

FACES OF



Beyond the Audit

From Capitol Hill to the farm gate, ResponsibleAg benefits agribusiness.

Growing up in eastern Oregon, Daren Coppock was no stranger to agriculture. His family raised both wheat and barley while also managing a herd of purebred shorthorn cattle. Like many youth, he showed lambs and steers while participating in 4-H and FFA.



DAREN COPPOCK
President & CEO,
Agricultural Retailers
Association

He also was no stranger to the agricultural supply industry.

"We had an ag retailer just 200 yards down the road from where I grew up, so I was exposed to that side of the business from a young age," says Coppock, president and CEO of the Agricultural Retailers Association (ARA). "I guess you can say I've got this stuff deep in my blood."

Coppock has served in his position at ARA for the past 11 years. The non-profit trade association represents the interests of agricultural retailers and distributors across the United States on legislative and regulatory issues.

It was in 2014, however, that ARA came together with The Fertilizer Institute to begin laying the groundwork for what would become ResponsibleAg, an industry-led initiative to help agribusinesses ensure compliance with environmental, health and safety (EHS) and security regulations to keep employees, customers and communities safe.

Creating a One-Stop Safety Program

While many attribute the explosion that occurred in April 2014 at the West Fertilizer Co. storage and distribution facility in West, Texas, as the impetus for the ResponsibleAg program, Coppock says that its origins actually can be traced back two months prior to the accident.

"We had a board meeting that February, and at that time, our board decided to create a code of practice for handling anhydrous ammonia in the interest of product stewardship and safety," he recalls. "After what happened in West, we made two changes to the plan. One was to include ammonium nitrate, and the other was to team up with The Fertilizer Institute (TFI) because it couldn't just be a retail effort."

In the months that followed, as ARA and TFI started working with the Asmark Institute to develop the actual

audit questionnaire, it became apparent that the program needed to be more all-encompassing.

"We wanted to create a system that was easy enough for agribusinesses to access, one that didn't cost a lot of money or require a lot of effort on their part to get into it," Coppock says. "By adding in the other areas where federal compliance is required — from EPA to DOT to OSHA and Homeland Security — we created a one-stop shop."

Five Years of Improved Safety

It's been just more than five years since the first facilities received ResponsibleAg certification, and Coppock says findings from audits reveal that the industry overall is doing its part to maintain both health and safety.

"Only about 0.4 percent of the findings are what the agencies would consider serious violations," he says. "The vast majority of findings are paperwork-related — not having a box checked, an 'I' dotted or a 'T' crossed. So, it makes me feel good that we're in pretty good condition as an industry."



After the explosion in West, Texas, ARA teamed up with TFI and the Asmark Institute to develop a comprehensive program to ensure safety and federal compliance with regulations from EPA, DOT, OSHA and Homeland Security. Ammonium nitrate was added to the planning process, which originally had focused only on handling anhydrous ammonia.

He says the ability to show that the industry is being proactive with safety through ResponsibleAg is valuable when he visits with representatives from federal agencies or Congressional committees.

"When we can identify the number of facilities enrolled and show how they're improving and correcting potential violations, it goes a long way," he adds. "We can say, 'If you're thinking about piling more regulations on us, take a look at this first.'"

While some facilities have other safety programs in place, Coppock urges all facilities to consider ResponsibleAg.

"If they have their own program, that's great, but if they don't have anything and are hoping they can fly under the radar and stay out of trouble, that's what we don't want," he says. "In this day and age, with the kind of regulatory environment we operate in, we need to be able to comply with the regulations and show that we're doing everything we can do to be safe and environmentally and socially conscious."

"I can't think of a simpler and less expensive way to measure your compliance and document it than ResponsibleAg."

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

— Daren Coppock

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The impetus for the ResponsibleAg Certification Program began two months before the April 2014 accident at the West Fertilizer Co. near West, Texas, when the ARA board decided to create a code of practice for handling anhydrous ammonia in the interest of product stewardship and safety.

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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**.

