OVERVIEW

This project evaluated government and interest groups use of social media to advocate, educate and lobby for different agricultural policy topics. The collection process involved documenting data from 25 different social media accounts throughout the entire months of February and March 2018. The accounts observed included the Facebook and Twitter pages of House and Senate Ag Committees chairmen and ranking members, general farm organizations, resource and environmental lobby groups, commodity organizations, cooperatives, consumer food lobby groups, nutrition, food safety and quality lobby groups, and general agribusiness organizations. Each account was evaluated Monday, Wednesday and Friday of each week throughout the two months of observation. Each post was recorded and grouped into a category based on its relation to one of the twelve Farm Bill titles.

Figure 1 displays the overall results of the project. Nutrition was the most common topic of discussion followed by the miscellaneous category. That topic included posts about general farm bill overviews, animal welfare, labor and disaster response/relief. Conservation was the third most discussed topic, followed by trade and rural development, which focused mainly on the rural opioid crisis. Credit, energy, crop insurance, research and commodity followed respectively. Forestry ranked eleventh with one post, followed by horticulture with no post.

TRENDS

I also analyzed how the data changed over the two-month period. I looked at the top three topics throughout the study, excluding the miscellaneous category. I tried to correlate these spikes and dips with mainstream media headlines at the time.

The two main events that showed correlation were both announcements by President Trump. President Trump announced the idea of replacing food stamps with “harvest boxes” in the middle of February. This caused an increase in nutrition related post. Additionally, President Trump announced a steel tariff might be implemented at the beginning of March. This increased trade talk significantly.

Government Agricultural Committees

- American Farm Bureau Federation
- National Farmers Union
- Organic Farmers Association
- National Sustainable Ag Coalition
- Resource and Environmental Lobby
- Commodity Organizations
- Cooperatives
- Consumer Food Lobby Groups
- Food Policy Action
- Food Marketing Institute
- General Agricultural Business Organizations

The most popular Facebook post throughout the study was “How Regenerative Food and Farming Can Reverse Rural Poverty and Forced Migration in the Americas.” The post had 3,000 likes and 1,237 shares. The post was made by the Organic Consumer Association. The most popular post on Twitter was titled, “The Ag Industry Has Been Shaped By Countless Innovations Over the Years.” The American Farm Bureau Federation tweet had 999 favorites and 767 retweets.

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