

## What the Next Governor Needs to Know About Minnesota Agriculture

Chris Radatz

---

Minnesota's agriculture has a long history of serving as an economic cornerstone for the state's economy. According to 2007 information from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture:

- Minnesota agriculture (including production and processing) is the second largest economic sector in Minnesota.
- Agriculture is the second largest employer in Minnesota.
- Employment in agriculture and the food industry accounts for 15 percent of total jobs – 24 percent in rural areas and 13 percent in metro areas.
- Agriculture and food exports account for more than 20 percent of Minnesota's total exports from all industries.
- The "multiplier effect" of Minnesota's agriculture production and processing generates \$55 billion in economic activity for the state.

What can the next Minnesota governor do to build on agriculture's strong economic cornerstone and rich history, ensuring that agriculture is a vibrant contributor to Minnesota's future? To answer that question we need to look at specific areas and examine the interrelationship between the state of Minnesota and its farmers and ranchers.

One of the biggest roles the governor of Minnesota plays in supporting Minnesota farmers and ranchers is developing and implementing state programs and policies that promote

a positive business climate, one that encourages growth and investment by Minnesota farmers and ranchers and builds on the strengths agriculture has in Minnesota: people, technology, land, water and air.

By 2050, the world population will require 100 percent more food. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports that added farmland will help produce only 20 percent of the additional food our planet will need in 2050, and 10 percent will come from increased cropping intensity. Accordingly, the FAO concludes that 70 percent of the world's additional food needs can be produced only with new and existing agricultural technologies.

Currently, Minnesota agriculture is a major producer of food in our nation and the world. We rank:

- First nationally in the production of turkeys, sugarbeets, sweet corn and green peas for processing
- Second for spring wheat, oats, dry edible beans, canola, and cultivated wild rice;
- Third for soybeans and hogs
- Fourth for corn, sunflowers, flaxseed and total crop production
- Fifth for total cheese and honey
- Sixth for dairy, red meat, barley and total agricultural production
- Seventh for all wheat, potatoes and total agriculture exports
- Eighth for total livestock production, and
- Tenth for cattle and calf production

Real leadership will be required of the next governor of Minnesota to ensure that we continue our current level of food production and also fulfill what some would say is our moral obligation to meet the growing food demands of the world as outlined in the FAO report. Agriculture is under daily attack for some of the technology and production methods used in bringing crops and livestock to consumers across the globe. Many of those attacks are clearly based on a lack of knowledge and absent any sense of reality. The next Minnesota governor

must be able to look at the facts, set aside emotion and chart a course that will lead to the state of Minnesota being an important partner with agriculture and not a burden on the backs of farmers and ranchers.

Minnesota agriculture plays an integral role in supplying bio-energy to our state and nation, which lessens our dependence of foreign sources of energy. This new, developing opportunity for Minnesota agriculture does not come without controversy and will require a balancing act. We do not yet know what the next commercially viable source of bio-energy will be, but it is a safe bet that Minnesota agriculture will be an important player. Leadership will be required to sort through the controversies while continuing to support the current production of bio-energy, sending a strong signal that Minnesota is the place to invest in the future of bio-energy production.

Property taxes are taking a bigger bite out of the bottom line of Minnesota farmers and ranchers every year. In 2010, many in production agriculture saw double-digit increases in property taxes on their farm land. The next Minnesota governor needs to examine our property tax system, a system that was put in place years ago when there were more people living on the land and a closer relationship existed between the ability to pay property taxes and the income generated from the land. In more and more areas throughout the state, farm land makes up the majority of the property compared to residential or commercial/industrial property, resulting in farmers and ranchers paying a disproportionate amount of the cost of local government services, including schools, compared to other property owners.

The next Minnesota governor needs to look beyond the numbers. While the economic numbers on the important contributions of agriculture to our state and nation are impressive, agriculture is not just about the numbers. It's about people, it's about rural development, and it's about tradition. Thousands of farm and ranch families across our great state have worked the land, raised their families and passed on the strong tradition of agriculture for generations. Since 1976, over 8,000 farms have been recognized as being in

the same family for 100 years or more.

Minnesota farmers and ranchers have a strong sense of community. They actively participate in township and county government, schools, churches and community organizations of all types. A key to this dedication to remaining in the community where they were raised is an education system for their children that ensures everyone has an equal opportunity to receive a quality education, which is not determined by school size, class size or where you live. We all need to work together to carefully examine our current education system, particularly how we fund rural schools, and implement a sustainable system for the future that meets the needs of students and employers of tomorrow's workforce.

Many who read this will have been born and raised on the farm or have close relatives who farmed. Every generation we become further removed from having close contact with a farmer and/or rancher. Today's farmer and rancher is not the same as they were five or even ten years ago.

Many of today's farmers and ranchers do not just use cell phones — they carry smartphones with them to check their emails. They regularly post stories about their farms and ranches on social media networks. They have global positioning systems installed in their combines and tractors. They have real-time data on how much and where fertilizer and crop protection products are applied. They know instantly how their crops are yielding and what moisture the harvested crop is at. They search the Internet for the latest scientific information to assist them in making management decisions.

Along with increased use of modern technology, Minnesota farmers and ranchers continue to explore ways to add value to their produce. Organic production, selling directly to consumers and participating in local markets are just a few of the marketing techniques today's farmers and ranchers are using to meet the demands of today's consumers.

Minnesota agriculture is a big tent with room for all. Minnesota farmers and ranchers live and farm in a large, diverse geographic area. They produce hundreds of different products and byproducts that are used daily in the lives of

people literally across the globe. Their production comes from farms ranging in size from less than 10 acres to farms with thousands of acres, using many, many different production and management styles. Minnesota's next governor must be an advocate for all Minnesota farm and ranch families. There is no right size, production method or management style for Minnesota farms. All farmers and ranchers are part of the agriculture community that takes pride in meeting the growing demands of consumers.

Finally, Minnesota farmers and ranchers are looking for a Minnesota governor who will listen to them and engage them early and meaningfully in the legislative and regulatory process. Minnesota farmers and ranchers have a vision of a bright future for themselves, their families, their communities and agriculture. They look forward to partnering with Minnesota's next governor to achieve that vision.