

Share Your Farm Story Tools and Tactics to Market Your Business and Connect with Media



Picture: Lisa Kivirist & John Ivanko's farm in Wisconsin. They run a 5-acre market garden and a Bed and Breakfast on the farm. As shown, the farm is run on renewable energy and they do a variety of educational outreach efforts on the renewable energy elements.

Content and Resources Provided By: Lisa Kivirist, John Ivanko, Aimee Witteman, Colorado Nonprofit Association Toolkit, Fleishman-Hillard Media Training Manual, Media 101+ by Pyramid Communications and Fourth Sector Consulting
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Why are media & public relations important for farmers?

The personal stories of farmers form the authentic and compelling heartbeat of the sustainable agriculture movement. By sharing your story and farm experiences effectively and strategically with various media outlets, you will:

- Increase visibility of your farm
- Add credibility to your operations
- Enhance your image
- Bring in new business without having to spend a cent
- Provide a more authentic voice of farmers in media
- Help further the national sustainable agriculture movement

Everyone's farm, business or organization could make a great topic for an article. But what's your hook and news angle to get the free media coverage you deserve? This guide provides a crash course in public relations tools and tactics from a sustainable agriculture perspective and you'll read inspiring examples of how others are successfully crafting businesses that authentically reflect their values and generate media interest. Learn how to identify your compelling story, connect and work with journalists, write a compelling press release, confidently explain sustainable agriculture to the media, and grow both your business and the sustainable agriculture movement.



Overview

- Media 101: Overview of public relations from a sustainable agriculture perspective.
- Identify your marketing and media goals. What makes your story unique? Create your compelling story.
- Showcase various sustainable farming operations' stories & media experiences.
- Provide media relations basics, tools, and resources: How to talk to reporters, handle interviews and write press releases.

What's Your Story?

The term “Public Relations” is thrown around a lot. Here is an actual definition:

Public Relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say, and what others say about you. (Source: Institute of Public Relations)

The key thing for farmers to remember, and the important message we bring to public relations and the media is we are living an authentic life already! We are living an authentic story day-to-day in how we run our farm and treat our customers – this all falls under the “what we do” part of the definition above. So this element of “reputation” and “public relations” comes very naturally to farmers. See some examples below:



Drake Family Farms (West Jordan, UT)
Drake Family Farms makes handcrafted goat milk soap and sells it at the market. They take time to hand-cut the soap and create the beautiful labels. All the things they do add up to their reputation.

Three Sisters Farm (Sandy Lake, PA)
Three Sisters does a beautiful job of their displays at the farmers market, utilizing color and the bounty of the season.



All these are things farmers often take for granted, yet they are very important in adding up to that reputation and the image we leave with others.



Let's Dispel Some Top Media Myths

1. "If I build it, they will come"
 - We can't expect by just existing that the media and the public will find us. We are farmers and business owners, and have the responsibility of letting people know who we are, building connections, and sharing our story.
2. "Mainstream American doesn't understand or appreciate sustainable agriculture"
 - Not true anymore. The organic and sustainable movement continued to grow even in hard times –even while other sectors were decreasing. This comes from more people wanting to know where their food comes from and looking for information, particularly media and journalists, on how their readers or viewers can make better educated food decisions.
3. "I'm sh-sh-sh-shy"
 - When you are passionate about something that shyness goes away. That passionate connection to your values and principles really resonates and comes through when you're talking with people. So its basically all about keeping true to your authentic message, and learning how to share your story.
4. "I don't have any connections"
 - We all actually do! We all have connections via our customers at the farmers market or people we know in our community or churches that can help connect us to the media as well as other outlets and connections.
5. "Corporate conglomerate slugs run the media game, and I don't want to play that game!"
 - There are lots of people out there that want this information. Even within the big media corporations, there are people just like you that are passionate about their writing and are hungry for stories like these about farmers and sustainable agriculture. They want to connect with better resources and to have the examples in their stories. The key is to connect with these folks.
6. "Just leave me alone and let me grow things" OR "Can't you see I'm busy? Talking to the media is overwhelming and I don't have time" ... "P.S. I don't give a tweet"
 - That is why we are having this training and providing these tools (including the FARM database), to make this easier and to use everyone's time efficiently. We can also shift our thinking – it is possible to do some of this media work! We can do media prep in the off-season -- having some photos ready to go and a press kit for example. When the media calls you already have what you need ready.

Define Sustainable Agriculture

**Still where most people think →
their food comes from.**

Circle M Farm (Blanchardville, WI) has a beautiful CSA farm and also does pasture raised meats. It's small, local, and sustainable. People want to imagine their food is coming from a place like this!



