

2018 Iowa Essay Contest Winner

Anna Campbell, Audubon FFA

When I look out my window each morning, I see hills of crops dotted with swine confinements, wind turbines, and family farms. Contributing to this environment is my father, a 55-year-old farmer living as the fourth generation on his family farm. He lives by a set of principles engraved into him by earlier generations of stewards of the land. Being a contributor to the land is a reward that could be my future, but as the age of the average farmer is rising, the same cannot be said for every young American. In order to stay relevant to future farmers, cooperatives will need to focus on education.

To become a partner with the generations to come, cooperatives need to extend their knowledge to students through programs like FFA. These programs have a mix of rural and urban pupils that have all gained a loose grasp on the idea of agriculture but could retain much more knowledge if approached by cooperatives. This would give students a better understanding of cooperatives and how they help agriculture. Also, this could spark interest in potential future farmers. Offering to share expertise could help teenagers comprehend how the cooperative system works.

While 97 percent of the U.S. is rural, only 19.3 percent of the population resides in these areas. While the jobs done in cities are important, the people doing those jobs need a firm understanding of agriculture in order for cooperatives to still remain relevant. Cooperatives must make sure that the misinformed don't become deceived by ag-related myths. Cooperatives could take a role in educating the world through television, radio, newspaper, and other forms of communication. Doing so, some urban residents may become uninterested in the industry and help close the rising age gap.

Young people born into agriculture know about cooperatives and the help they can provide, but those who come into the industry unexposed but willing to fill the shoes of agriculturalists do not. One thing that the majority of people have access to that cooperatives can use to reach out with is social media. Cooperatives could expose incoming agriculturalists to their values through technology; this helps cooperatives be obtainable at the touch of a finger. This younger generation will have more knowledge about technology than any other and will understand things best through screens, and cooperatives need to lasso the opportunity to remain relevant in the future by providing easily accessible resources through social media.

As the population is growing rapidly, cooperatives will need to help fill the age gap of the average farmer to help feed the world; their values will need to be shared with generations to come. My father and cooperatives both stand for some of the same principles: member control, giving everyone a voice, and having the most strength through numbers. These are morals that are fading into the past and need to be revitalized through means of education. Cooperatives can help the future of agriculture, but only if they take the measures to do so.