



**“Keeping it in Balance: A Talent Pipeline for Agri-Advocacy.”**

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## Executive Summary

This report aims to highlight worldwide regulatory issues, policy changes, and food influencers' impact on agriculture and recommend a mitigation strategy for agricultural trade and commodity organizations. The objectives of this report are covered in five sections, building the case for the final recommendation. Current infrastructure within agricultural trade and commodity organizations should be used to develop a talent pipeline for elected officials and regulatory employees to aid in counter-acting the historical decline of agricultural representation in government, the rise of environmental advocacy, and food influencers driving the consumer marketplace. By continuously engaging with potential talent, ag trade and commodity associations can maintain a competitive edge, and attract eager individuals who want to be involved.

There is a historical decline in agricultural representation and experience in government and regulatory agencies. Agricultural commodity and trade organizations use a variety of advocacy strategies to influence these officials, including lobbying and forming coalitions. This report aims to provide information on the regulatory professionals needing more knowledge or background in regulating and passing legislation.

The second and third objectives highlight the environmental advocacy groups, food influencers, and non-profits' influence on agricultural policy. It will aim to show consumer-driven demand for food traceability, increased environmental awareness of food production, and non-profit entities funding ag-related projects to shape food policy. Food influencers and environmental

advocates worldwide are shaping agriculture policies and implementations due to the social awareness they bring to the consumer and, ultimately, the elected officials' constituents.

Finally, this report will recommend that agricultural advocacy organizations implement a political and regulatory talent pipeline strategy through existing leadership programs to recruit agriculturally minded individuals to run for office or pursue a career in an agriculture policy role for those who align with that organization's mission.

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## Abbreviations

Ag – Agriculture

CAP- Common Agriculture Policy

CRS-Congressional Research Service

EPA- Environmental Protection Agency

European People's Party

EU- European Union

F2F- Farm to Fork

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GFP – Global Focus Program

GMO-Genetically Modified Organism

IDFA- International Dairy Foods Association

MEP- Members of the European Parliament

N – Nitrogen

NC – North Carolina

NCDA – North Carolina Department of Agriculture

NCFB- North Carolina Farm Bureau

NL – The Netherlands

S&D-Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats

T/ha – Tons per Hectare

USA – United States of America

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

USDA-ERS – United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service

## Forward

Growing up, my parents taught me to be a good person, remember who I represent, and get a job upon graduation because moving back to Henderson, North Carolina with them was not an option. Every semester at N.C. State University seemed shorter than the last. As a business major, the job possibilities were endless it was difficult to decide what direction to take. Through interning for a couple summers at the state legislature, the cross-section of politics, policy, and agriculture as a subject matter, I knew that I had not just found a job; I found a career. A career that takes me home to my family every day in agriculture, full circle. That career is in agricultural advocacy.

Merriam-Webster defines advocacy as “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal.” The term 'act' is not defined. Advocating is not just lobbying- (although my official title is a “lobbyist”). It can take on many forms, which is the main objective of this report-places we as advocacy organizations can grow to stay relevant through the regulatory burdens government places on our food producers. Agriculture, policy, and politics make up a terrific (or a horrific) advocate. The word "policy" comes from a Greek word, “polis”, which means "community". The word "politics" closely resembles the word "policy" interpreted to relate to citizens. I define all these terms because we in agriculture like to tout the term "community" often. Therefore, all three of these words are closely linked not just by definition but also by the inherent spirit of the agriculture industry and community- the culture! Here in North Carolina, specifically at N.C. Farm Bureau Federation, we have robust young farmer & rancher programs, LEAD, and many other ag leadership development programs throughout the state that aid in sharpening interactions and influencing those outside of industry. My true belief is that we must protect our domestic food production in the United States. It is a national security issue that must be

defended and we need to be a net exporter, not a net importer of food. Throughout my travels, I learned that farmers are their biggest advocates because of the power of the first person.

Worldwide, and in our own commodity and trade organizations here in North Carolina, there is a challenge to get young farmers and agribusiness persons involved in leadership, policy, and advocacy activities. Why is that? The free food bribes and swag can only go so far. We see farmer protests in Europe-were they not satisfied with the efforts of the agricultural organizations representing them? Or is it because the government needs to communicate with or consult agriculture ministries before implementing a new regulation or phasing out CAP subsidies?

Nevertheless, we in the agriculture community think we have a say in all these processes. Are we "having a say" if we aren't in the room when the decisions are made from the start? Another commonality amongst farmers worldwide is that they don't necessarily want to rely on government subsidies to stay afloat-they wish to be profitable. Like any other business, young entrepreneurs cannot do so if government regulations and policies keep whittling away at their operating license.

Note that when we compare our food production and our farmers to others worldwide we are not comparing apples to apples. The U.S. regulatory policies to those in Europe is often not a direct comparison because the underlying theories of governance and regulatory frameworks differ significantly between the two. In the United States, regulations are influenced by a market-driven approach, emphasizing minimal government intervention (with voluntary incentives thrown in occasionally) maximizing individual freedoms, and a value in research-based frameworks-a more reactive approach. This often results in a regulatory framework where policies are implemented after significant market failures, public pressures or a severe weather event. In contrast, Europe tends to adopt a more precautionary principle in regulatory development,

prioritizing preventative measures to mitigate potential risks before they materialize. As a result, regulations in Europe may be more stringent and proactive compared to the often more permissive U.S. policies, making direct comparisons inherently flawed.

Nuffield has given me the opportunity to understand these concepts not just within the United States or North Carolina but worldwide- the same culture of community spirit. Which is why Nuffield has seen success- the agriculture community shares community spirit worldwide like no other industry.

## Acknowledgements

I offer my deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to all those who have made this Nuffield International Farming Scholarship possible. My sponsors at Ag Carolina Farm Credit, Griffin Farms, Mrs. Dale Boone, North Carolina State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and the North Carolina Sweetpotato Association made this all possible. I will forever be a servant to your pursuits.

To my current employer, North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, I am immensely thankful for your unwavering support. Your dedication to uplifting farmers and advancing agriculture in our state is strong, and your belief in my potential means more than words can convey. A special thanks to my teammate, Stacy Sereno, for covering and keeping the roof on that building downtown while I was off gallivanting. I feel incredibly fortunate to be in the NCFB family, knowing that your support empowers me and countless others passionate about the future of farming and agriculture in North Carolina.

