

Impressions of Agriculture: Using Semiotics to Decode Agricultural Images

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How do people view agriculture? This question is important, because the answer can affect what people they buy, where they buy from, and how they vote on legislation involving agriculture. For those in agriculture to be able to represent themselves and their products accurately and effectively, this question needs to be answered. It is particularly important to agricultural communicators, because as a profession, it is their job to communicate with the public to reach mutual understanding. Learning what impressions and stereotypes people associate with agriculture should help them do this job more effectively. One important way people communicate and interpret the world around them is through images. This study will focus on images and what information can be gained from analyzing them. Participants in the study will use disposable cameras to take pictures of “agriculture” and fill out a brief survey on their background and experience with agriculture. The images and surveys collected will be analyzed to determine what patterns emerge. The results of this research will reveal consumer impressions and stereotypes of agriculture through analyzing and decoding images people associate with agriculture. It will also reveal how background and previous experience with agriculture influences these impressions and stereotypes. This knowledge will assist agricultural communicators in communicating more effectively with the public.