

October 2012

Seven most deadly sins of agricultural photography: today and 40 years ago

By
Mark Moore and Jim Evans



Is anything new under the sun, in terms of composing good agricultural photographs – and avoiding bad ones? That question came to mind recently when we discovered in the Agricultural Communications Documentation Center a 1972 item in *Agri Marketing* magazine. In it, agricultural photographer Dennis Eilers listed his candidates for the seven most deadly sins in composing photographs.

So we decided to illustrate those danger signs and emphasize some basic reminders, using a “bad-better” format. In this feature you will find (1) Eilers’ brief description of each danger sign, (2) his prescription for avoiding each problem and (3) photos we have taken to illustrate the problem and solution. Our thanks to Julia and Nathaniel Moore for serving as models in this effort. Also, thanks to Lynn Henderson, publisher of *Agri Marketing* magazine, for approval to highlight the article by Dennis Eilers.

WATCH FOR THESE DANGER SIGNS

Horizonitis

Creating this problem

“Easy. All you do is put a horizon in every photo - right smack in the middle.”

Avoiding this problem

“Correct by tilting camera down or up for low or high angle, making more interesting, more dramatic photo.”

Comparing the approaches



Fifteen feet

Creating this problem

“Most common problem - just back up 15 feet from subject.”

Avoiding this problem

“Correct by moving in close to action. Famous photo school rule applies here: ‘fill the frame’.”

Comparing the approaches



Everything in

Creating this problem

“Put everything possible into picture. Old cans, new cans.”

Avoiding this problem

“Remember: effective use of photography is to eliminate "unwanted" distractions from picture when it is being made.”

Comparing the approaches



Nothing in

Creating this problem

“Opposite of everything in, this sin committed by moving as far back from subject as possible...”

Avoiding this problem

“Correct with telephoto lens, moving close.”

Comparing the approaches



Sticking out

Creating this problem

“Line up farmer so telephone pole, old windmill, barn cupola protrudes from head, ear.”

Avoiding this problem

“Correct by changing camera angle, eliminating distracting background.”

Comparing the approaches



Forty-five

Creating this problem

“Oft-committed sin of all photographers. Pros, no exceptions. It's simply shooting everything at eye-level so lens angle dissects ground at 45 degrees. Causes sameness look.”

Avoiding this problem

“Improve picture by moving camera up, down, as subject dictates – such as shooting young soybean plants at ground level.”

Comparing the approaches



Out of focus

Creating the problem

“No excuse.”

Avoiding the problem

“Take extra time, focus sharply on picture center of interest, then shoot.”

Comparing the approaches



Can you help strengthen this list?

After nearly 40 years, what deadly sins of agricultural photography would you add to the list today? Why?

Which of these seven deadly sins might you omit or revise today? Why?

Please send your thoughts and suggestions to moorecommunications@earthlink.net or evansj@illinois.edu. We will share what you provide. Thanks.

About Dennis Eilers. He offered these tips early in his 40-year career as an agricultural photographer, journalist and marketing communicator in the U.S. His earlier professional

experience included farm magazine writing and photography, as well as agricultural advertising and public relations. Through his Iowa Photo Farm service he created an estimated 75,000 photographs of Midwest agriculture and country lifestyle.

This professional development feature is provided through partnership of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) and the Agricultural Communications Documentation Center (ACDC), University of Illinois. Co-author Mark Moore is a freelance agricultural journalist based in Nashotah, Wisconsin. Jim Evans is professor emeritus of agricultural communications, University of Illinois, and ACDC staff associate.