I also sincerely appreciate the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Your commitment to the growth of our agricultural community is vital, and I am deeply honored a "chance" to prove myself in 2017 thanks to Mr. Zane Hedgecock. The work you do to ensure the prosperity of agriculture in our state is invaluable, and I am grateful to be a part of your mission to cultivate a brighter future for farmers everywhere. Thank you for investing in me and belief in agricultural leadership. North Carolina agriculture is in good hands.

To my family, my deepest gratitude for always being there for me. Your love and support have been the foundation that has carried me through this journey. You encouraged me to pray for

new and attainable heights from the beginning, even when the path was uncertain. I am beyond grateful for your patience, sacrifices (keeping my dog, watering my plants, etc.), and unwavering confidence in me. The independent study with you, Catherine Watts, is an unforgettable memory that is hard to describe. Besides Christ, you are my greatest strength, and I could not have pursued this opportunity without you.

Finally, to my fellow Nuffield Scholars, it is an honor to stand among an inspiring group of individuals. Your curious minds, passionate spirits and dedication to agriculture is reason to have faith that farmers will continue to feed the world.

## Objectives

1. Analyze the historical decline of agricultural government representation and advocacy organizations' current influence.
2. Examine regulatory professionals' need for more expertise in their agricultural field.
3. Evaluate strategies used by environmental advocacy groups to influence localized policies, including farmer opposition to these policies.
4. Highlight consumer-driven demand for food traceability and increased environmental awareness of food production.
5. Propose a strategy for agricultural advocacy organizations to build a regulatory talent pipeline focusing on individuals with agricultural expertise.

## Introduction

Traveling the world has proven one thing farmers have in common: they face challenges with government regulation daily. They want to run their business-feeding people while being profitable-without the backlash of regulatory burdens or consumer opinions. Over time, there has been a steady decrease in the percentage of agribusiness and farmer professionals represented in government, particularly in the United States. Environmental advocacy coalitions and food influencers worldwide have banded together to influence government institutions and persuade consumers about what they should believe their food source should look like, without the science to prove why producers must make specific changes. How can we as agriculture advocacy organizations better align our mitigation efforts to ensure they address industry's most significant threats? Are there current resources that used for this? The answer is yes. Current infrastructure within agricultural trade and commodity organizations should be used to develop a talent pipeline for elected officials and regulatory employees to aid in counter-acting the historical decline of agricultural representation in government, the rise of environmental advocacy and food influencers driving the consumer marketplace. The final objective is to integrate objectives one through four, building upon each to ultimately reach the conclusion found in the recommendations.

## Core Findings

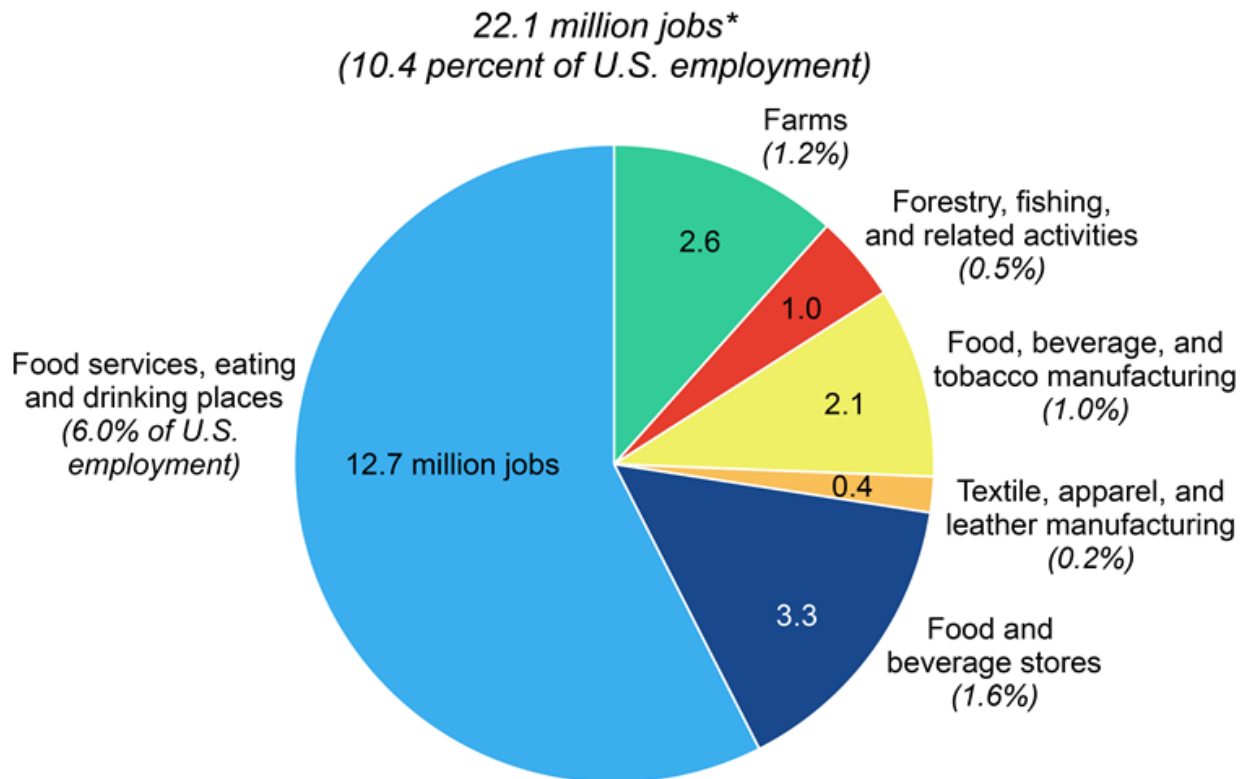
### Objectives One and Two

Analyze the historical decline of agricultural government representation and advocacy organizations' current influence.

Examine regulatory professionals' need for more expertise in their agricultural field.

