

NAICC NEWS

by Dennis Hattermann,
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You are what you eat



"We need people to be involved with our government officials and to educate the public so people are making informed decisions based on knowledge and sensibility rather than fear or misguided propaganda. As professionals in this field, it is our responsibility to spread the truth."

It is an exciting time to be in agriculture. If you are working in this industry and do not agree with that statement, you are not involved enough in your profession, or you are living under a rock.

This dynamic environment is one that can provide a challenging and rewarding career for crop and research consultants (the two groups making up the NAICC). You can relate these two groups of crop professionals to medical professionals.

Researchers develop the tools to help the farmer grow a better, safer, more efficient crop just as medical researchers find new medicines and technological advances to help people live healthier lives.

Crop consultants serve in a similar role as medical doctors in that they consult with the grower and make recommendations and prescriptions for the right mix of products and technology that the grower should use to produce the healthiest, most efficient crop possible.

Both of these groups (researchers and consultants) need each other just as the medical doctors working "in the field" need the medical researchers to continually find new tools such as antibiotics to overcome resistance issues and other challenges facing human health. Our professions overlap in other ways, too.

One area of medicine that has not gotten the attention it deserves is nutrition. Which source and delivery method of nutrients and phytochemicals are best at optimizing human health? What is the scale? How healthy is healthy? The possible combinations when factored with individual human genetic and

metabolic differences seem endless. People are swayed by the media regarding natural foods or supplements and pesticides by information that is often superficial, emotional, misguided, self-serving or just plain wrong. Many are quick to demonize all pesticides but ignore the chemicals inherently found in "organic" crops that can be harmful.

Anyone who thinks all "natural" food is safe should do some reading on aflatoxins. For those who don't know, aflatoxins are chemicals produced by an *Aspergillus* fungus growing on a substrate (such as grain crops or peanuts) that has not been treated with a fungicide. Aflatoxins are completely natural but very carcinogenic and toxic, unlike fungicides. We need an integrated, sensible approach to plant and human health.

There is a lot of potential for agricultural and medical scientists to collaborate toward the common goal of enhancing human and environmental health. Many plant chemicals and natural supplements remain undiscovered and many could benefit from refined dosage. We can fine tune what we eat to preclude "after the fact pharmaceuticals."

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If you are older and you don't have the energy or desire to blaze a new trail, mentor a young person and encourage them to do what we have not done. There is still much to be excited about and much to learn. **AG**

