

FACES OF



Advocating for Ag on Capitol Hill

ResponsibleAg is showcase for industry's commitment to compliance, safety

The average American is said to be at least three generations removed from the farm. On Capitol Hill, the divide seems even wider.

"Since I began working in Washington, D.C., I've seen fewer and fewer members of Congress who have a good understanding of agriculture today," says Richard Gupton, senior vice president for public policy and counsel for the Agricultural Retailers Association (ARA). "The same is true for the congressional staff and regulatory agency employees. That's why it's important for our members to be engaged in activities that show their commitment to operating in a way that protects the environment and keeps employees and communities safe. The ResponsibleAg program is part of that commitment."

Created in 2014, the industry-led initiative has helped agribusinesses ensure compliance with environmental, health and safety (EHS) and security regulations to keep employees, customers and communities safe. Gupton, who has served in his position at ARA for 18 years, says he doesn't know of another industry with a voluntary program that is as robust or provides such in-depth training.

"Before ResponsibleAg, our members strived to do the right thing, training their employees and protecting them

and their communities while complying with some very complicated federal regulations," he says. "Today with ResponsibleAg, that continues, but now our members have a third-party process to validate all the steps they're taking."

Protecting the freedom to operate

When Gupton arrived on Capitol Hill working as legislative counsel for the representative from

"Each and every day, there are agencies and lawmakers trying to put forth measures that could take away a lot of the tools necessary for modern agriculture."

— Richard Gupton



Building relationships on Capitol Hill ensures that ARA members have a voice when changes to current policy or new regulations are proposed. In February 2020, Rep. Dan Bishop of North Carolina, second from left, took time to visit with, from left, Erica Peterson of the North Carolina Agribusiness Council, Diana Henderson and Harry Albert of TKXS, a TELUS Agriculture company, and ARA's Richard Gupton.



Sen. Mike Braun of Indiana meets with ARA members in February 2020 during the annual ARA Legislative Fly-In in Washington, D.C. From left, Barry Day, Superior Ag Resources; Sen. Braun; Dan Bouch, Corteva Agriscience; Bill Strack, Marcus Construction; and Karis Gutter, Corteva Agriscience. During the event, ARA members meet with Congressional representatives to share their stories, including information about ResponsibleAg.

his hometown of Raleigh, agriculture policy was one of his responsibilities.

"When I first started working on policy in D.C., I was involved with the 1996 Farm Bill, so I've watched how policy impacts the industry for 25 years," he says.

ARA, a non-profit trade association, represents the legislative and regulatory interests of agricultural retailers and distributors across the United States. Gupton oversees ARA's public policy advocacy efforts, working with a com-



As part of its educational efforts, ARA hosts regulatory agency personnel for tours of the training facility at the Ford B. West Center for Responsible Agriculture in Owensboro, Kentucky.

mittee of ag retail members who provide direction on policy and regulation issues.

During a typical week, Gupton and his team work to educate members of Congress and regulatory agencies about matters impacting the industry — everything from commercial driver's license requirements for seasonal ag employees to protection of pesticide products and other production agriculture tools.

"Overall, we're trying to protect the retailers' freedom to operate," he says. "We support common-sense regulations that ensure retailers can operate safely and securely for the environment, their employees and their communities."



RICHARD GUPTON, Senior Vice President for Public Policy and Counsel, Agricultural Retailers Association

Educating about agriculture

Gupton says those who propose new regulations or changes to current policy often lack a complete understanding of the tools of modern agriculture. They don't fully realize that agriculture is a high-tech industry where precision application is the rule, not the exception. However, once they learn about the steps ag retailers take to train employees, ensure environmental stewardship and operate safely and compliantly, appreciation grows.

"When we make visits to the Hill, we talk about ResponsibleAg and the industry's investment in our one-of-a-kind training facility, the Ford B. West Center for Responsible Agriculture," Gupton says. "We really see positive reactions from lawmakers and regulatory agencies."

When an ag retail facility receives ResponsibleAg certification, ResponsibleAg

sends letters to the members of Congress who represent the district in which the facility is located. Often, those letters prompt a congratulatory reply, Gupton says, and can even lead to facility visits from lawmakers.

"Once they start to build that relationship, it can really open up the lines of communication and provide a positive and proactive way for the industry to share its position," he adds. This relationship building led to a past collaboration among the ARA, The Fertilizer Institute, OSHA and ResponsibleAg to create a training video and other similar projects.

Investing in the future

While many ARA members might have their own internal safety auditing and compliance programs, Gupton urges them to look on ResponsibleAg as an extension of their business operations, an investment in good faith and trust with the community and with agencies that enforce regulations.

"Each and every day, there are agencies and lawmakers trying to put forth measures that could take away a lot of the tools necessary for modern agriculture," Gupton says. "Being part of ResponsibleAg and doing what our industry should do shows the industry is committed to safety and goes a long way toward protecting those modern ag tools we provide to farmer customers."

To learn more about ResponsibleAg, visit www.ResponsibleAg.org or call 270.683.6777.

THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY



www.ResponsibleAg.org

@ResponsibleAg

MISSION

ResponsibleAg is an industry-led initiative **committed** to helping agribusinesses properly store and handle farm input supplies. The program helps members ensure they are **compliant** with environmental, health, safety and security regulations to keep employees, customers and our communities **safe**.

