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Racing to Promote Ag

NASCAR provides a perfect venue for educating consumers about beef and ag in general.

by *Kindra Gordon*

With 75 million NASCAR fans, the racecar circuit offers a mega-opportunity to connect consumers with America's farm and ranch families, as well as ag businesses. For the past three race seasons, Denver, Colo.-based Furniture Row Racing has worked to do just that.

Through logos, signage and sponsorship on the Furniture Row car, No. 78, the Farm American program has been created to bring visibility to the importance of keeping America's food supply grown and produced in the United States.

For the 2012 NASCAR Sprint Cup season,

car No. 78 features a red barn and farm scene logo with the words "Farm American. Grow It Here." Additionally for 2012, the Farm American program has begun featuring a farm or ranch family at each race. To date, farms in Virginia, California, Tennessee and Nevada have been highlighted during NASCAR races in their respective states.

Jonathan and Amber Cavin, from Rose Hill, Va., are fourth-generation farmers whose 1,000-acre farm includes beef cattle, tobacco and vegetables.

They were the farm family spotlighted by Furniture Row Racing and the Farm American program during the NASCAR race at Martinsville, Va., in late March.

Of the experience, Jonathan says, "NASCAR has grown and is now followed around the world. It is a good platform to shed a positive light on American agriculture. With only 2% of the population involved in agriculture, this is a way for us to educate both the NASCAR fan and the consumer on who we are and what we produce to feed not only our family, but the world."

Farm American's roots

The Farm American effort is the brainchild of Furniture Row Racing team



▶ Jonathan, right, and Amber Cavin, center, Rose Hill, Va., are fourth-generation farmers. Their 1,000-acre farm includes beef cattle, tobacco and vegetables. They are pictured with Regan Smith, left, driver for the Furniture Row Racing Team.

owner Barney Visser. Visser isn't a farmer or rancher. He built his career during four decades in the furniture industry. It is that experience that has made Visser an ardent advocate for American farmers and ranchers.

He explains that during the course of his career, he saw the American furniture industry implode as less-expensive furniture imports took jobs and business away from American companies — many of them family businesses. He's concerned that without being proactive, the same trend could happen to America's food supply.

Hence, Visser has turned to NASCAR to help get the message out for supporting American agriculture. He wants American consumers to recognize the important role U.S. farmers and ranchers have in providing the nation with a safe, sustainable and reliable supply of food — as well as the fact that agriculture employs more than 22 million people in the American workforce.

Visser initially started his Furniture Row Racing team — and car No. 78 — in 2005. The car bore the traditional sponsor markings for the Furniture Row company. But as his concern for America's farmers and ranchers grew, Visser developed the Farm American campaign and uses his many marketing tools, including the NASCAR team, to help get the "Grow It Here" message out to millions of fans.

2012 marks the third season that the Farm American signage has graced car No. 78 on the NASCAR circuit. The Farm American team is working to continue its ag awareness efforts and broaden the program's scope. The team has built an inexpensive program that allows farmers, ranchers and ag businesses to use the weekly NASCAR marketing tool in the same way Furniture Row has.

By adding interactive educational displays to the Fan Zone at every race, the Farm American team hopes to dispel myths about ag, connect with consumers and build support for the Farm American brand. They envision a Farmer's Market; farm machinery simulators; and more farmers, ranchers and ag businesses on hand to visit with consumers.

To help that vision become reality, the Farm American team needs industry support. To date, Michigan-based Agro-Culture Liquid Fertilizer has joined the Farm American effort as a financial sponsor. The pharmaceutical company Boehringer Ingelheim VetMedica Inc. is slated to come on board in 2013.

Faulkton, S.D., Angus producers and ag advocates Troy and Stacy Hadrick are

Cargill Beef also on the racetrack

Cargill Beef has also formed an agreement with Roush Fenway Racing to appear as the primary sponsor for the No. 6 Ford Mustang in 12 races this season. This marks the second season for the two entities working together on the NASCAR circuit.

Cargill's first appearance as the primary sponsor of the No. 6 car, driven by NASCAR Nationwide Series Champion Ricky Stenhouse Jr., was on March 17 at Bristol Motor Speedway in Bristol, Tenn.

Tammy Shaw, Cargill Beef vice president of marketing and sales, said the decision to renew the sponsorship was a result of the shared enthusiasm between Cargill's customers, employees and NASCAR fans.

Shaw notes the value of the sponsorship as NASCAR fans have strong brand loyalty toward the companies supporting their favorite drivers.

"We are leveraging our racing sponsorship to drive brand buzz and excitement with our retail and foodservice customers, who can use it as a point of differentiation to increase beef sales," Shaw says.

working with the Farm American team to encourage the ag industry to partner with the effort. The duo tells that after seeing that PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) has displays at NASCAR events, it's evident that farmers and ranchers need to ensure they have a voice sharing their stories with consumers, as well.

Stacy Hadrick emphasizes that the goal of the Farm American program is to provide a platform for farmers and ranchers to share their story with consumers — rather than having a celebrity spokesman. She shares that consumers want to hear from real farmers and ranchers.

"We need to do it ourselves," she says, "and this program is helping do just that."

Along with that, she explains that the larger vision for the Farm American

campaign is to build a groundswell of support for American ag products and the "Grow It Here" message. Hadrick says, "This is more than sponsoring a racecar. Sponsors of the Farm American program become part of the larger effort and pride in supporting American agriculture."



Editor's Note: More than 30 ag organizations are supporting the Farm American program as communication partners. This is a zero-cost program that helps facilitate information about the Farm American effort among agricultural membership organizations and consumers. Communications partners include the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, National FFA, United Egg Producers, North American Equipment Dealers and several state farm bureaus. For the latest news on the Farm American car, go to www.farmamerican.com or visit them on Facebook.

