



The Patrons Chain

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL GRANGE

March 20, 2020

Let's change gears! Now, overall try to reduce use of Microplastics

By Betsy Huber, National President

Microplastics—what are they? In the past couple years we have had resolutions at National Grange concerning microbeads or microplastics and their danger to the environment.

I'm sure we've all noticed plastic waste along the roads and in fields—plastic bottles, food containers, plastic bags, even toys and rubber balls. These can easily be washed into ditches, streams and rivers in a rainstorm.

What happens to this plastic debris over time? Unfortunately some is consumed by wildlife. We've all seen terrible photos of marine animals and birds entangled in six-pack rings, or huge garbage areas in oceans where vast amounts of debris including plastic collects. Some of this floats on the surface, but much more consists of broken pieces suspended in the depths of water. It's extremely difficult to clean up this type of plastic waste.

Plastics degrade over time but never go away. They break up into smaller and smaller pieces, eventually becoming microplastics and microscopic nanoplastics. They are found everywhere around the world and consist of microbeads, microfibers and broken-down pieces of plastic.

Microbeads are tiny abrasives found in washed-off cosmetics, cleansers and toothpaste. In 2015 Congress passed the Microbead-Free Waters Act, banning the use of microbeads in cosmetics and toothpaste. Manufacturers are phasing them out but they are still used and are still found in waterways.

Microfibers are tiny pieces of threads and fibers that break off clothing (nylon, polyester, rayon, acrylic and spandex). These fabrics shed fibers with every wash and they go down the drain into sewer systems and are discharged into waterways.

Microplastics can leach chemicals into the environment, but they also attract and concentrate heavy metals and organic pollutants dissolved in the water, making them even more dangerous.

Microplastics are present in both tap water and bottled water—in fact, a study showed that much more are present in bottled water than water from the tap. They are also consumed by aquatic life and bioaccumulate in the food chain, but we probably consume more from dust in the air than through eating seafood.

We can cut down on microplastics in the environment by reducing the use of single-use plastics; purchasing items with less packaging; using reusable water bottles and cups; and not using a plastic lid and straw when dining out. Science has not yet discovered a way to eliminate the waste already accumulated in the environment, but we can do our part by taking these actions so we don't add to the problem.

Granges can use crisis as reason to embrace change, expand opportunities

By Joe Stefenoni, National Grange Membership and Leadership Development Director

This is certainly not the article I planned to be writing this month. As we all begin to adjust to our (temporary) normal, many of us may be left wondering “what will our Grange do as we’re all quarantined?” Although gatherings of multiple people are being discouraged (and banned in some jurisdictions) this does not mean that the Grange’s benefit cannot be extended to both the community and our members. Throughout the course of our history, the Grange has been a source of consistency and continuity to thousands of communities in times of crisis.

The theme for Grange Month 2020 is “Cultivating Connections”. While many areas may still not be able to host activities as April comes around, we as Granges can still cultivate connections with our members and our communities. This new temporary reality is a perfect opportunity for Granges to give additional responsibilities to some officers as the administrative officers handle the business of the Grange until we are able to convene meetings again. The Granges can be made responsible for contacting Grange members to check-in on their well-being. The Lecturer/Program Director can continue to develop programs that educate and enliven both members and non-members. As movement restrictions are lifted, the Stewards could be responsible for picking-up and delivering items to members who are more susceptible of contracting an infection.

Connections can also be cultivated with members of our communities. As we are quarantined or are sheltered in place, Grange leaders can be keeping abreast of what the community needs and will need. As day-to-day life returns to normal, our Granges can be at the forefront of the community to ease the transition. Community socials, educational forums and other events that bring the community together will be essential in the upcoming months. Social media and technology-based platforms like your Grange’s grange.org website, Facebook, blogs and Zoom are all useful in engaging both Grange members and community members.

Please share with all Granges and members the advisory issues by National Grange Master/President Betsy Huber regarding the use of digital platforms for conducting Grange business. This can be an opportunity for Community Granges to evaluate their use of technology and find new ways to incorporate tech tools into the regular operations of your Grange.

Finally, this is not the first major national event that has occurred in the Grange’s long and illustrious history. Just as our predecessors, it is our responsibility to look to the care and comfort of the Grange as we relieve the distresses of our Sisters and Brothers.



Grange Resource Binder now available

The Grange Resource Binder is a comprehensive tool for Community Granges that outlines important information on business procedures, Grange meeting procedures, Grange law, Grange officer resources, and program resources. Each Resource Binder is 434 pages that comes with a flash drive that contains certain documents in a digital format.

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FCC uses variety of approaches to provide assistance in response to COVID-19

Gathered by National Grange Legislative Director Burton Eller

Broadband community steps up

The internet and telephone provider community took actions this week to increase speeds, lift data caps, and offer 60 days or more free service to students and low income households. The response of 24 companies to FCC Chairman Pai's call to pull out all the stops will help Americans stay connected during this pandemic. Pai also urged the remaining telecom companies to get on board.

Radio and television broadcasters can help

On a conference call this week, Chairman Pai commended radio and television broadcasters for their coronavirus response so far. Pai then challenged the broadcasters to work with cable and satellite operators to avoid blackouts and service disruptions over the next 60 days.

Other emergency measures

In additional actions by the FCC, several cellular companies were granted temporary access to additional spectrum to help meet the increased pandemic demand, and certain and recertification requirements for the Lifeline program were waived for 60 days to assure continuance of service for the program many rural citizens depend upon.

