

# The Magic of Agriculture

Magic show is a unique way to connect children to agriculture.

Story & photos by **Kasey Brown**, associate editor

**A**griculture can be magical at times. It can seem magical when a new calf is born or a sun rises over a pasture. It might be safe to bet that most cattlemen don't associate agriculture with a magic show, though.

Rhonda Ross, creator of the Thank a Farmer® Magic Show, would disagree. She uses a magic show to engage children and teach them about agriculture.

"Those in agriculture often have a difficult time knowing how to educate in the best way. I use magic because kids like it," Ross explains. You may not see her

tricks done by Houdini, but they are adapted to an agriculture message, and they enamor kids.

## Education and entertainment

Coming from a sixth-generation farming family, she says, she started the Thank a Farmer Magic Show because of many instances in which farm kids were bullied. Youth from dairy farms in Wisconsin were bullied for wearing their boots to school, and FFA students in Arizona had their tires slashed. She decided that youth needed to be

educated about agriculture at a much younger age.

"As urban sprawl slowly encompasses our nation's farmland, there is an urgent need for kids to know agriculturally where the food they eat and the clothes they wear really come from," she notes.

Ross named her program the Thank a Farmer Magic Show — and "Thank a farmer!" are the magic words for many of her tricks. Showing gratitude to someone elevates their importance, she says. She explains in the show many reasons why

farmers should be thanked.

Without a reason why, the thankfulness loses its meaning.

Because she travels to students all over the country, instead of going from pasture to plate, she presents information from the product end first.

"That helps makes a connection to what they know," she says.

The presenters, including Ross and her mother, Joyce Rice, work with local, state and national ag agencies to educate youth on what is grown and raised in their state and local communities.

For instance, in her presentation at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo., she used examples like dollar bills, beet sugar, lipstick, baseballs, tires and asphalt, among others. Ross also makes it enjoyable for adults by adding more scientific information, like enzymes from animals used in many products.

Ross and Rice are passionate about public awareness of the importance of agriculture and farmers and ranchers. Because of this, they do not use animals or puppets in the programs, reasoning they would send a confusing message to children.

The magic show travels year-round. Ross explains that her goal is



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to reach as many urban kids as possible, and it helps to coincide with fairs and stock shows when they are already geared for agriculture. The program also travels to schools. A goal is to have a National Thank A Farmer Day recognized in the nation's

schools so every child has a minimal understanding of how important agriculture is in their daily lives.

Thank a Farmer is a nonprofit organization, and Ross's next challenge is to get funding to take the show to the library

system. Her background and accomplishments show that she is adept at tackling challenges.

### Basis for passion

Ross was born into a six-generation farm family, but has spent most of her life in the city and traveling around the world. By age 13, she was professionally performing her comedy juggling act; by 16 she was named "Rodeo Photographer of the Year;" and by 22, she had completed her journalism studies at Iowa State University (ISU) and California State University (CSU) and was singing the National Anthem in venues such as Madison Square Garden.

Additionally, she spent countless hours on her grandparents' farm and fell in love with the lifestyle. She was in college during the farm crisis of the 1980s and grasped the impact it had on farmers and ranchers around the country. She understood that farmers and ranchers couldn't just get "another job" as many other students suggested.

"Farming is about love of the land and everything that comes with it. Farming is a 24/7 commitment and a risk they share with God. As farms continue to consolidate, each new generation of Americans has fewer direct ties to the land. Educating the public becomes absolutely crucial," she emphasizes.

For more information about Thank a Farmer and the magic show, visit [www.thankafarmer.org](http://www.thankafarmer.org).



►Rhonda Ross uses silly hats and juggling skills to entertain children during her magic show.

## If you're interested in beef improvement, this one's worth putting on your schedule.

2014 BIF Symposium • Lincoln, Neb. • June 18-21

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The 2014 Beef Improvement Federation symposium will be June 18-21 at the Cornhusker Marriot in Lincoln, Neb. Themed "Novel Traits: Needed or Novelty," the meeting will allow the research community and industry to meet and discuss issues surrounding the genetic improvement of beef cattle and for attendees to learn about technologies and management practices that can aid in the profitability of their operations. Find out more at [www.BIFconference.com](http://www.BIFconference.com).

This online event site is made possible thanks to the cooperation of the Beef Improvement Federation and the sponsorship of LiveAuctions.tv.



For more information, contact Shauna Rose Hermel, editor, 3201 Frederick Ave., Saint Joseph, MO 64506; 816-383-5200; [shermel@angusjournal.com](mailto:shermel@angusjournal.com). Follow @AJeditor on Twitter.

