

## 2020 ADVANCE AWARD Ag Advocate of the Year: *Amber Kohlhaas*

**Business:** Self-Employed Marketing Specialist, grain farmer and cow-calf operator

**Hobbies:** my family really enjoys being outdoors. I'm a huge animal lover and really enjoy spending time on the farm doing chores and being around all sorts of animals on our funny farm. In the summer, my family spends a lot of time boating and fishing at Clear Lake. Since COVID, I've found a new love for hiking with my daughter.

**Why Selected:** Goes to a Kossuth County resident who is actively engaged in farming or farming-related activities and who positively impacted the community in manners such as the advance or implementation of agricultural practices, preservation and the environment, professional development, advocacy for agriculture, education and/or service to the community, whether for a single effort, series of efforts or over a period of time.

ag•vo•cate: Advocate for agriculture, Kohlhaas

*Brad Hicks*  
Publisher

Agriculture is the center of Amber Kohlhaas' life. Born into a grain and livestock family farm near Garner, a graduate of Iowa State

University with a degree in ag business, a career that included stints with Successful Farming magazine at Meredith Corp. in Des Moines and then in marketing for sprayer builder Hagie Manufacturing in Clarion, all the while in adult life a partner with her husband in their own grain and cattle operation near, while remaining a helper with his and her families' separate operations – and a mom as well – that's a few thousand acres worth for most.

But Kohlhaas didn't stop there. She's an advocate – "advocate" she calls it – for the life she has led, part of the wider effort to let people know what agriculture is and isn't, taking the extra steps to promote the industry. It's that involvement that has earned her the Kossuth County 2020 Ag Advocate Advance Award.

"The average consumer today is over three generations removed from the farm," she stated. "With the agriculture industry being more diverse today than ever before, consumer choices have in turn also become more vast and complex.

"Today, farm and ranch families make up just 2 percent of the U.S. population. This means that the average consumer is most likely to not even know a farmer whom they can personally turn to

for answers to their farm-related questions. This is why there is so much misinformation and confusion in the consumer space in today's society.

"As a part of the 2 percent of farmers, I feel that it's our responsibility to offer some visibility into our best practices," she continued.

"Every farm is unique and different. Just as consumer families each have individual needs and preferences, there also isn't a cookie cutter approach that works for every farm. However, as farmers, if we are open and intentional about our personal experiences and best practices, consumers will be able to go into the marketplace armed with practical, hands-on experiences and education to more confidently make informed consumer choices that are in the best interest for their families," the Algona resident stated.

Her involvement includes being a member of the National Agri-Marketing Association (NAMA), Common Ground Iowa and the Kossuth County Farm Bureau Board of Directors.

"It's sort of hard for me to pinpoint how I started being an advocate. I think it's like Nike says – I just started doing it," she said.

"Going way back to my early childhood days, I was always

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involved on the farm and really enjoyed helping with the livestock chores, as well as being in the field. My favorite part of going to school was the days that we did show-and-tell. I found it very interesting to see what kids chose to bring in and share with us. As a kid, I always thought it was really special and fun when we could bring in a live farm animal for kids to touch and see in person.

“I feel fortunate for having the opportunity to be raised on a family farm, as there are so many kids that never get a chance to ride in a combine or see a baby calf being born. I don’t want to take those unique opportunities for granted, and if there are ways to share some of our farm experiences with others, I believe that we, as farmers, have a responsibility to do so.”

She said some of her opportunities to become involved were doors that opened for her.

“As a farmer, I have had people reach out on occasion asking if they can have a farm tour, ride in the field or see our baby calves during calving season. People have replied to some of my social media posts containing farm pictures, asking for clarification about what silage is, why we haul manure or why we have so many pens on the

farm for our cows, etc. I’ve had someone ask to better understand what farmers are doing in the fields between planting and harvest season, as well as requests to do virtual chores with kids while they were out of school due to COVID-19. These are just a few examples of things that people have reached out to me for – and I’m so glad they did. Farmers are eager to share our best practices and will answer questions to the best of our ability from our personal experiences on our farms. So, don’t ever be afraid to initiate a conversation with a farmer. You’ll be glad you did and they will too.”

While farm life is fulfilling, there is fulfillment in advocating – agvocating – as well. “The things that you are passionate about aren’t random,” she explained. “They are your calling. Someone once gave me a great piece of advice. ‘Helping others achieve their goals is key to achieving your goals.’

“Can you think of someone, perhaps an expert in their field, who carved out time of their schedule, or life, to teach you something that you were interested in and knew little to nothing about? I can think of several whom have helped me grow, and I’ll always be grateful to those people for giving me their time and humility to build up

my confidence.”

For her, some of those experiences were her college days.

“I spent time job shadowing a wide range of careers, ranging from USDA market offices to large agricultural publishers. It was a very valuable learning experience. I spent weeks at companies that I could envision myself being happy working at long term. But more importantly, it gave me a short-term experience to learn which companies and careers were not a fit for me personally.”

That others provided those types of opportunities was and remains important to her. “This is something that I always try to remember and will pay it forward.”

She views that as important in the work to make agriculture’s case to the 98 percent. “It’s my hope that by being approachable, joining the conversation and sharing visibility with a slice of life on our farm, that families gain a deeper understanding of the role that agriculture plays on the food, fuel and fiber that we all are consumers of. It’s my hope that when families sit down at the dinner table, that there is a new appreciation for who and what it took to put the meal on their plates.”