Over time (Figure 2), there has been a steady decrease in the percentage of agribusiness and farmer professionals represented in government, particularly in the United States. This should come as no surprise as the profession of a farmer in and of itself has declined over the years, today making up just 1.2% of the total U.S. employment as shown here in Figure 1:

### U.S. employment in agriculture, food, and related industries, 2022



\*Full- and part-time jobs. Categories may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of

Figure 1: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials>

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) publishes membership data of each Congress. Currently, the United States is in its 118<sup>th</sup> year. According to the Congressional Research Service, out of the 541 elected members from the entire United States, there are 31 professions related to agriculture including farmers and ranchers. (8 in the Senate, 23 in the House). In addition, over three-fourths of elected officials have previously been elected in local, state, or federal levels before being in Congress (Figure 3). Note in Figure 2 below that prior agriculture occupations of Representatives in the 83<sup>rd</sup> to 116<sup>th</sup> Congress have declined by almost half since the 1950s.

Table 1-8 Prior Occupations of Representatives, 83rd - 116th Congresses, 1953 - 2019

Occupation	83rd 1953	84th <sup>a</sup> 1955	86th 1959	89th 1965	90th 1967	91st 1969	92nd <sup>a</sup> 1971	93rd 1973	94th 1975	95th 1977	96th 1979	97th 1981	98th 1983
Acting/entertainer										6	6	11	8
Aeronautics										1	0	3	3
Agriculture	63	60	45	44	39	35	36	39	30	15	23	36	31
Business or banking	149	141	130	156	161	158	149	153	141	112	109	120	114
Clergy				3	3	2	2	4	5	6	5	2	2
Congressional aide	23	22	25	28	26	27	24	24	24	23	30	31	34
Education	65	60	41	68	57	60	69	59	64	71	67	65	43
Engineering			3	9	6	5	4	2	3	2	3	6	5
Journalism	39	36	35	43	39	40	30	24	23	20	18	23	17
Labor leader				3	2	3	5	3	3	6	4	2	2
Law	248	247	242	247	246	240	237	222	221	219	200	200	202
Law enforcement						2		2	2	8	6	7	6
Medicine	6	6	4	3	3	5	6	5	5	3	6	5	5
Military										0	0	0	1
Professional sports										3	3	3	3
Public service/politics	361	349	384	371	372	361	316	352	345	48	29	39	32
Real estate										11	15	21	19
Veteran	268	277	281	316	327	327	318	322	307	299	282	264	249
<b>New Occupations</b>													
Artistic/Creative										4	5	19	11
Healthcare										0	1	3	2
Homemaker/Domestic										2	1	0	0
Science						1	1	2	2	3	3	2	2
Secretarial/clerical										1	2	1	2
Technical/Trade										3	4	9	7
Miscellaneous										5	5	1	5

Figure 2: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Chpt-1.pdf>

## Almost half of the members of Congress were former state or territorial legislators

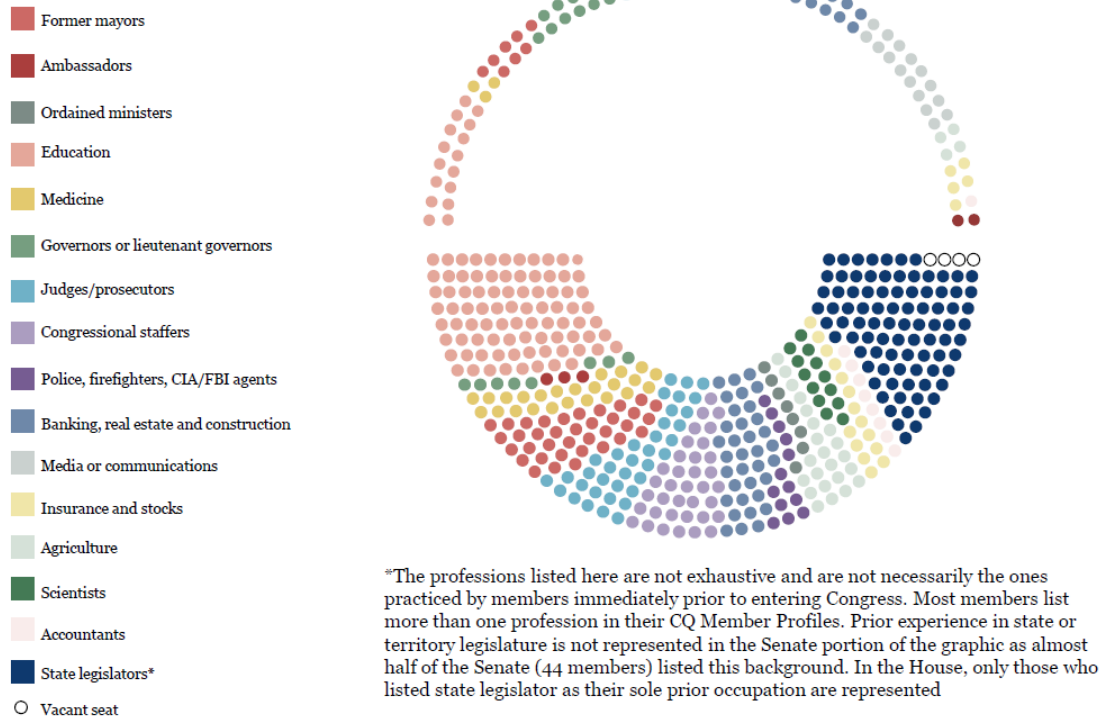


Figure 3 <https://www.nationaljournal.com/md/665237/the-115th-congress-by-profession-who-they-were-before-election/>

The purpose of these charts is to show elected officials previous lack of agricultural representation in Congress.

European Union government differs; however, the subject matter is the same. Figure 4 represents the flow of legislation. Once the EU Commission publishes their policies, it goes to European Parliament and then the Council of Ministers, the law is final. For agricultural advocacy groups, the mindset of being proactive is difficult because they spend the majority of their efforts on defense and every crisis seems worse than the last. Meetings with the Swedish farmer's association, Copa-Cogeca, Top-Agrar and USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) have good

collaboration amongst the themselves because it is essential. These EU lobby groups have opportunities to offer amendments throughout the process and coordinate what is submitted.

