

# The Power of Words

Word choices are critical to marketing products and image.

Commentary by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor

I recently had an “aha” moment while shopping at a vintage market. The store, which is only open one weekend a month, was buzzing with shoppers. I was among them, and we were ogling over what most people would call “junk” — from old dishes and dusty furniture to tools and rusty buckets. The checkout counter had a lengthy line, and the vintage wares were flying out the door.

As I drove home, I pondered the unique success of this store. Through the art of words, the store owners — and many others — have created a hearty business in selling junk.

Years ago these places were called flea markets. Then, calling them antiques came into vogue. During the past few years, “upcycling” and “vintage” have become the marketing words of choice, and through the nostalgia created, a frenzy of sales have followed.

This concept of “story-selling” with key words can be evidenced in other areas, as well. I recently heard a radio ad promoting a local town’s “handmade” ice cream. Once upon a time, the marketing focus would have been on homemade, but now “handmade” conjures up a more appealing image.

We’ve seen a similar trend in food and beverages, especially burgers. Add the word “gourmet,” “custom” or “hand-crafted,” and you are much more likely to boost sales — and possibly even charge a few more dollars for the product.

## Ag applications

A discussion at a recent ag industry conference broached this topic of words. The discussion focused on the transition from calling an individual a farmer to more frequently calling them a “producer.” It was suggested that a more appealing word for today’s times may be to use “provider.”

Given the changing age demographic of our population — with many millennials no longer having a connection to a “farmer” or “producer” — perhaps recognizing that farmers and ranchers are “providers” has merit. It may help bridge a better connection with consumers when they become more aware of the food and array of products that agriculturists do provide.

Similarly, I’ve often heard people propose during the past decade that the term

genetically modified organism (GMO) should be replaced with a less scientifically scary term. Indeed, given the negative connotation GMO has earned during the past 20 years, perhaps a new name would help this technology gain better acceptance — and understanding — among consumers.

You may agree or disagree with these ideas, but the important takeaway to recognize from all of this is that words do create images and stories in people’s minds, and they ultimately influence purchasing choices. Whether you are a seedstock producer or business owner, you may want to re-evaluate the words you use for your marketing. What “story” do they suggest?

junk  
custom  
gourmet  
vintage  
producer  
provider  
handmade  
American  
upscaling  
independent  
sustainable  
hand-crafted  
story-selling

## Target understanding

As a final point, in agriculture we are often encouraged to share our story with others so they know what we do to produce — or provide — the food that comes to their table. That continues to be critically important. Just make sure you are using words to which the average consumer can relate.

As one example, I read an article in the April 2017 *Inc.* magazine that featured Duncan Berry, owner of Fishpeople Seafood in Oregon. His company was described as “delivering sustainable seafood caught in American waters by independent fishermen.” Instantly I recognized some key words designed to resonate with consumers — *sustainable, American, independent.*

Moreover, in the article, Berry described his industry with this impactful statement: “If you dropped most humans into the environment that a salmon survives, I don’t think they’d make it. . . . Along with the fisher folk themselves, the fish are the heroes of our story.”

For those of us who raise cattle, I believe we have a very similar storyline in the beef industry. We just need to find the words to capture the passion and persistence of our livelihoods and share that imagery with consumers.



**Editor’s Note:** Kindra Gordon is a freelance writer and cattlemaster from Whitewood, S.D.