But the Reality... →

A very generic, large, corporate, soybean or corn field is the norm



It's also reality ...

that this dichotomy of images is an opportunity for sustainable and organic farmers to tell their story!

We **do** reflect that image people have in their minds

Define Sustainable Agriculture

Key points about the sustainable and organic agriculture message that are important to include when you are talking about your personal farm story ...

❖ Protects future generations

This is the legacy message, and it resonates with people across all economic levels and geographic regions. We all care about our children, and want to create and leave them with a better world. Undeniably, a more environmentally friendly agriculture practice will help do that.

❖ Stewards landscape

Preserves our countryside and our family farms

❖ Safer & more nutritious

An increasingly important concern of folks, as food safety has become such a huge media story (recalls etc). This is a great opportunity to tell the positive story of this movement, and the importance of knowing your farmer and knowing your food source!

❖ Needs to be a federal policy & funding priority

This is a theme throughout everything discussed in this manual. The more we can build awareness of sustainable agriculture, the more by default its realized that it needs to be a priority in federal policy and funding. One of the many goals of NSAC is to help support these funding priorities in DC, but the more we can tell our individual stories supporting the message of sustainable agriculture, the easier that process will be for us all.



If we all promoted this message?

If we all shared our individual stories **AND** this broader important message of sustainable agriculture collectively

❖ Business Grows

❖ Movement Grows

❖ World Transforms



Identify Your Media Goals

Be Specific.

What do you want as an end result of your media efforts?

This will determine what media outlets you pitch to and your message.

For example: For many smaller farms, your key media goals are centered locally - people that drive to your farm, go to your farmers market, or drive to your CSA drop off.

So generally targeting your local market, which *could* include:
(1) Building your local CSA or (2) Increasing traffic to your farmers' market stand.

Vermont Valley Community Farm (Blue Mounds, WI) →

Vermont Valley Community Farm has a fairly large CSA but they have a lot of great on farm activities and reasons for their members to come out to the farm. It makes a fabulous story for their local media. The people in this photo are a part of their annual "Pesto Festival," where they invite their members to the farm to pick the extra basil, and everyone brings their food processors and makes pesto while sharing their special recipes and having a delicious potluck!



Identify Your Media Goals Continued



Or you might have more **regional goals/ broader in geographic outreach**. Maybe you want to: (1) Grow restaurant sales or (2) Generate customer traffic to an on-site farm store or seasonal destination (i.e. a pumpkin patch)

← Chapel's Country Creamery (Easton, MD)

Holly is a cheese maker in MD, where she transitioned their family farm from a family dairy farm to a cheese making operation. They make very high quality cheeses. Holly's goal has focused on increasing restaurant sales on the east coast, and this is also her media outreach goal.

Or you may have **national media goals**: (1) For example if you have a product that you can ship easily like mail-order fiber products and it would not matter where your customers are coming from; (2) Or develop a chef clientele for specialty syrup

Hickoryworks (Trafalgar, IN)

→

Hickoryworks targeted chefs that wanted to use their unique specialty syrup. What they did creatively to develop their media content was to start looking at the restaurant trade publications, where they list who the new chefs are etc. They did not target the top chefs, but the up and coming chefs, and requested pictures and testimonials of how they used their samples of syrup. Hickoryworks posted photos on their website of how chefs were using their product, and started to get a lot of buzz ... and then low and behold the Food Network and Gourmet magazine were calling!



Create Your Compelling Story

- **Create Your Compelling Strength**

Sometimes things we may take for granted, years of farming a particular way for example, are actually new and fresh today and have a new audience.

Darthia Farms →
(Gouldsboro, ME)

As they put it “we have always been hippy farming, its just all the sudden ... hippy farming is hip!”

They have been using draft horses

and a lot of tools that are fossil fuel free. Now they are connecting with a whole new generation of customers and media. The fact that they have being doing it for so long adds to the authenticity of their message.



- **What makes your business unique?**

Titus Mill Farm →

(Pennington, NJ): honey and firewood. Firewood is a strong local business in their community and Titus Mill Farm does local deliveries. Their toddler daughter was always helping in the deliveries as well. This might not strike you as anything unique or different, but it truly is a unique element in today’s

world. The fact that his daughter was helping really connected with his customers and developed a strong loyalty. From a media standpoint it was a great message – where you could truly say this is a family run operation.