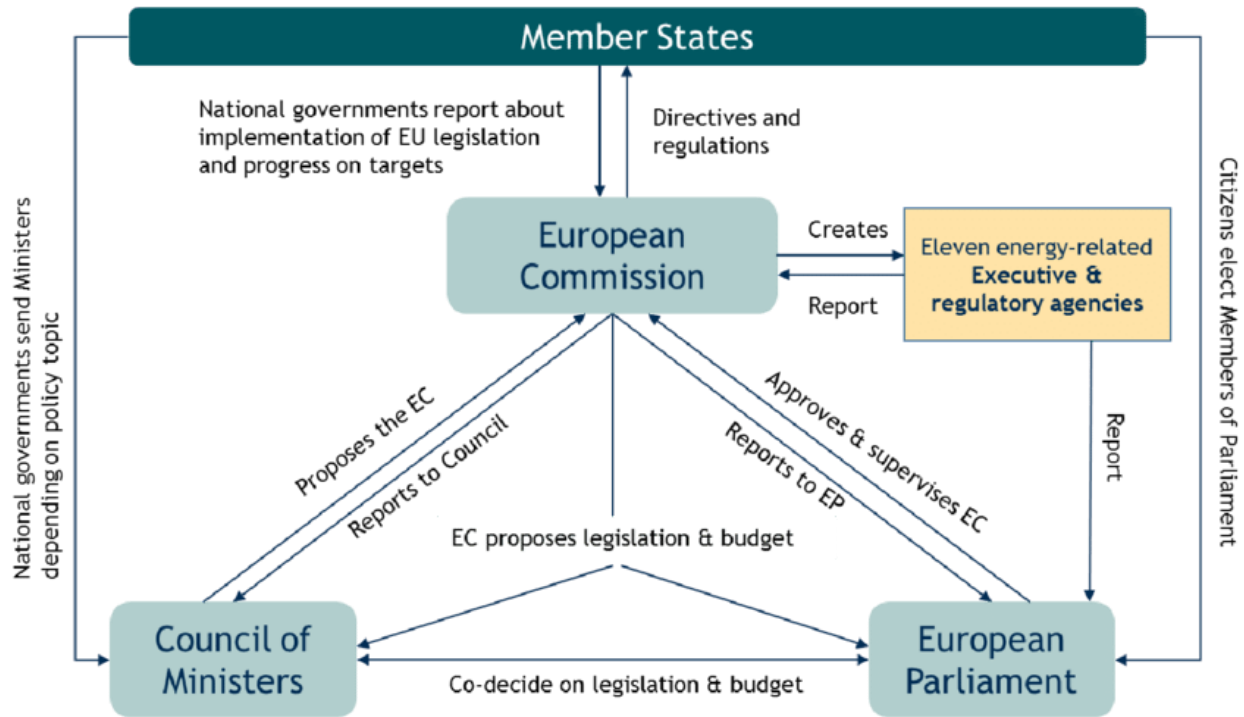


Figure 4 [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Overview-of-EU-energy-governance-structure\\_fig1\\_311656214](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Overview-of-EU-energy-governance-structure_fig1_311656214)

An example of a disconnect between profession and position, is the EU Agriculture Commissioner's limited agricultural background, highlights the challenges of effectively representing a field without direct experience in its core practices and issues. The European elections were held in June of 2024. The European People's Party (EPP) held onto the majority of the seats with the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) party having the second largest makeup of Parliament (“2024 Election Results | 2024 European Election Results | European Parliament”). Parliament re-elected the same European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, a member of the EPP. The Commission President (Ursula) appoints the other 27 Commissioners with a team of employees to serve them in office. Typically, the agriculture portfolio is less

intense and influential per se than others, but since the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which houses the EU farm subsidies, is under this portfolio. Agriculture receives more attention than usual when changes are made to the CAP.

For the last five years and until the end of 2024, the Commissioner Designate for Agriculture is Janusz Wojciechowski from Poland. A politician since 2004, he is an attorney by trade (O'Donnell). His team of roughly 12 people have a variety of experience and degrees. The team works on various regulations and laws including CAP schemes and reforms. These people hold degrees in ag economics and law. ("Janusz Wojciechowski's Team"). This group, led by the Commissioner as its figurehead, is charged with the policies to put forward to the full Commission for consideration.

In an article published by Euronews before the most recent appointment of the EU's newest agriculture commissioner, they bet on who would be the "next farming boss" (Fortuna). In other words, who President von der Leyen would appoint to be the Designate for Agriculture? Due to the farmer protests erupted over Europe this year, it deserved its own article. These protests will be highlighted more in objective two. The article states that this position traditionally will, *"never go to one of the 'Big Four'-France, Germany, Italy and Spain-which collectively account for more than half of the EU's agricultural output."* The article adds that in the past the position has gone to countries with a smaller agricultural footprint. This approach seems counterintuitive-to put a smaller country with less impact or interest in the agriculture field in control. It may be purposefully done. What the article did get right, was that the position will go to the EPP-settling on Christophe Hansen from Luxembourg as the country of choice to represent the entire Ag and food portfolio in the EU commission for the next five years.

*"Although he (Hansen) lacks a strong agricultural profile...he has significant expertise in trade and environment". More from article, "Commissioner-Designate for Agriculture and Food Christophe Hansen from Luxembourg is the new Commissioner-Designate for Agriculture and Food. This is the first time "food" is added to the title of the Agriculture Commissioner. Mr. Hansen has a master's in Geosciences, Environmental Sciences and Risk Management from the Louis Pasteur University, Strasbourg. He has been a member of the European Parliament since 2018, where he was the rapporteur for the EU Deforestation Regulation." (Bolla and Taylor).*

For this example, agricultural advocacy groups play a vital role in bridging the knowledge gap between these EU commissioners and their teams on the complexities and challenges of the sector. Through targeted outreach, these groups help influence decision-making to better align with the realities and needs of the agricultural community-which is part of their mission.

Advocacy groups raise awareness about specific issues through organizing public campaigns, lobbying policymakers, and providing resources that educate the public and influence legislative change. Copa and Cogeca is one of these such groups with the EU. They, *"organise themselves to respond to the challenges and questions posed by European decision-makers, allowing European farmers and cooperatives to put forward their views and proposals concerning a multitude of subjects that directly affect farmers no matter what agricultural activity they are involved in"* (Copa Cogeca). Key word, "respond". In addition to Copa, each member country has an agricultural advocacy organization who works with it on their issues. Examples of state advocacy organizations include the Irish Farmers Association (IFA), the Lower Saxony Farmer Association in Germany, the LTO in the Netherlands and the Polish Association of oil producers (PSPO). Trade and commodity groups work similarly in the United States. These groups include, but are not limited to, the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), National Pork Producers

Council (NPPC) and the American Soybean Association. It is a fair assessment that agriculture has their voices heard in advocacy, but more is needed when faced with opposition on specific environmental policies.

