THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN AGRICULTURE
A guide to social media success
What is social media and why is it important in agriculture?

Social media is all about people. It is a way to build relationships, share information, and connect with diverse audience of people you may never meet in real life.

So, interacting on social media, whether it is Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram or another channel, allows you to develop a community and share your story in a way that was never possible before now.

The general public still has faith in farmers and ranches, but some are wary of modern farm practices. It is important that agriculture unites and has a chance to tell its side of the story. Social media is one way to make your voice heard.

Examples of successful online ‘agvocacy’

1) “Farmer Style” Video
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LX153eYcVrY)
This video successfully showcases the younger generation’s ingenuity and creativity through a positive depiction of farm life. The video is fun and witty, playing off a popular song, but it also has an important message. The video has received more than 16 million views.

2) Agriculture Proud Farm Blog
(http://agricultureproud.com/)
Ryan Goodman’s Agriculture Proud blog is a great example of how one rancher, utilizing social media, can have a large impact on the public’s perception of agricultural practices. Goodman keeps his message positive and honest, which has gained the trust of his audience. Openly talking on his blog, has led to Ryan being featured as a guest author for blog posts in CNN’s Eatocracy.

3) “Keeping It Real: Through the Lens of a Farm Girl”
(https://www.facebook.com/lens.of.a.farm.girl)
This iconographic page showcases farm values through pictures and words. This method of social media is easily shared and attention grabbing.
Getting started
The easiest way to get started on social media is to choose one way to participate at first. Consider what your objectives are. Always the photographer at parties? Try Instagram. Love trying out and sharing new recipes? Pinterest may be for you. Consistency is key. Once you choose the tool that works best for you, all you need to do is sign up! Do not feel like you need to be active on every network. Choose one to focus on at first and grow from there.

Here are a few of the most popular social media tools:

**Facebook**
www.facebook.com
Active users: 1.5 billion
Facebook is great for connecting with people. Nearly 1 billion of its users are active every day! You can post updates about activity on your farm, share pictures, and see what friends, celebrities, organizations, and groups are up to. Your Facebook community often consists of people you know in real life.

**Twitter**
www.twitter.com
Active users: 316 million
Twitter is a popular option that allows you to “tweet” 140 character updates and connect with people from around the world. You can share news links, pictures, or inspirational quotes. You can also retweet posts from other users to increase their reach and send direct messages to share your thoughts. Twitter allows you to connect with people who you have never met but share like-minded interests. You can use hashtags to find other users talking about topics you’re interested in.

**LinkedIn**
www.linkedin.com
Active users: 380 million
Linkedin is geared toward the professional community. It allows you to network with work colleagues and is a powerful tool for brands and job seekers. You can post your resume, connect with other professionals, and keep up to date with industry news. You can follow groups focused on topics relevant to your industry.

**Pinterest**
www.pinterest.com
Active users: 73 million
Pinterest was the fastest growing social media platform of 2014. It is an online pinboard where users share pictures, interests, and hobbies. It is a great tool to share pictures from the farm, your favorite agriculture fact, or your grandma’s recipe. Pinterest focuses on visual sharing.

**Instagram**
www.instagram.com
Active users: 300 million
Instagram focuses on sharing pictures and 15-second videos. Users can edit and add filters to their photos and share them directly to Facebook and Twitter in addition to posting on Instagram. Hashtags can be used on the platform to tag photos or videos with relevant keywords.
All About Facebook

Facebook isn’t hard to get the hang of once you know the basics. Here are the four main things you need to know:

1) **Timeline:** The timeline on your main homepage chronologically lists all of your personal activity and other items which your friends post on your page. It is also where you create your personal profile with your name, picture, and anything else that you want others to know about you or your farm.

2) **Friends:** After you create your profile and set up your timeline, it is time to search and add friends. You can search for old high school buddies or “like” your favorite agricultural organizations. You can search using your email contact list to get started.

3) **Newsfeed:** Your homepage is a continuous newsfeed following everyone that you are connected to and every page that you “like”. It also includes updates from your friends’ activity.

How to use Facebook for agriculture

Facebook is a great place to start a positive conversation about agriculture and get people excited about farming.
1) Post photos from the farm.
2) Share agricultural messages.
3) Connect with agriculture pages.
4) Share farm facts on your page.
5) Post videos of your operation, a note about activity on your farm, or a tour of your barn.
6) Advertise agri-tourism events.
Facebook Tips & Tricks
It’s not enough to just be “on” Facebook anymore – we have to use it effectively. Here’s how:

1. **Post interesting status updates.** Most of the people who “friend” you or “like” your page won’t hang out on your page browsing your photos, videos and past posts. Rather, 90 percent of their experience with you on Facebook will occur through status updates that show up in their news feeds. **Ideas** – experiment with different voice and tone, post links to videos and websites, share powerful quotes or statistics to engage and respond to comments, likes and shares.

