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Reaching Farmers--In the Combine

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Reaching Farmers--In the Combine

Abstract

Extension agricultural educators face the challenge of reaching busy business people--farmers. Often we need to discuss new ideas with a farmer or gather information for a project. Other times we would simply like a chance to become more acquainted with various farmers. One way to initiate a meeting is to make a cold call. But, too often, farmers are away from the farmstead conducting their business. Reaching a farmer, during harvest and in the combine, offers a unique opportunity to communicate one-on-one.

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Introduction

Agricultural Extension educators face many challenges as they try to get their messages to farmers. And, for a new Extension educator, the challenges can be even more daunting. Trying to meet the farmers in the county, sharing new ideas and strategies, or assessing local needs can turn into a haphazard task if not done correctly. One way to do it correctly is to examine the involvements of the farmer at the time you want to meet. We can make a "cold call," show up unannounced, and hope someone is home to greet us. But, too often, farmers are away from the farmstead and busily involved with their work. Rather than backing away from trying to reach the farmer during these busy times, reaching the farmer while he or she is operating the combine during harvest can offer a unique opportunity to communicate one-on-one.

Clearly, trying to share new ideas with a farmer, one-on-one, during the springtime doesn't make a lot of sense. In the spring, the farmer is coordinating a myriad of field activities and trying to get as much accomplished in as little time as possible. Especially when they are planting, farmers must focus attention on planting in absolutely straight rows, at the proper speed, at an appropriate depth, and at the correct seeding population. The last thing they need at such a time is to attend to the local Extension educator wanting to offer advice.

Sometimes we find it essential to meet with the farmer during these busy times in the spring. These conversations tend to be quick; we arrive at the farm, quickly exchange some information, and then we leave, allowing the farmer to get back to work. Spring is by far the busiest time of year for a farmer.

Combine Connections

OK, so spring isn't very good for talking to a farmer because it's the busiest time of the farming year. It would seem to follow that the second busiest time of the year, fall harvest, would also be a terrible time for an on-farm visit. I have found this doesn't have to be the case. Spending time meeting with a farmer, one-on-one in the combine, is one of the best opportunities an Extension educator can have to reach a farmer if he or she has an important matter to discuss. Let me share some personal experience.

I began my Extension career in mid-October, in the middle of soybean harvest. One of my first goals was to meet as many of the local farmers as possible before the winter meeting season began. I wanted to make sure I had a bit of a head start before having to stand up in front of these

farmers at a variety of different local meetings. I hopped into my county pick-up truck and drove off to meet my first local farmer. It was a bit intimidating since I knew few, if any, farmers would be sitting around the farmstead, waiting for me to show up.

As I was about to arrive at my first visit I saw a combine working in a nearby field. I drove to the field and waited for the combine to come close to the headland where I parked. The farmer opened the combine door and invited me to sit in the "buddy" seat. He was glad to talk with me as I introduced myself, and happy for the distraction the conversation offered.

It worked great! I now knew one of the local farmers and was ready to move on to others. As I continued my quest to meet more farmers, I looked for combines in the fields rather than farmers at the farmstead. I found the vast majority of the local farmers were more than willing to allow me to go a handful of rounds in the combine as they worked the harvest. During October and November, I introduced myself to a great many of the local farmers this way.

It wasn't long before I learned the secret of why my method of meeting farmers was successful. Combining soybeans or corn doesn't require nearly the attention to detail that planting does. In fact, I've found farmers actually prefer discussions with someone as a way to break up the monotony of harvest.

Conclusion

As I have continued my Extension career, I try to remember my early success in meeting farmers and gaining their attention during harvest. If I have a matter to discuss with a particular farmer and if harvest time is upon us, I try to target my visit to when the farmer is in the combine. It works well.

Are there other good times to meet with farmers one-on-one? Of course. Do farmers always want to spend a lot of time talking when they are in the middle of harvest? Certainly not. But, during harvest times, there is an excellent chance that a particular farmer can be found rather mesmerized in the combine--not at a dealership looking for parts or on a wintertime vacation--hoping for some pleasant form of interruption. More often than not, there is a very teachable moment waiting for an enterprising Extension agent to stop by.

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