

'My Job Depends on Ag' strikes marketing gold

Published on 07/28/2015 - 9:42 am

Written by Chuck Harvey

[0 Comments](#)



Believing in the power of knowledge, two Fresno residents and 35,000 Facebook followers have begun a mission to defend Valley agriculture from consumers who charge that farming wastes too much water and damages the environment. Valley residents Stephen Malanca and Erik Wilson were fed up with claims that farmers use too much water and do more damage than good to the environment.

They were also frustrated that many residents, even as close as San Francisco, had no idea of the scope of Valley farming and how much it's connected to other major businesses, thus playing a large role in the success of California's economy.

So two months ago, Malanca, who works at Mac's Equipment Repair in Kerman, and Wilson, who owns a custom spraying company in Dos Palos, created a Facebook group called "[My Job Depends on Ag](#)" and began offering decals to get their message out.

In two short months, the page has attracted nearly 35,000 followers.

And decals have sold like hotcakes, with about 5,000 decals purchased so far.

A link to purchase decals can be found at the top of the Facebook page.

Several kinds of decals are available.

One says "My Job Depends on Ag." Another has "My Life Depends on Ag." One has a green map of California or

another state as the background. It sells for \$5.

The other, which sells for \$10, has an American flag shaped like a map of the U.S. as a background.

Also, decals showing other states in the background are available. The initial ones are Arizona, Washington, Oregon, Texas, Minnesota and Montana. "We asked our members which state they wanted us to make," Wilson said. "We had a vote. And these were the top six, not in order, of who won. But we will eventually make them all."

Both success of the Facebook page and decal sales indicate that the two men have struck a nerve within the agricultural industry. The idea of calling the group My Job Depends on Ag came in the form of a text message from Malanca to Wilson.

"Wilson responded, "That's perfect Steve."

Development of the decal was an epiphany, Wilson said.

In addition to Facebook, the two men are having a My Job Depends on Ag website developed to provide further information.

Wilson pointed out that to convince people that farmers help feed the world would be massive undertaking. But so far, the effort has proved successful.

And group members see continued potential for getting the word out.

Member Ty Higgins, host of Ohio-based Farm and Country, a nationally syndicated weekly radio program with agriculture industry news and country music, said that from his standpoint, My Job Depends on Ag has spawned into a country-wide conversation. "Although it all started with the dry conditions in California and the measures being taken there effecting agriculture, it has given a platform for how too much rain is impacting farmers in the Midwest as well," Higgins said.

Like Higgins, many members are from outside the local ag community.

Interest is coming in from all over the U.S., from Hawaii to the East Coast.

And from large corporate producers to small farmers, the message is the same, "We need water," Wilson said.

Most members of My Job Depends on Ag are individuals with some connection to ag. And some represent growers in Central California.

Even large agricultural groups like Western Growers and the Arizona Department of Agriculture have requested a connection with the My Job Depends on Ag group. But the founding members would like to see the group remain grassroots in the way it operates.

The grassroots effort has worked well, but the viability of farming in the Valley remains highly dependent on consistent water deliveries.

Wilson added that environmentalists have called for Valley farmers to move somewhere else where there is more water. But that is unrealistic considering the Valley is ideally suited for the bulk of fruit and vegetable crops consumed in the United States, he said.

"The San Joaquin Valley is very unique," Wilson said. "You just can't move."

Realizing this, farmers and others have banded together to save Valley agriculture. By joining My Job Depends on Ag they believe they will have more of a voice.

Meanwhile, decal sales continue brisk, providing some revenue to the founders of the group.

“We are making some money,” Malanca said, adding that he did not have an exact figure on money earned.

Part of the proceeds from the sales will go to providing scholarships for agricultural students.

For now, the objective is to bring the farm industry together and to provide accurate information about what it does.

“We wanted to bring the ag community together,” Malanca said. “Eric put us on Facebook. There was no money behind this.”

“People need to know where food comes from,” Malanca added.

Malanca lamented that many people still see food as coming from the grocery store. Also, knowledge is lacking when it comes to agriculture’s ability to boost the job market.

But the belief by many that farmers are water wasters is the most pressing issue faced by agriculture, Malanca said.

“Farmers are not abusers of water,” he said. He stressed that contrary to past newspaper reports, farmers do not use 80 percent of the state’s developed water supply for agriculture.

Local water districts report that by installing drip systems and other conservation measures California farmers have cut usage to about 43 percent of the developed water supply.

Wilson pointed out that a residential acre of land requires three to seven acre feet of water annually. An acre foot totals 326,000 gallons.

Almond growers use about four acre-feet of water per acre annually, Wilson said, stressing the need to get the real facts out.

“Our goal is to educate,” Malanca said. “The first two months have been extraordinary.”

The success caught the attention of the Fresno City Council, which acknowledged the group at its June 24 meeting. The council declared June 24 as My Job Depends on Ag Day.

The primary goal of the group is to help farmers obtain the water supplies they need. But also important is the effort to educate the non-ag community about the importance of agriculture.

“How many people don’t understand farming?” Malanca asked. “We are growing food for them.”

He added that people have slammed almond growers for using too much water. But water use for almonds isn’t that bad,” Malanca said.

“Tomatoes and cantaloupe use more water,” he said.

[inShare13](#)