Create Your Compelling Story

- **Select a Spokesperson for your Business**

Papa Bear's Plantation (Ocala, FL)

Mark Wagner is a perfect spokesperson for his family run business, which is primarily a pecan plantation. Wagner had always creatively thought about other ways to diversify the operation, get people to come out to the farm, and stay longer. To begin with, he started thinking about how there was no auction site in the area, particularly for small farm animals (goats etc), and there were increasing numbers of people moving back to small farms in the area. So Mark obtained his auctioneer license and would host auctions on his farm on weekends. He also developed a small food-stand around the auction so he could feed attendees. A third thing that happened, is people were asking if they could get married on his farm, and originally he rented out the land, but then decided to become an officiant himself so he could marry people on his farm! All of this makes his story very unique and interesting.



- **Value Added:**

“My business started by tapping into abundance. I had extra goat’s milk, started experimenting with cheese making and things grew from there.”

- Diana Murphy, **Dreamfarm (Cross Plains, WI)**

She got her cheese license (a requirement in WI), and now has a commercial operation on the farm. She partnered with Vermont Valley as well (farm discussed earlier); that is an established CSA in her community.

Create Your Compelling Story

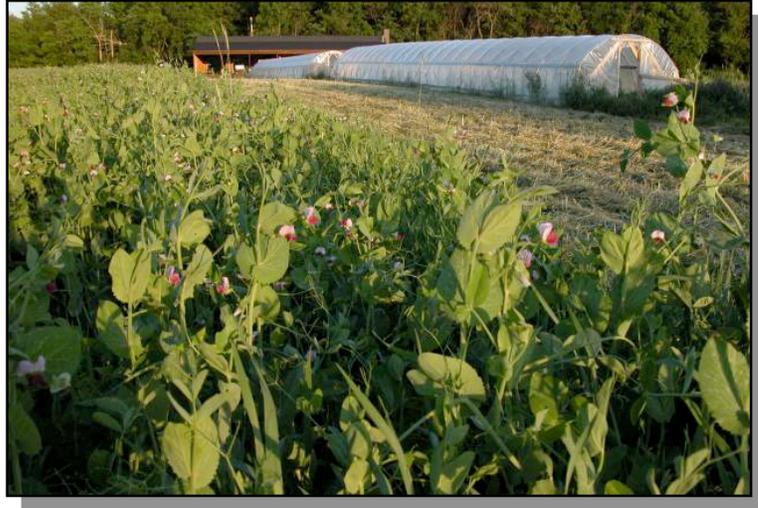
- **Niche Product or Crop:**

Can be the actual product or how it's grown.

“Our crops are custom harvested. We offer farm fresh products, harvested less than 24 hours from the field to restaurant kitchen.”

– Eero Ruuttila

**Nesenkeag Cooperative Farm
(Litchfield, NH)**



That “freshness element” really makes their story unique.



- **Year-round Seasonal Eating:**

“Our business evolved out of a challenge of preserving all the excess produce for year-round eating.”

– Todd & Jordan Champagne

Happy Girl Foods (Big Sur, CA)

Todd and Jordan were both very interested in traditional techniques for year round seasonal eating – meaning the canning/preserving side of food. They were also finding many farmers that had an abundance of food, which they could not sell at the market or were too ripe to bring other places. This evolved into their very successful business of a variety of healthy canned foods. This idea of year-round seasonal eating has also become a very timely and popular story in the media.

Create Your Compelling Story

- **Farming and Ranching Method:**

There are various methods for this (organic certification etc...)

"Our decision to seek organic and predator friendly certification is driven by our commitment to habitat and landscape protection more than the need for an eco-label. The label does provide a good tool for communicating with consumers about the risks and rewards of responsible agriculture."

- Dave Tyler

Thirteen Mile Lamb & Wool Co. (Belgrad, MT)



In MT, where predators are a big problem in raising livestock, Dave describes how he went through predator friendly certification – where you can prevent predators in a humane way so you are not damaging the natural habitat.



- **Diverse Skill Sets:**

" We have to secure the higher margins that retail prices bring. Therefore, we've learned to wear lots of hats. We're farmers, yes, but also accountants, marketers, negotiators, graphic designers, public relations people."

- Joel Salatin

Polyface Farm (Swope, VA)

Farmers today often have diverse stories like this (including being family members, community members, activists etc) and the fact that we OURSELVES actually do all these things and don't outsource them is a very compelling story, particularly from the sustainable reliance and independence side.

Create Your Compelling Story

- **Marketing**

The various ways you can market your product or yourself!

“My big difference in running the farm was to put a face to food by renaming my farm and products MaryJanesFarm. I branded myself. Suddenly, my products took on the passion in my heart for the things I believed in.”

