

By Rep. Steve King

In Iowa, we have grown accustomed to meritless attacks on farming by people who know nothing about agriculture. Many of these critics, like New Yorker Robert F. Kennedy Jr., have not spent time learning about all that actually goes into farming, yet they never hesitate to attack the agriculture industry.

A recent article in Time Magazine may have hit an all-time low. Time recently published a bitter hit piece on the current state of the American farming industry.

The Time article focused on misconceptions about farming rather than facts, and Bryan Walsh, the article's author, interviewed only those hostile to production agriculture, rather than actual farmers. Claims made in the article: farm communities suffer from pollution and stench, animals are routinely abused on farms and inexpensive, non-organic food has led to American obesity.

In the article, Walsh writes that "the waste produced by the pig and his thousands of pen mates on the factory farm where they live goes into manure lagoons that blanket neighboring communities with air pollution and a stomach-churning stench." I have lived in Iowa my entire life, have visited all 286 towns in the Fifth District and I have never seen a community blanketed with air pollution and stench as described by Walsh.

Walsh also stated that "unless Americans radically rethink the way they grow and consume food, they face a future of eroded farmland, hollowed-out countryside, scarier germs, higher health costs — and bland taste." He fails to provide any evidence to support this claim.

I have spent my life working toward soil conservation. I know what rich and productive soil we have in Iowa and the steps we've taken to preserve its viability. I've been on this earth for sixty years and I still relish the taste of burgers, brats, steaks and chops hot off the grill. Don't try to convince me they have become "bland."

Organic agriculture is a great niche market. There is a high return on investment from organic production and many consumers prefer the taste of organic foods. But organic food cannot sustain a large population of people.

Nobel laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug, the recently deceased father of the "Green Revolution," was asked in 2000 if organic agriculture could feed the world. Dr. Borlaug responded, "That's ridiculous. This shouldn't even be a debate. Even if you could use all the organic material that you have--the animal manures, the human waste, the plant residues--and get them back on the soil, you couldn't feed more than 4 billion people."

Organic farming is a valuable segment of the agriculture industry, but it cannot replace conventional farming. The assumption that it can is dangerous for the millions of people who depend on the affordable food products produced by conventional farming.

Time also missed the ball on animal agriculture. Animals today are raised in much better conditions than a few decades ago.

Most are fed science-based diets and housed in climate controlled barns. These barns allow farmers to produce meat that is lower in fat. Hogs produced today survive Iowa winters in 70 degree barns. They no longer have to face exposure to sub-freezing temperatures.

The waste from animals raised in these facilities is held in state of the art

containment systems until it can be used to replenish nutrients and organic matter in the soil. Animals are not fed large amounts of antibiotics as suggested by Walsh. When animals are transported, they become stressed. Because stressed animals are more prone to sickness, producers do often introduce a small amount of antibiotics to prevent sickness until the animal is no longer stressed. Pigs do better when illness is prevented, just like people do better when illness is prevented.

The Time article also criticized meat production and insinuated that eating cheap American meat makes Americans fat. Instead of a sweeping judgment that “American addiction to meat” is responsible for the health problems of millions of Americans, why didn’t Walsh cite other factors, such increased video game usage, television viewership and Internet browsing that can turn people into furniture?

Time’s article seems to long for a time when farming was a primitive industry with little innovation or technology. The world’s population has more than doubled in the past 50 years due to advancements in agriculture. Without an increased food supply, many more people would have starved to death and their ancestors would not exist today.

Innovative farmers in Iowa and across the United States are the world’s breadbasket. Does Time really want less bread in that basket?