What Government Should and Shouldn't Do to Advance the Mobile Tech Revolution in Agriculture

The convergence of technology and agriculture has revolutionized modern farming. From streamlining communication, to allowing remote crop monitoring via wireless sensors, to guiding farm machinery, there are [scores of examples](#) of ways in which modern farmers and ranchers rely on mobile devices to make their operations [not just more efficient, but more sustainable](#). As our attention shifts to confronting the array of threats stemming from the coronavirus and we seek to mitigate risks, mobile connectivity has become vital for everything from connecting students and teachers, working remotely, checking in with loved ones, and longer term planning. Many of us will be focused on increased efficiencies and stretching resources in the face of serious economic hardship in the days, weeks and months ahead.

Leveraging technology will be a critical component of how we make the necessary changes to how we live, learn, and work, going forward. The good news is that for many of us in and around the agriculture industry and those of us who reside in rural America, adoption of mobile technology is nothing new.

A survey conducted at the American Farm Bureau Federation's 101st Annual Convention & Trade Show in Austin, TX of more than 250 conference attendees – including farmers, ranchers, and others working in the sector – provides a snapshot of the widespread use of mobile technology in agriculture and underscores the need for government policies that promote continued access to mobile devices.

When convention attendees were asked, *“How important are mobile electronic devices or other connected technologies with apps, to your farm or farm-related activities?”* the results were stark. 86% of respondents said mobile electronic devices or other connected technologies were either “Essential” or “Very Important.” Less than 3% said mobile technology was “Not Important.”

<i>Essential</i>	55.95%
<i>Very Important</i>	29.76%
<i>Somewhat Important</i>	11.51%
<i>Not Important</i>	2.78%

American Farm
Bureau Federation

CONVENTION SURVEY 2020

JAN 17– JAN 20

A survey conducted at the American Farm Bureau Federation's 101st Annual Convention & Trade Show of conference attendees including farmers, ranchers, and others working in the agricultural sector.

How important are mobile electronic devices or other connected technologies with apps, to your farm or farm-related activities?



Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Government policies and institutions should never restrict farmers access to the latest technology and mobile electronic devices.

STRONGLY AGREE
86.51%
(216)

STRONGLY DISAGREE
1.59% (4)

SOMEWWHAT AGREE
11.11% (28)

SOMEWWHAT DISAGREE
0.79% (2)

Attendee
Occupation

FARMERS & RANCHERS
68%
(165)

AGRICULTURAL
SECTOR, OTHER
32% (81)

RESULTS BASED ON (253) RESPONSES TO THIS SURVEY

But continued access to the mobile devices that farmers and ranchers need is not a foregone conclusion. Several government agencies have correctly recognized the hurdles that rural communities face in securing mobile access; the FCC, for example, has [pledged](#) billions in funding to establish 5G connectivity in rural communities, which has the potential to [transform](#) agriculture.

Unfortunately, however, another federal agency is placing rural access to modern technology at risk. The US International Trade Commission (or “ITC”)—an agency that is supposed to protect American industry against unfair foreign competition—has in recent years seen a host of petitions filed by rent-seeking entities threatening “exclusion orders” that would ban the importation of smart phones and other connected devices that are used widely in rural America.

One current ITC case that we are watching anxiously targets devices made by Amazon, Dell, HP, Microsoft, Motorola Mobility, and Samsung. The exclusion order, which is requested by an [Ireland-based patent troll](#), would bar the importation of more than **50% of all Android smartphones** and **97% of premium Android smartphones**, in addition to **80% of Android tablets**. That exclusion would be devastating for the nearly 40% of Farm Bureau survey respondents who said they rely on Android devices—not to mention the millions of other Americans who do as well.

On February 14, the same Irish troll filed a [second ITC complaint](#), this time threatening even wider harm to rural access to mobile devices. Brazenly, the troll asked the ITC bar the importation of touchscreen products from Amazon, Apple, ASUS, LG, Microsoft, Motorola, Samsung, and Sony. Combined, those companies comprise over [90% of the U.S. smartphone and tablet markets](#). If the Commission goes along this order would present a sweeping blow that would drastically widen the digital divide and hamper the array of modern agriculture operations that rely on mobile connectivity.

[Federal agencies should be encouraging, not hindering, rural access to affordable connected devices](#). Farm Bureau Convention attendees agreed—the respondents were nearly unanimous when asked whether they believed that “*government policies and institutions should never restrict farmers’ access to the latest technology and mobile electronic devices*”:

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	86.51%
<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	11.11%
<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	.79%
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	1.59%

That’s a compelling statement about the strong bond with between today’s farmers and mobile technology. The more that farmers can harness the power of mobile technology to become more efficient, competitive, and sustainable, the better for everyone. The U.S. government must remain committed to fostering equal access in rural America. It is critical that agencies fully consider the effects of their actions on the public especially where government action could substantially hinder rural connectivity.



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CONGRATULATIONS TO NATIONAL GRANGE PRESIDENT BETSY HUBER, NAMED ON MARCH 13 TO THE

FCC'S PRECISION AGRICULTURE CONNECTIVITY TASK FORCE

AS PART OF THE ACCELERATING BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT ON UNSERVED AGRICULTURAL LANDS WORKGROUP

Read the full release at bit.ly/2xC28bO



5 TIPS

for Staying Connected



Our nation's broadband providers are working to keep you connected ... no matter where you are, no matter what.

#stayingconnected

- 1 Centrally locate your router**
 - Keep it upright and off the floor to improve coverage
- 2 Remove obstructions from router**
 - Dense housing materials can be difficult for Wi-Fi to penetrate
 - Devices like microwaves and cordless phones can obstruct the signal
- 3 Move wireless devices closer to your router**
 - Shorter distances equal stronger signal and faster speed
- 4 Turn off internet-connected devices when not in use**
 - Exit streaming apps after use
 - Restart your devices regularly
 - Turn off auto updates on apps, gaming consoles, and PCs
- 5 Protect your Wi-Fi**
 - Use a password
 - Update anti-virus software, drivers, firmware, and computer/device software

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