

Millennial Farmers Help Shape the Future of Ag



Younger farmers—millennials ages 25-40—are changing the face of agriculture through their use of modern farming practices and reliance on technology and data to improve outcomes. Just as important, they're educating and entertaining the public using social media to raise awareness of farming and its important practices.

Millennials are “digital natives” who have grown up surrounded by technology and they are willing to integrate more and more technology into the ag industry. Millennial farmers have embraced a variety of precision ag tools, from smartphones and mobile applications to drones and aerial applications to agricultural robots and GPS-driven machinery, along with business programs and digital financial management systems. These younger farmers are reinventing large-scale agriculture using data from sensors, satellites and other sources to track crop health and make more informed planting and treatment decisions.

Adopting these data-capture technologies is creating an increasing reliance on digital tools that can amass, analyze and model data, something millennials embrace. A generation ago, digital yield maps transformed farming by capturing and processing farm-level data. Today, farmers are looking at layers of field-level data. Tomorrow, when Gen Z starts becoming farmers, they'll be capturing plant-level data. Future farmers will likely rely less on intuition and more on tools and software that enable them to check their instinct against the algorithm's assessment of likely outcomes to inform decision making.

This reliance on data and technology by younger farmers is likely to increase. The farm consolidation trend is continuing, so farms are likely to keep getting bigger, making them more complex to manage. An owner can no longer circle their operations in two hours. Day-to-day tasks may demand additional full-time employees, not just family members, so farmers may need additional management skills. Garrison Kinsel, a 23-year-old farmer from Texas, recognizes how important his studies have been. “I think my advantage right now is being at a university and learning about the new advancements being made in marketing and technology,” he said. “We have been raised in an age where technology is constantly advancing, and we have been forced to grow with that technology. As farming and agriculture continue to change, advances in technology and changes in the norm will be handled much easier by people of my generation.”

These educated, dedicated millennial farmers appreciate the history of agriculture while looking toward the future of farming. They're



ready to innovate to increase productivity, efficiency and quality, knowing that population increases, land limitations and a desire for more sustainable farming practices create the need to produce more with less. The qualities many millennial farmers possess—adaptability, technical savvy and dedication to farming—will help them fulfill their role in sustaining the ag industry.

While data and technology are changing how farms are run, it's younger farmers' use of social media that's changing the narrative around farming. By sharing aspects of farm life on X, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, millennial farmers are rekindling the interest of consumers in where food comes from and how it is produced. They're also helping change stereotypes surrounding the millennial population, showing that this generation is hardworking and innovative.

Zach Johnson, the Millennial Farmer on YouTube, is a fifth-generation farmer from Minnesota. He started a YouTube channel in 2016 that has grown to a full-blown business that he runs in addition to the farm. He started it to help educate others about the realities of farming. "I'd seen so many articles about what farming was doing wrong," he said. "So, I decided to show what actually goes on at a farm." One of his goals is to show people how much farmers care about sustainability. "The fact is, if we don't take care of our land and make smart choices, we're not going to be in business," Johnson said. "There's nobody who could care more about the water and land in my community than me." Follow Zach Johnson on YouTube @MillennialFarmer.

Video parodies posted on YouTube by the Peterson Brothers, a trio of fifth-generation Kansas farmers (Greg, 32, Nathan, 29 and Kendal, 26), garner millions of views using humor to show what life is like on the farm. You can follow the Peterson Brothers on YouTube @PetersonFarmBros. Be sure to check out their "Ghostbusters" parody "Crop Dusters" to learn more about aerial application of seed treatments.

YouTube and TikTok are becoming places to get farming and ag information, from equipment repair instructions to planting tips to behind-the-scenes peeks at farm life. Instagram, Snapchat and other social media platforms offer a variety of channels that allow farmers to connect with one another and share the joys and challenges of farming.

Young farmers are the future of agriculture and they're having a positive influence on production, sustainability and the perception of farm life. By sharing personal stories about farming, they're chipping away at misconceptions and building trust with customers. By embracing the power of technology and data, they're improving yields and driving success. Together, it makes for a bright future for farming.

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