Two Bits



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The first two months of a school year have a way of disappearing. One day, the school buses are making their morning rounds and, before you know it, students are settling into the routines of fall.

This year, as an empty-nester, there are no school buses coming into my yard. I still find myself watching those yellow buses, though, and thinking about the students climbing aboard and now well into their school year.

Among the things I hope they learn along the way is something that isn't technically one of the "R's" of education, but is every bit as important: agricultural literacy.

Fewer Americans — and fewer North Dakotans — have a direct connection to production agriculture, making opportunities to build that understanding increasingly important.

Even in North Dakota, where agriculture is all around us — a foundational industry, even — we shouldn't assume every student understands where their food comes from, how cattle are raised or why agriculture matters simply because they see it on the drive to school. A student may know that a hamburger comes from beef, but, if asked where that beef comes from, "the grocery store" might very well be the answer. That's not wrong — it's just the last stop in a much longer story involving a rancher, a cow, a calf, grass, genetics, nutrition, animal health, transportation and processing. Agricultural literacy helps fill in that story.

We can all play a role in improving ag literacy. That might mean inviting a local schoolteacher to bring their class to the ranch for a field trip or offering to come to their classroom as a guest

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Farm and ranch families make up less than 2 percent of the overall U.S. population, meaning only a small fraction of students grow up on active farming and ranching operations.

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