- MaryJane Butters

MaryJanesFarm (Moscow, ID)

MaryJane Butters markets herself – puts her name and face on the products. In doing this, there was a real story behind her products because everything she was doing sang of authenticity. She developed a product niche, and sells to stores like REI, of creating very healthy and tasty organic dehydrated food primarily used for camping. Shown in picture is her Garlic Pesto Fry Bread that sounds much better than traditional camping food! She’s moved on to do several magazines and books about the farming lifestyle and rekindling of traditional crafts for farm women today.



- **Land Use:**

“Of our approximately 50 tillable acres, 38 are actually owned by our CSA members, allowing us to secure a long-term land base by accessing the capital of the people who get our vegetables. We have the complete authority over the land without needing its ownership.”

- Bob Bower, General Manager
Angelic Organics (Caledonia, IL)

Amazing story – how much more do you get committed to your farm? This does not happen at the regular big-box retailers, and again make a very compelling story.

Create Your Compelling Story

- **Championing policy:**

“Organic beginning farmers often have to go at it alone. Farm Bill programs can help close this gap by prioritizing grants for beginning organic farmer training programs.”

– Jamie Collins

Serendipity Farms (Aromas, CA)

Jamie has told her story incredibly authentically, while sharing the issues and challenges that she has as a beginning young farmer in CA, particularly with land access and price issues. So she has worked with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) to support funding for new programs, and authentically shares her story of how she often has to piece together parcels of land that are miles apart to affordably farm in CA.



Create Your Compelling Story Events & Special Days

Tie-in when media is looking for these types of stories

- Earth Day (April 22nd) - environmental stories
- Mothers Day (May 9th) – media desperately looking for stories for Mother’s Day. Whether you’re a mom and a farmer, or you tie it in to Mother Nature ... there is many ways this story could happen.
- Organic Month (September)
- Seasonality Focus (i.e. Spring Planting, Fall Harvest)
- Independence Day (i.e. Energy Independence). Good Example of how you can twist an existing holiday into an opportunity or angle for a good story.
- National Tour of Solar Homes

Other Approaches:

- Devise current news tie-in to your farm story
- Tie National stories Local
- Reverse a statistic. For example obesity and child obesity issues are very much in the media today. How do the products you sell, or your approach to farming, help negate this and improve the health of our nation.



Tim from Northwood Farms (Wonewoc, WI) sells his meat and dairy at the local farmers market. He is also educating folks about his organic farming methods and its connection to larger environmental, climate change, and food safety issues.

If you can find that tie-in, then you can send out a press release (which we will discuss in further detail later) on this connection, or call the media covering the story and offer to serve as a local resource on the issue.

Create Your Compelling Story Events

Create Your Own Event

Open House/ Field Day on your Farm:
Way to engage your local community but
also create a reason for the media to
cover your farm.

Picture: Open House Farm Tour.
Inn Serendipity (Browntown, WI)



**Remember the key ingredients: food,
folks, fun, and photo ops**

The press searches out newsworthy and important happenings in their community. Most assignment editors and broadcast producers review press releases to determine which appear to be most newsworthy and relevant to their audience. By creating an event or happening, perhaps welcoming a new breed of dairy cow or completion of a wind turbine system used to completely meet your energy needs, attention can be focused on the value that the event has in your community.

Harnessing the fact that we live in an increasingly visual world, create a photo opportunity on your farm. Often a dedication ceremony, local celebrity visit, children or school group tour or special demonstration days help provide powerful visuals. Attract a crowd to an educational “farm day” picnic, potluck or farm tour. Have plenty of literature and information for the media, including your farm’s newsletter, brochure and a selection of previously published articles about your farm.



Create Your Own Event: Contest

Contests can generate excitement and make your event more visual

Silver Maple Emu Farm (Brodhead, WI) raises emus. The large egg of the Emu is often used in craft settings, so they have an “Annual Emu Egg Decorating Contest” which ties in neatly to “Annual Emu Week.” Folks come and purchase eggs, and bring them back when they have an open house in early May and put all the eggs on display.



National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

WORKSHEET CREATE YOUR COMPELLING STORY

Now it's your turn to tell YOUR compelling farm story!

Identify your communication goals: Do you have local, regional, or national goals?

Local: (examples: Build CSA business. Increase traffic to farmers' market stand.)

Regional: (examples: Attract customers to corn maze. Grow awareness of annual farm open house.)

National: (examples: Increase sales of fiber products. Develop chef clientele for garlic sold by mail.)