2. **Don’t over-do it.** Post no more than one or two status updates per day—or less! Don’t be an oversharer—make sure that you’re posting fresh, interesting, and interactive content.

3. **Don’t sync your accounts.** There are plenty of tools available that will allow you to post the same content to multiple social media communities. Don’t be fooled! Remember that each online community is unique with its own “best practices”.

**Status update content ideas**

- **Success stories.** Everyone loves a good happy ending. So share a triumph you’ve had, an anniversary or milestone you’ve celebrated or just some good news.
- **Photos.** On social media, a picture really is worth a thousand words. Pictures are GREAT for telling (and showing!) agriculture’s story. Just make sure your photo is high quality, and add a short caption.
- **Videos.** Whether you’ve created your own video or you’re sharing a video that someone else made, videos are great if done well. They elicit strong feelings of support and empathy and draw interest.
- **Calls to action.** Engage your friends/fans! Make sure some of your posts are interactive, whether it’s a call for recipes, photos, signing online petitions or attending events.

- **Breaking news.** Social media is driven by breaking news. On Facebook, either link the news story directly or write a few paragraphs about the story in a blog and share your blog. Make sure it’s a current story – old news doesn’t garner much of a response on social media.
All About Twitter

Twitter is easy to use once you get a hang of the lingo. All you need to do is sign up, create a username (which can be as creative as you want, though we suggest keeping it professional and including your name or key words) and find interesting people to follow.

Twitter Dictionary

Tweet: A 140 character post that you use to share and communicate.

Re-Tweet (RT): How to share what someone else has tweeted or give credit to someone else on Twitter. Twitter also now allows you to quote tweets, where you can add your own comments to the retweet.

Direct Message (DM): A private message.

Feed: A stream of tweet updates from the people you follow.

Handle: Your username (example: @animalag)

Mention (@): What you use when referencing another user by their handle (such as @animalag). Use @ to communicate publically with other users.

Hashtag (#): A hashtag is used to denote a larger conversation and see what other people are talking about based on subject, words, and themes (examples: #agchat or #harvest).

Twitter users to follow
@AnimalAg – Animal Agriculture Alliance
@ProtectHarvest – Protect the Harvest
@AgChat – AgChat Foundation
@PorkCheckoff – National Pork Board
@DairyGood – National Dairy Council
@MeatInstitute – North American Meat Institute
@ChickenCouncil – National Chicken Council
@FarmBureau – American Farm Bureau Federation
@Beef – National Cattleman’s Beef Association
@TurkeyGal – National Turkey Federation
@SheepUSA – American Sheep Industry Association
@UEPCertified – United Egg Producers
@UnitedSoy – United Soybean Board

Search Twitter for topics you’re interested in to find more people and organizations to follow.
Twitter Tips & Tricks

1. **Have a personality.** Have personality, have character, experiment with different tones of voice in your posts. Engage your followers and send out a wide variety of content.

2. **Track your links.** You can use a third-party Twitter app, like Bit.ly or Ow.ly to track and shorten your links. The shorter your links, the more characters you have to spare!

3. **Don’t tweet only your own content.** Tweeting only about yourself is boring! Tweet articles or blog posts from your favorite newspapers, bloggers, and partner organizations. If the tweet is useful, then it reflects well upon you and increases the likelihood of reciprocal tweets.

4. **Retweet and reply often.** Retweet unto others as you would have them retweet unto you is the Golden Rule of Twitter. The more often you promote others, the more often they will in turn promote you.

5. **Follow on a 1:1 Ratio.** From a strategic communications point of view, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by following on a 1:1 ratio—meaning if you have 1000 followers you should be following 1000 people.

6. **Use Hashtags Strategically and Authentically.** Hashtags function as a means to organize tweets, spread information, and find new followers. Don’t overdo it though—any given tweet should not have more than 1-2 hashtags, and not every tweet should include them.

7. **Use Favorites.** Favoriting tweets is a great way to bookmark tweets for easy retweeting in the future. Also, using the favorites function to archive your most important tweets gives them added exposure to your followers.

How to use Twitter for agriculture

- Share quick updates on what you’re up to on your family farm or ranch.
- Participate in a twitter chat through AgChat (they usually take place Tuesday nights).
- Connect with other agvocates.
- Share farm facts.
- Post videos of your operation, a note about activity on your farm, or a tour of your barn.
- Advertise ag events. Promote outreach efforts.

Five free Twitter apps

2. Twtpoll—creates simple multiple-choice polls that can easily be tweeted and tracked.
3. Twitpic—share photos in real time from your smartphone or tablet, or via email.
4. Twibbon—allows groups and clubs to create “Twibbons” (ribbons/banners) that Twitterers can overlay on their own Twitters.
5. Cinchcast— allows users to share audio messages online that you have recorded using your computer or smartphone.
All about Pinterest
Pinterest lets you organize and share visual information. It is a unique way to share agriculture’s story through pictures. By creating a board dedicated to agriculture, other users can see what a real-life farm, ranch, barn, or crops actually look like. Pinterest’s users skew female and represent a wide age range.