### Objective Three

Evaluate strategies used by environmental advocacy groups to influence localized policies, including protests from farmer opposition.

Historically, the United States follows suit with the EU regarding environmental regulations.

Norman Borlaug warned of this throughout his lifetime. In the book, "The Man Who Fed the

World" by Leon Hesser, he writes about Borlaug and his journey to educate agriculture

researchers and combat hunger, particularly in developing countries. Hesser says,

*"...agricultural biotechnology has arguably been submitted to greater scrutiny than any technology ever introduced into farming. Many government agencies worldwide have reviewed the science and approved its use. In the United States, at least three cabinet-level government agencies examine each biotech crop before it is approved for planting. And state agencies also regulate the process. Borlaug comments on this paradox: 'Activists have resisted research, and governments have overregulated it.' He says, "...most governments have either given agriculture and rural development a low priority or pursued impractical, idealistic development goals.... And cheap food policies to appease the politically volatile urban dwellers have greatly distorted production incentives for farmers."* The policy hypocrisy is noticed amongst European politicians as well. Celine Imart, MEP France and farmer: *"The European Union has banned the production of GMO crops, but not their import. The result? Not only are our producers prevented from competing on a level playing field, but customers are finding GMO foods on their plates. If we wanted to protect our market, we would subject our trading partners to the same restrictions we do ourselves"*.

In the United States, scientific evidence drives crop protection regulations through multi-year research and thorough testing. This allows new products and technologies to come to market faster if the research proves they are safe. In contrast, the EU policies follow the precautionary principle, often restricting agricultural innovations unless they are proven safe and unlikely to pose any potential risks in the future. *“The precautionary principle enables decision-makers to adopt precautionary measures when scientific evidence about an environmental or human health hazard is uncertain”* (*The Precautionary Principle: Definitions, Applications and Governance | Think Tank | European Parliament*).

Chlorpyrifos is an example of the differing principles. This insecticide controls vegetation and other insects that are a nuisance to various crops including cereals and vegetables. It has been used in the United States since 1965 and *“has been reviewed several times by EPA for tolerance reassessment, reregistration, and most recently, as part of its ongoing registration review.”*

(“Chlorpyrifos | US EPA”) According to the EPA: *“Chlorpyrifos is an extremely valuable tool for farmers due to its efficacy, broad-spectrum activity against multiple pests, and its fit with conservation biological control in crops. Revocation of all food tolerances for chlorpyrifos will negatively impact the production capabilities and economic stability of producers of many human and animal food crops.”*

In summary, this insecticide is vital for the efficient production in many commodities grown in United States. EPA has approved it through rigorous research and scientific processes since the 1960s. Insert today the US Court system: *“On November 2, 2023, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit issued a ruling vacating EPA's final rule revoking all chlorpyrifos food tolerances and remanding the matter to EPA for further proceedings. As a result of this decision, all food tolerances for chlorpyrifos that existed before the final rule revoking these tolerances*

*were reinstated once the court's mandate was issued on December 28, 2023. On February 5, 2024, EPA issued a Federal Register notice to amend the Code of Federal Regulations to reflect the court's reinstatement of those tolerances.” (“Chlorpyrifos | US EPA”)*

To compare this example with EU regulations and use of the precautionary principle, the EU commission issued a ban on chlorpyrifos in 2020 due to, *“Experts concluded that concerns related to human health exist, in particular about possible genotoxicity and developmental neurotoxicity.”*-emphasis on the term "possible". According to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), *“no safe exposure level – or toxicological reference value – can be set for the substance.”* The EU's ban on chlorpyrifos is a clear example of how regulatory decisions often leave farmer advocacy organizations on the defensive. It is a reactive verses proactive approach. These groups frequently react to restrictions that impact farmers' ability to compete and manage crops effectively. This underscores a broader trend where EU farmer advocacy organizations respond to decisions directly affecting their members' livelihoods. This reactive dynamic is closely tied to the CAP, which, while aimed at supporting farmers, often introduces new regulations and environmental goals that add to the challenges these originations must navigate. To complicate matters, member states can and do impose stricter regulations through CAP with their strategic plans. *“Agricultural policy is proposed by a supranational authority—the European Commission, agreed to or amended by agricultural ministers of EU member nations, and reviewed by the European Parliament. In its most recent version (2023–27), the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) relies on Member States' strategic plans framed by 10 key objectives” (USDA ERS - Common Agricultural Policy)*

One major example of a variety of moving parts to regulations in the agriculture sector in Europe is the European Green Deal proposed by the European Commission in 2019. Parts of the deal

have been delayed to work out implementation plans and conduct elections; however, they are expected to be fully implemented. It has eight parts, and each has controversy tied to it.

A controversial portion within the Green Deal has portions of which are postponed much due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and EU farmer protests is the "farm to fork (F2F)" initiative (*Overview: EU Farm to Fork and Green Deal Initiatives - AGRINFO Platform*). To summarize, F2F Strategy is, "*Central to the Green Deal, this strategy seeks to make food systems fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly. It addresses the environmental and climate footprint of the EU food system, food security challenges, and a global transition towards competitive sustainability*" (*Overview: EU Farm to Fork and Green Deal Initiatives - AGRINFO Platform*)

Another portion of this strategy was that of the EU sustainable food system framework that recently was not published in the 2024 Commission's public works programme. This proposal, "*aims to standardise sustainability for all food products in the EU, including imports. It will involve new legal frameworks, sustainability definitions, labelling requirements, and sustainable public procurement criteria*". One could argue that lobbying groups such as Copa-Cogeca and influential agricultural EU trading partners have won this battle. The absence of this section was heavily criticized in a letter from over 100 environmental advocacy groups part of the EU food policy coalition claiming, "*breaking promises made to EU citizens*" (Agroecology Europe et al.). Not once was there mention of science based evidence as to why the Commission should continue down this path, another use of the precautionary principle.

