals, how it manages to be at once intimate and unsen-

timental," Pollan wrote. "One day Hadrick is tenderly nursing a newborn at 3 a.m., the next he's having a 'big prairie oyster feed' after castrating a pen of bull calves."

After the article appeared, Troy and Stacy received phone calls from animal-rights people around the country.

"We weren't specifically threatened, but the tone of some of the calls made you wonder what some people could be capable of doing," Troy says.

The experience disappointed

and shocked the Hadricks.

"It took us awhile to figure out how we could turn this negative into a positive," Troy says.

They eventually concluded that no one would probably tell a positive story about agriculture except producers.

Putting a face on food

"In the end, Stacy and I knew we couldn't do it ourselves," Troy says. "Everyone in agriculture needs to work together to put a face on food."

Last year, they formed a company called Advocates for Agriculture and began crisscrossing the country giving presentations to farm and ranch groups about speaking up for their businesses and way of life.

"We hope we are making up for the damage the 'Power steer' article caused," Troy says. "We are trying to turn a bad experience into something positive."

For tips from the Hadricks on how to be a better advocate for agriculture, see Page 8.

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