



## Uniting as a family is a better way to promote ag

*Editor's note: Honor DeBates Schwartz is a New York dairy producer. See her full article at [www.proudtodairy.com](http://www.proudtodairy.com).*

Even though I have chosen to remain on my family's conventional dairy farm, I still enjoy receiving news from my holistic friends. A friend had shared an advanced book review of "Defending Beef," written by Nicolette Hahn Niman. According to the review, the author and livestock producer advocates for sustainable meat production throughout the book. I noticed that the publisher had posted videos of the author lecturing to various non-farm organizations, which I watched.

The videos all were intended to advocate humane agricultural production, but the presentations were confusing as the author insinuated that most farmers make a multitude of inhumane decisions. At one point, the author implied that farmers often overmedicate their cows with drugs, and then later on, the author admitted to treating their own cows with "minimal drugs." How could the non-farm audience keep up with the author's logic and understand that most farmers who use drugs are thought to be inhumane but that some other farmers who use drugs are humane?

What was most offensive was when the author claimed that conventional dairy farmers are "divorcing the land." This person rationalized that because many dairy farmers house cows in freestalls, they are keeping their animals away from the land. Like many dairy farmers, my family houses our herd in a freestall, and yet we still depend on the land to provide our cows with feed every year. Thus, being accused of improper land management by a fellow farmer, who was supposed to be promoting livestock agriculture to the public, was difficult to stomach.

Jessica Ziehm, a dairy producer and executive director of the New York Animal Agriculture Coalition, believes "We are shooting ourselves in the foot. It's doing our industry a disservice by picking out flaws. Those are low blows. It's like name calling."

According to Ziehm, farmers' decisions to point out flaws in other farmers' operations is a part of marketing. "All marketing is, is pitting one process against another. And farmers are using marketing gimmicks to sell their products," Ziehm adds. "Some are saying, 'We're BST-free.' And they are implying that their milk is better [for the public to drink] when that's not true. We're confusing our consumers."

Ann Adams, the interim CEO of Holistic Management International, suggests, "I think any producer should be clear why they are following the practices they are and have a rationale for those practices. If they are doing any kind of direct marketing or customer interface, they should be

prepared for (responding to consumer concerns)."

Indeed, all of us need to be prepared to defend the entire ag industry, and we need to articulate our farm practices to the public in a way that promotes all farming methods. We need to recognize

and respect each other like a family in order to promote agriculture. The more we support each other's farming methods, the better we can represent agriculture in a positive light, and thus gain the non-farm public's confidence without confusing them. **PD**

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Bilby, et. al., University of FL, 2006; Moussavi, et. al., Cornell University, 2007; Greco, et. al., University of FL, 2013.

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