Another part of the F2F strategy was the sustainable use of pesticides proposal that was withdrawn by the recently re-elected European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen- largely in part of the farmer protests- another segment of the Green Deal ag lobbying groups worked to mitigate. As a result, the Commission has formed a group to discuss this moving

forward entitled, “*Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU agriculture.*” (“Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture”)

All member countries within the EU must submit a plan to Brussels to comply with new law.

One such example is the expiration in the Netherlands of the “manure derogatie”, an exception for nitrogen usage for Dutch farmers eliminated in 2024 and will not extend. Animal ag producers in the Netherlands have been operating under a derogation exception for some time, allowing them leeway to apply more or less nitrogen to land (LTO). The bottom line is there is too much animal waste in the Netherlands than farmers know what to do with and they cannot transfer it across country lines. Animal ag producers pay other fruit and vegetable producers to apply manure on their land. According to one Dutch dairy farmer, this cost ranges from \$20-\$100euros/ton, depending on the location. So a farmer is looking at anywhere from \$30,000-\$100,000 per year alone on waste disposal....and eliminating the manure derogatie exemption will not help. According to a USDA FAS report from June 2024, 42.5% of Dutch dairy farmers do not have a disposal method plan. What now? This likely means less EU dairy production within the next 5-10 years.

Another farmer advocacy group in the Netherlands, the LTO, is pushing for a more transitional plan from the manure derogatie and has expressed concerns with politicians (Van Den Boom). But it is too late. According to some discussions with Dutch farmers, producers pay an annual fee of about 1000 euros for the organization to provide various services, including lobbying or advocacy efforts. In conversations with local producers, some of them refrain from joining specific groups agri-advocacy groups because they are perceived as cliquish, feeling they are exclusive or unwelcoming to outsiders or newcomers. This creates a sense of inaccessibility that discourages potential members from joining, lessening the organization's advocacy impact. The

same is said about agriculture advocacy organizations in the United States. This needs to change. Building a team with as many members as possible ensures diverse perspectives and maximizes collective strength to achieve shared goals.



Figure 5 Dairy cows, Netherlands



Figure 6 grain feeder, pig farm in Netherlands

In addition to opposition to some of the green deal initiatives by farmer advocacy groups, farmer protests have also sparked much of the delay. Many farmer advocacy groups do not claim to be part of these protests. In a report by USDA FAS, *“the more recently formed Agractie and Farmers Defence Force, which actively participate in farm protests, have not been asked to contribute to the drafting this manure plan. If the farmers behind these organizations feel the government has not heard them, it could lead to future protests”* (“Dutch Loss of Manure Derogation,” 2024)

Farmer protests sparked in 2024 amongst many other EU member states as well. *“Emmanuel Mathé, a French farmer from the small village of Noisy-Rudignon in Seine et Marne, told CNN: “We’re subject to enormous constraints and there are products coming in from outside Europe,*

*that compete with us without having to apply the same rules that we're obliged to in order to produce.” (Tanno & Liakos, 2024)*



Figure 7 <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/03/europe/europe-farmers-protests-explainer-intl/index.html>



Figure 8 <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/07/1229719323/european-union-scraps-pesticide-proposal-in-another-concession-to-farmers>

A section of the Green Deal that has seen success is the latest passage of the nature restoration law in Parliament which means *“companies will only be allowed to sell products in the EU if the supplier of the product has issued a so-called “due diligence” statement confirming that the product does not come from deforested land or has led to forest degradation, including of irreplaceable primary forests, after 31 December 2020.”* (Parliament Adopts New Law to Fight Global Deforestation | News | European Parliament) The law states:

- *“EU countries must restore at least 30% of habitats in poor condition by 2030, 60% by 2040, and 90% by 2050”*
- *“Provisions for agricultural ecosystems can be temporarily suspended under exceptional circumstances.”*

This law is significant because it sets ambitious targets for ecosystem restoration, which can have a ripple effect on the global agricultural industry. For U.S. farmers, this law matters

because it may shift EU market demands, influence trade policies, and create competitive pressures that affect local economies. As the EU prioritizes sustainability, American agriculture must adapt to maintain market access and remain competitive in a changing global economy.

## Objective Four

Highlight the consumer-driven demand for food traceability and increased environmental awareness of food production

Food influencers and environmental advocates around the world are shaping agriculture policies and implementations due to the social awareness they are bringing to consumers and, ultimately, elected officials' constituents. The two examples of influencers are Vani Hari from the United States and Greta Thunberg-who primarily advocates in the EU.

In the United States, Vani Hari, known as the "Food Babe," has significantly influenced consumer awareness about food safety, ingredients, and corporate transparency in the food industry. Often times comparing our food production systems to be more like Europe's. Just as agri-advocacy groups work towards better production methods and more research, she advocates for removing certain chemicals and additives in processed foods while calling out major food companies for using certain ingredients that differ by country. Some call it "food is health". Her campaigns, along with many other social media influencers, have sparked widespread consumer demand for cleaner, more natural food options, even affecting food companies like Kraft and Subway to reformulate their products. A form of public pressure such as this influences consumers to become more conscious of their eating, something that could be accomplished by sticking to the base of the food pyramid (raw fruits, vegetables and conventional proteins). Her influence highlights how consumer activism in the U.S. can drive large-scale changes in the marketplace and as always, farmers are at the bottom of this food pyramid.

An example of environmental awareness campaigns is to highlight climate activist Greta Thunberg and her fight towards more environmental sustainability in Europe. While her activism focuses primarily on climate change, her influence has also spilled over into the food

industry as consumers increasingly connect environmental health with food choices. Her message about reducing carbon emissions and ecological degradation resonates with younger generations now demanding sustainable food production practices. As a result, European consumers (politicians included) are pushing for more transparent labeling, reduced packaging, and sourcing in the food industry. Thunberg's activism highlights how the demand for environmental responsibility shapes food production, pushing companies to trace their supply chains, minimize environmental impact, and adhere to stricter environmental regulations.

