

OUR SAY

Time to show consumers you care

SEVERAL speakers I've listened to recently emphasized the need for agriculture to rebuild trust with American consumers.

Through the years, consumers for the most part have given farmers and ranchers high marks on producing quality, safe food, but beef recalls and PR campaigns by well-funded food activists and animal-rights groups have shaken that trust.

"Sound science," a phrase agriculture likes to use to make its safe-food argument, isn't enough anymore, at least according to Matt Sutton-Vermeulen with the Center for Food Integrity, a relatively new food-industry organization. Speaking at the Governor's Ag Conference, Sutton-Vermeulen contended that producers also need to take a "principle-driven" approach, one that focuses on compassion, fairness, respect and responsibility.

In other words, farmers must show consumers they are committed to these principles as much as they are to profit and sound science.

How that's to be accomplished will take several forms. A key is to explain to consumers the best management practices producers use to raise crops in an environmentally sound manner, and the animal-care practices they employ to raise and handle livestock.

Agriculture isn't comfortable with these concepts, I suspect. Producers already believe they are good stewards of their resources and really don't like somebody looking over their shoulders. But these are different times, when the attention span of consumers is declining, and they are easily swayed by the latest "new study" reported in the media.

Also, concentration in both production and retailing make agriculture an easier target.

According to Sutton-Vermeulen, a recent CFI survey showed that consumers trust themselves on food and the environment more than they do farmers and government agencies. The same survey showed consumers were more concerned about animal welfare than they were the welfare of agriculture workers. And 30% of the respondents indicated farm animals should be treated the same way as pets.

What all this means is that agriculture has a big challenge in making its case.

He cited one venue at which agri-

culture must promote its story: "State fairs are a good vehicle, the face of agriculture, for educating consumers on how food is produced."

The Nebraska State Fair, wherever it ends up, should be refashioned to incorporate this food production component. Unfortunately for all of us, many

of the powers that be in Nebraska seem bent on dismantling the state fair.

Have a safe season

Before heading to the field, stop! Make sure you remember what matters most — your family. Did you tell them that? Are you and your equipment prepped

for a safe season? Are family members aware of dangers on your farm or ranch?

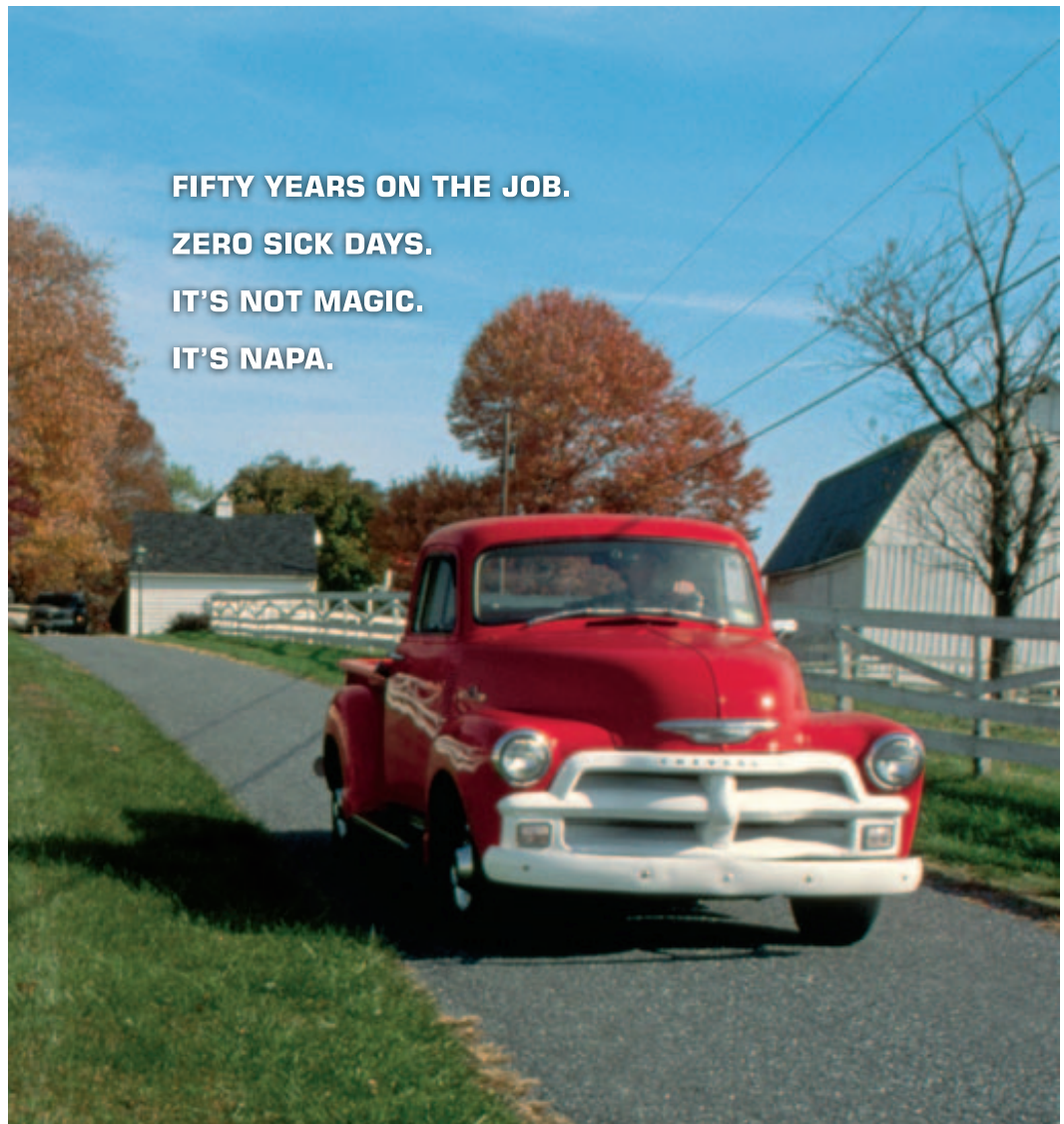
Guess what? Your family needs you to be alert, safe and healthy. Record crop prices and general optimism in the ag sector mean very little if you or someone you love becomes a statistic.

FIFTY YEARS ON THE JOB.

ZERO SICK DAYS.

IT'S NOT MAGIC.

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