If you engage in any type of social media browsing, you know it’s a bit of a mixed bag for the presentation of agricultural sciences. For every well-researched crop science Twitter feed out there (@WyWeeds is one of my favorites), there’s another that is just supremely wacky, providing far-out agricultural information that has zero basis in research or science. When a Facebook friend shares yet another flawed study, I take a breath and decide if I’m going to engage, battling that dreck with facts. Lately, I do engage, and I do this not because I think I’ll change minds or I like a good public Facebook spat, but because I think it’s my job to provide folks with correct science-based information about crop science. Recent studies demonstrate an increasing distrust of science (https://bit.ly/2YZGTdc), and in my small world, I’m going to do what I can to help restore that trust.

For example, do you know the 10 USDA-approved genetically modified crops that are currently being produced in the United States? I do, and I can usually reel them off in pretty quick order when they become a topic of conversation: corn, soybean, cotton, potato, papaya, squash, canola, alfalfa, apple, and sugarbeet (https://bit.ly/2Gcfn4I). Why do I bother to know this? Well, if even one person asks me about a can of green beans that are labeled as “non-GMO,” I have enough knowledge to explain why that is spurious labeling as there are exactly zero genetically modified green beans currently available. While I may not change a mind, I at least have to try to counter deceptive advertising with science.

I get that we all may not lurk at the grocery store, waiting to badger some poor person who just wants to buy green beans. But many of us do use Facebook, or Twitter, and it offers an avenue to gently insert some science into discussions when they get weird. Politely offer an alternative, backed by science, when someone posts the latest Facebook advice on how to control weeds using beer, soda (NOT diet, mind you), ammonia, and vinegar. Explain on the “straw bale gardening” post that you cannot just plunk the tomato plant down into the straw—there’s that pesky carbon:nitrogen ratio that is involved. Mention that the Diet Coke study (which implies that you will immediately die of stroke if you just look at the can) was not published in any reputable scientific journal and had a sample size of…..10 people.

“I do believe that as trained crop scientists, it never hurts to insert some corrective science into a flawed post or tweet...”

I don’t think that we need to get into a big frothing snit with every posted example of bad science, but I do believe that as trained crop scientists, it never hurts to insert some corrective science into a flawed post or tweet if you have the time and inclination. We all do research, teaching, and outreach to spread our science, and sometimes being a “citizen crop scientist” is a first logical step towards providing that information. Happy posting.