Norman Borlaug spoke to this notion too: “...*some of the environmental lobbyists of the Western nationals are the salt of the earth, but many of them are elitists. They've never experienced the physical sensation of hunger. They lobby from comfortable office suites in Washington or Brussels. They have never produced a ton of food. If they lived just one month amid the misery of the developing world, as I have for 60 years, they'd cry out for fertilizer, herbicides, irrigation canals, and tractors and be outraged that fashionable elitists back home were trying to deny them these things.*”

Hari and Thunberg exemplify how consumer-driven activism reshapes the global food landscape by emphasizing transparency and sustainability.



Figure 9 Vani Hari, Food Babe

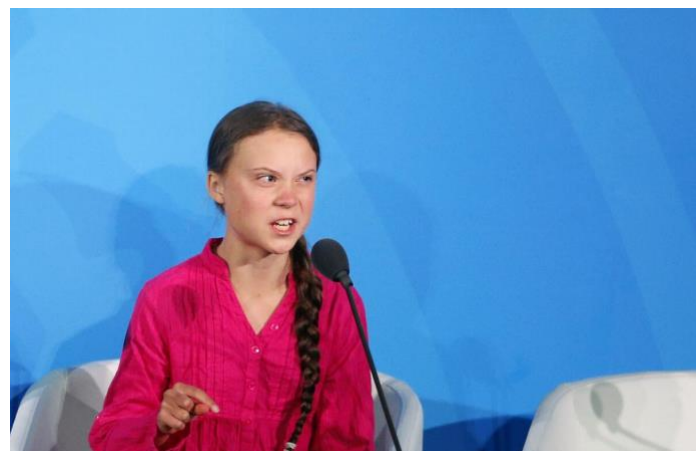


Figure 10 Greta Thunberg, Environmental activist

The influence of these two examples is affecting policy down to the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Agriculture advocacy groups from the dairy industry have expressed concerns about how the science is selected and even the criteria from which it is sourced. Executive Vice President Matt Herrick of the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) says there are *"...questions about how and why certain scientific studies are selected as well as why the committee has relied more on food pattern modeling than established science"* (Alvey).

Here in North Carolina, our beloved N.C. State University is getting in on the fun to help shape research on the future of animal food production and policy. Recently announced in 2024, the Bezos Earth fund granted the land grant university \$30 million over five years to *"lead a center of excellence to create a biomanufacturing hub for dietary proteins that are environmentally friendly, healthy, tasty and affordable. The Earth Fund has committed \$100 million to establish a network of open-access research and development centers focused on sustainable protein alternatives, expanding consumer choices."* The Bezos website also states, *"... animal-based protein production requires extensive land use and generates significant greenhouse gas emissions. As the global population expands, the health of both humans and the planet will increasingly depend on the widespread availability of proteins that taste good and are produced in ways that reduce emissions and protect nature."* ("Bezos Center for Sustainable Protein Launches at Imperial With \$30M...")

What does this all mean? More from their website, *"This means reconsidering our diets, transforming market systems to drive sustainability, and rethinking where and how food is produced to vastly reduce its footprint on our planet."* ("Future of Food").

Is this not directly related to how agriculture policy is shaped or influenced? It is. See Figure Nine below from NCSU's Bezos Center Earth Fund website:

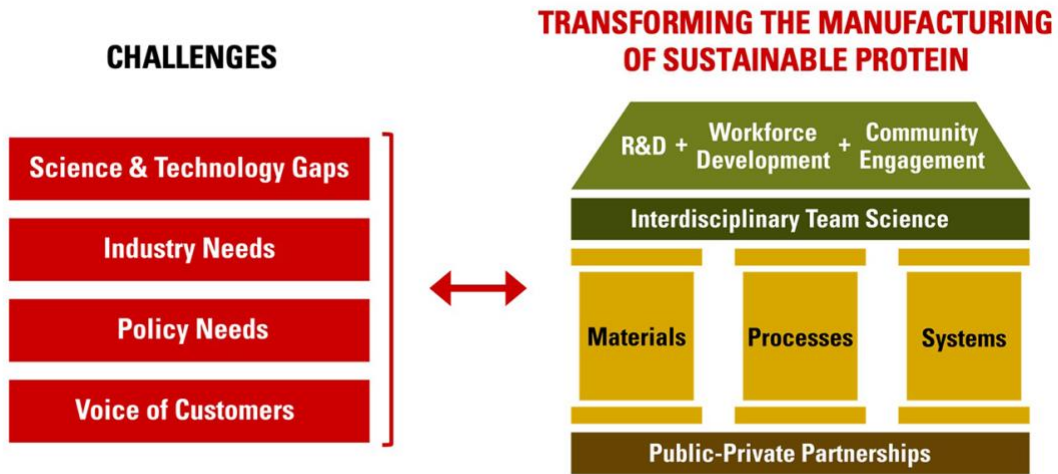


Figure 11: NCSU Bezos Earth Fund: <https://enr.ncsu.edu/bezoscenter/>

This report does not argue that environmental sustainability should never be considered or factored into laws or regulations. However, it cannot be at the forefront. USDA ERS states, "Under medium population growth, production worldwide would have to increase to 14,060 trillion crop calories to feed 9.75 billion people in 2050. This is a 47-percent increase in crop calories from a 2011 baseline." (*Population and Income Drive World Food Production Projections*)