Things to know:
- **Pin**: A link or image added to Pinterest. It can be an image added from the web using the “Pin It” button or uploaded from your computer.
- **Board**: A board is a set of pins. It can be titled anything you want (Example: “Life on the Farm”) and can feature any subject.
- **Re-pin**: You can search and repost other images from other users’ boards.

The “Pin It” button for your web browser is easy to install and allows you to post images easily. You can install the button directly through the Pinterest page, under “Pinterest 101”. You can also follow people and see what they are posting on their boards.
All about LinkedIn

LinkedIn helps you connect with other professionals, looking for jobs, or posting one. Here are some tips to get started:

1. **Create a profile.** The more complete, the better. There are places to put your job history, post your resume, list your skills, and join groups.

2. **Find connections.** Use your email contacts to search for people that you know, either family, friends, or coworkers, to expand your ‘network.’ After your network expands, you can search for “people that you may know” using LinkedIn’s search tools.

3. **Join groups.** Joining groups is similar to finding connections. Search for alumni groups or professional pages. Share content with experts, ask for advice, or job hunt.

**Animal Agriculture Groups**

1) Animal Ag Aware (Alliance members only)
2) Livestock Animal Health Industry
3) US Poultry and Egg Association
4) American Feed Industry Association
5) Agri-Jobs

**How to use search and add groups**

After you join a LinkedIn group, you’ll probably want to see who’s in the group and how the group members are connected to you.

To find a specific Group, navigate to LinkedIn.com, go to “Interests”, then click on “Groups”, then “Find a group”. Based on keywords, you can search for relevant groups. Many Linkedin Groups are set up to only accept members who are relevant to the Group. Other Groups are open and will accept anyone who joins. An open Group may be less focused on the subject matter.
All about Instagram

To use Instagram, you will need to download the application on a mobile device. You can view posts and accounts on a computer, but can only upload content from a mobile device. Once you’ve downloaded the app and set up an account, you’re ready for your close up. To get started:

1. **Create an account.** Try to keep your username professional and easily searchable. Your name is great if it’s available. If not, try to keep it descriptive of what you’ll be posting so people can find you easily when they search that topic.

2. **Find other farm accounts to follow.** Instagram is still a new platform, so not many farmers and agricultural organizations are using it yet. Find the other early adopters and connect!

3. **Use hashtags to find relevant content.** Just like Twitter, you can tag your photos on Instagram with hashtags. Don’t go too crazy with them – two or three per photo is appropriate. If your hashtags are longer than your caption, you may need to rethink them.

4. **Try out different filters.** Instagram makes editing photos simple and easy. Experiment with the different filters and editing options available to make your photos look their best. Beware of going too extreme – you still want your farm pictures to look natural.

5. **Think beyond the photo.** Memes and infographics are images too! Try sharing them on your Instagram.

6. **Connect with social trends.** Pay attention to what’s trending and how you can connect it to agriculture. “Throwback Thursday” is one example of an Instagram trend you could use to share old pictures from your farm or when you were a kid.
What to do when...

A Facebook friend posts something inaccurate about farming.
Reach out to them: If you are friends on Facebook, it is likely that you know the person who posted the inaccurate information. However, you probably want to avoid conflict. So, don’t start off by telling them that they are wrong. Approach them with another option. Listen to why they believe the information that they posted, and tell them that while you value their opinion, you can send more information about the subject if they would like. Provide links to factual information.

Someone that you don’t know asks about “factory farms” on Twitter.
Be positive: Direct the person to correct information, but stay positive. Share details about your personal farm experience if you are comfortable. Sometimes it’s easiest to not engage in conversation. Know when it is worthwhile to engage, and when it is best to move on.

You receive a negative blog comment.
Don’t take it personally: It is important to promote a civil conversation on your social media pages. If the comment is referring to agricultural practices, attempt to engage the person. Remember that you represent the agricultural community and you are an important link between urban customers and farmers.

Need some more ideas about what to talk about online?

1. What is your favorite place on your farm? Why is it so special?
2. Post pictures of your farm and explain why it’s important to you to care for the welfare of your animals.
3. Post pictures of your family and what it means to them to work on the farm.
4. Post weekly updates about what is going on at your farm (harvest, births, new fences, etc.)
5. Create or share a video about what sustainability means to you and your farm.
6. Discuss the one thing that you would like the public to understand about agriculture and farming.
7. Describe a typical day on your farm either in words, pictures, or video.
8. Engage other farmers in conversation and learn about what they do differently on their farm.
9. What does animal welfare mean to you and your farm?
10. Who is your role model in agriculture?
Now that you’re social media savvy, connect with the Alliance!

Facebook: Facebook.com/animalagalliance
Twitter: Twitter.com/animalag (@animalag)
Instagram: Instagram.com/animalagalliance (@animalagalliance)
Pinterest: Pinterest.com/animalag
LinkedIn: Animal Agriculture Alliance