

**Jeremy Bennett**  
Oklahoma State University  
Stillwater, OK  
Master of Science in Agricultural Economics

### **“The Greatest Challenge Facing Agriculture Over the Next 5 Years”**

When thinking about the greatest challenge that agriculture faces, one could choose to focus on domestic or international problems, producer or consumer issues, or many more challenges depending on the sector in which you are involved. Coming from a small family farm, I could easily talk about producer issues affecting small farms and businesses. However, because of my education at a land grant university and my exposure to international opportunities, I am now able to see the agricultural industry in a larger context. For many people, agriculture has been interpreted and misinterpreted for far too long.

Similar to my heritage as a Native American, agriculture has many misperceptions that create challenges. Because most of the industry makes just enough profit to pay their expenses, they are not able to produce high end commercials like the energy and financial industries to combat the negative and often false accusations. I would like to focus on three misperceptions the agricultural industry faces now and will continue to face for many years to come if no major changes occur.

Anyone involved in agriculture understands the importance of the Farm Bill. There is a misperception that the Farm Bill simply protects the average, old, male farmer’s crop or livestock herd. The truth, however, is for many families around the country; Farm Bill legislation protects their livelihood and health. From the many food assistance programs to commodity programs, the Farm Bill is vital to many American families. Specifically, growing up in a state with numerous Native American tribes, I have witnessed the value of food assistance and school lunch programs that help families struggling financially. As Congress and other entities have recently pointed out, the food assistance programs are not perfect and have room for improvement. However, without these programs, more children would go to bed hungry, perform poorly in school, and families would suffer from malnourishment. No one wants to see families struggling to acquire food, thus the Farm Bill, which is dominated by food nutrition policy, helps to fight and curb childhood hunger. Through the land grant mission of extension, universities are able to educate the public and help decipher facts from misperceptions.

Another area that has been misconstrued is the livestock sector. Over the last decade, we have seen more and more attacks on animal welfare issues. From the poor management practices in swine, poultry, and beef facilities to the lack of cleanliness in processing plants, this sector has taken some heavy blows. If you were given a basket full of apples, you would probably find at least one bad apple. Rationally, you would simply toss the bad one out or cut off the bad spot, then focus on the final product. Unfortunately, there are too many people focusing on the bad or negative issues surrounding the livestock industry instead of the benefits it contributes to humanity. They think the whole batch of apples needs to be tossed, but they are misguided. Sure,

the livestock sector has room for improvement and has to correct these problems for consumer and animal safety. However, with the world population projected to reach over nine billion people by 2050, we will have to depend on both large and small scale farms and larger feedlots to supply the world with a food supply large enough to meet daily nutritional requirements. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, overall food production will have to increase by 70 percent by 2050 to maintain a healthy population. It is extremely important to educate all Americans about the grave need for more livestock in order to feed a world that is seeing enormous changes in its population size and preferences.

As a frequent international traveler, I have heard and seen the misperceptions individuals, groups, and countries have about certain crop production practices. Specifically, genetically modified organism (GMO) crops have a very negative perception in Europe. Having traveled to six different European countries, I can say from first-hand experience that it is extremely difficult to convince Europeans of the importance of GMOs. They have many misunderstandings or false claims against this sector of agriculture. This past summer, I had the privilege to live in Ethiopia for three months at a university that my home university created under the direction of Henry G. Bennett and President Truman's Point Four Program. Having personally witnessed the crucial need for GMO crops, I have never been more appreciative for the research conducted by the agriculture industry and Land Grant Institutions. I have driven across deserts that were once bare and can now grow drought resistant sorghum to help feed starving villages. Seeing malnourished Ethiopian children and families angered and saddened me a great deal, but also gave me a sense of hope for the industry for which I have so much passion towards.

In conclusion, as the world population increases, agriculture faces many challenges, but none are more important than the common misperceptions of the Farm Bill, livestock sector, and GMO's. The agricultural industry will face pressure from concerned consumers, producers, policy-makers, and the international community. In the end, all the sectors of agriculture must make a point to not only feed and clothe the rapidly changing world, but also must educate the rest of the world on the importance of our industry to a continued life of prosperity.