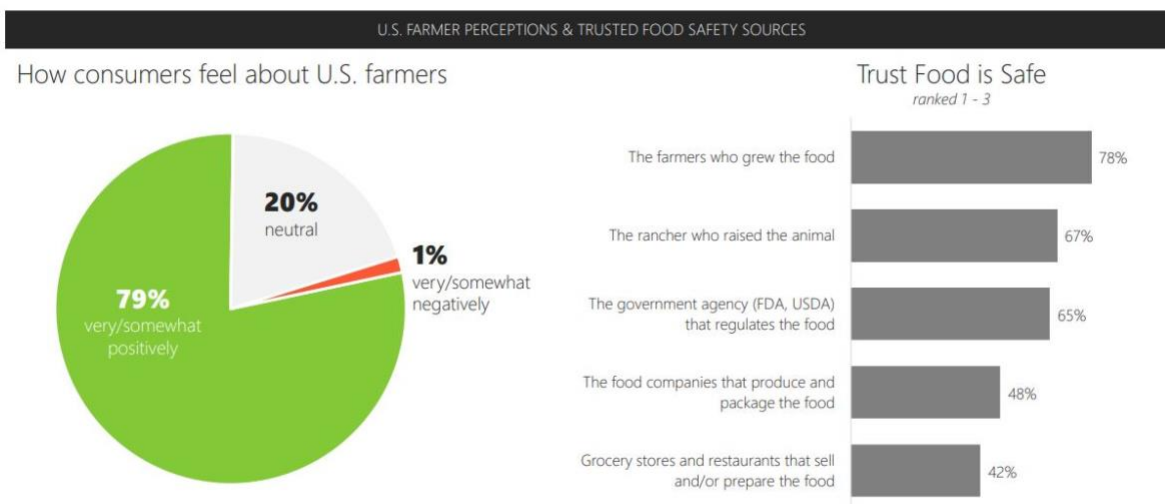
## Recommendations/Objective Five

A recommendation to agricultural advocacy organizations is to build a regulatory talent pipeline focusing on individuals with agricultural expertise and understanding of the industry.

Agriculture advocacy organizations cannot rely alone on political capital through awareness campaigns, lobbying policymakers, and providing resources to educate the public. While building trust toward farmers and crafting compelling messaging for consumers are vital, influencing the talent pipeline is even more critical. Statistics prove trust for farmers and their food safety, particularly in the United States.

Consumers most trust farmers and ranchers, the point of origin for our food, to ensure food is safe.

Those who process/handle food (groceries, restaurants, etc.) are less trusted; this lack of trust may be exacerbated by COVID-19 where negative stories of food handling practices and unsafe conditions have made some consumers see stores and companies as safety hazards.



S4: How positively do you feel about U.S. farmers who grow crops like soybeans, corn, wheat, and produce? Select one S5: Who do you trust most to ensure that the food you eat is safe? Ranking (n = 1502)

DATA/ESSENTIAL 6

Figure 12: <https://www.soyconnection.com/docs/default-source/brochures/usb-q1-consumer->

*Sarah Gallo, senior vice president at the Consumer Brands Association, representing food manufacturers, said food-safety regulation should be based on science. "When political*

*ideologies are used to create fear and disregard the role of science, it undermines public trust in food safety,” Gallo said. (Newman)*

To connect the scientific facts about agriculture and food production, a talent pipeline must exist for those wishing to enter the policy arena. Agriculture advocacy groups have developed numerous leadership programs to equip the next generation of industry leaders with the skills and knowledge to advocate effectively. However, it’s equally crucial to ensure these programs include a strong talent pipeline for policy positions, cultivating individuals who can navigate the complexities of regulatory frameworks and represent agricultural interests in influential roles. These leadership programs need content connected to a talent pipeline component. Whether for a political or regulatory role, combining a trustworthy profession of farming and agriculture with an untrustworthy one (government employees, elected officials) can create a unique dynamic that fosters accountability. A trustworthy profession brings credibility and integrity, while the untrustworthy one highlights overlooked perspectives, hence the massive pushback from agriculture advocacy groups on worldwide policy proposals and changes over the years. By linking the two, communication channels can become more transparent, and diverse viewpoints can inform policy development. This interplay encourages a balance between skepticism and trust, ultimately leading to more pragmatic solutions. These organizations should develop and integrate an internal structure for a talent pipeline within current leadership programs to have government leaders who understand the agriculture industry. Their infrastructure to do so already exists through their young farmer programs, leadership classes, and more. Developing this pipeline is crucial for shaping policies that ensure a stable and sustainable food supply. Knowledgeable elected and appointed leaders can support practices that boost productivity, protect resources, and address the challenges farmers face, like climate change. This

understanding is essential to creating policies that not only help feed the population but also strengthen rural economies and support the livelihoods of those working in agriculture. These persons do not have to be farmers, per se, as that profession decreases daily, but someone aligned with the agriculture sector's perspective.

By continuously engaging with potential talented individuals who align with agriculture advocacy groups, the ag trade and commodity associations can maintain a competitive edge, attract eager individuals who want to be involved, and build a political and regulatory pipeline aligned with their long-term missions. Examples include internships, job shadowing, and campaign schools, all from the grassroots level.

What is grassroots advocacy? Britannica describes it as, "*efforts to mobilize individuals to contact a policymaker or other individual with influence to take a particular action*". A mobilized effort to align the needs of the farmer advocacy organizations and create talent pipelines to elect, appoint, and hire politicians, policy staff, and regulatory officials is desperately needed. When experience is abundant in a policy arena, it yields good results, given there is a strong team on the bench to make the proper play and open the door for further discussion: "*The heavy representation of farmers on the committee has put a roadblock in the way of the European Commission, which wants to put greater emphasis on environmental sustainability and the interests of consumers as part of its Farm to Fork policy agenda.*" ("Meet the Farmers Who Control One-Third of the EU's Budget")

Examples of agriculture careers are not limited to the field, lab, or university. They are also found on Capitol Hill, in the halls of state legislatures, and among the EU Commission's staff in Brussels, The Hague, and beyond.

## Conclusion

Current infrastructure within agricultural trade and commodity organizations should be used to develop a talent pipeline for elected officials and regulatory employees to aid in counter-acting the historical decline of agricultural representation in government, the rise of environmental advocacy, and food influencers driving the consumer marketplace. By continuously engaging with potential talent, ag trade and commodity associations can maintain a competitive edge, attract eager individuals who want to be involved, and build a political and regulatory pipeline aligned with their long-term missions. Food production is vital for national security and sustainability, and we must have those like-minded individuals employed throughout the regulatory arena working with this notion. *“Responsible biotechnology is not the enemy; starvation is.”*-Norman Borlaug.

To reiterate, the commonality amongst farmers worldwide is that they want to be profitable. Like any other business, they cannot do so if government regulations and policies keep whittling away at their operating license. Agriculture advocacy groups must put safeguards in place through a talent pipeline strategy where they already have the programs and mechanisms to do so. It is through the program content, not reinventing the wheel.

Agriculture is too small to spend its way through political issues compared to other industries. In closing, many agri-advocates have ended their highly intellectual and insightful speeches with the catchy statement, "If you aren't at the table, you are on the menu." Farmers must prepare the menu from the start.

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