What's your compelling story? What are your 3 unique, key selling points? (i.e., organic since 1987, diversified crops, solar powered, value added products, community service)

1)

2)

3)

Three key words that capture your business philosophy:

Describe your farm:

In 3 to 5 sentences (use active verbs, quantify impacts, explain community benefits, employ problem-solution perspective or note awards received):



WORKSHEET ESTABLISH YOUR MESSAGE

Include the element from the previous worksheet here where appropriate

1. Who are you?	
2. What is your news?	
3. If an event, when will it occur?	
4. If an event, where will it occur?	
5. Why is your news relevant? Why should others care about what you are doing?	
6. What is significant about your project, work, or event? Elaborate on question 5	
7. What kind of change can be expected from your project, work, or event?	

* Credit to Colorado Nonprofit Association, Adapted by NSAC



To-Do List

Ways to Generate Media Coverage

STEP 1: Identify your media goals (refer to preceding worksheet and examples)

In addition to increasing awareness of sustainable agriculture, what do you want to accomplish specifically for your farm business with your media efforts? For example, do you want to introduce a new product or invite your community to a farm field day?

STEP 2: Create your compelling story (refer to preceding worksheet and examples)

Identify your strengths, unique characteristics and what makes your business and background special.

STEP 3: Develop a media list

Compile a list of media contacts, including the names of writers, journalists or producers who regularly cover related topics. Start a file of articles published or aired by those journalists since this might be a way to make an initial contact. When contacting someone it often helps to note a story that you enjoyed that they wrote or produced.

Send notice of all events to newspaper community calendars as well.

STEP 4: Write a press release

Follow the standard press release format. See the sample press kit for a free downloadable template.

STEP 5: Time your press release

Most magazines work ahead from three to six months (or more) when covering a story. Request an editorial calendar that lists upcoming article topics since publication issues may have themes which you might be able to tie into. In contrast, television and newspapers look for stories about one to two weeks in advance. Often radio programs consider stories two to five weeks in advance of their airdate. Blogs tend to be immediate with shorter lead times.

STEP 6: Submit your release

E-mail your release, then follow up with a telephone call or e-mail about one or two weeks after that to make sure they received it. Ask the assignment editor, producer or journalist if the story has been “assigned,” or if it is still being reviewed.

STEP 7: Accept and manage the interview (and photography session)

The interview or meeting can be the most enjoyable part of working with the media. Relax and just be you. Your enthusiasm will carry the interview, but don't forget to share the key items you care most about. Avoid “going off the record” about anything and minimize detailed or complex issues. A little warm hospitality goes a long way with journalists; send them home with some of what you grow, or offer a meal during their visit featuring the products you raise or grow.

STEP 8: Offer thanks for the media coverage. In addition, celebrate your successes.

After an article or story has run or aired, send a thank you note with ideas for future story ideas. When you do get good media coverage, keep a copy for your files, share it with your customers etc. Good media can work FOR you.



WRITE YOUR OWN PRESS RELEASES IN 6 EASY STEPS

A press release succinctly communicates key information to journalists as to why your story is newsworthy. A publication may print your press release verbatim if it's well written and they are crunched for time, so make sure it reads as a stand-alone article, written in the third-person.

STEP 1: Use action oriented verbs

Describe your operations using active verbs like “transformed, restored, and spearheaded.”

Sample: ABC Farm, owned by a third generation farming family of John and Mary Jones is located on 330 acres of the Cheyenne Valley. They've spearheaded a local land conservation movement through their pastured bison and poultry operation.

STEP 2: Highlight and quantify contributions

When possible, showcase with numbers the contributions your farm operations have made to your community, neighboring farms, or quality and health of the air, water, soil (i.e. how many gallons of pesticides did you not have to use). Feature the innovative strategies that have made your operations successful. Sample: As a result of ABC Farm's initiatives, adjacent ranchers on over 1,000 combined acres have adopted John and Mary's pasture-raised livestock model.

STEP 3: How does your operation benefit your community?

Give before and after examples of how your operation has improved your local area.

Sample: As a result, the Spring River that flows through the county now flows clear again and supports an abundant population of native fish. The fishing tourism market has blossomed.

STEP 4: Mention awards and accomplishments

Sample: For their conservation work and adoption of pastured livestock, ABC Farm received the state's Distinguished Rancher Award in November 2010.

STEP 5: Offer powerful trend data

The press often needs to quantify your success. Try and offer powerful trend data that might help sell the newsworthiness of diversified, sustainable (or organic), and/or family-scale agriculture.

Try to use real numbers rather than anecdotal statements. Current data available at:

Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF): <http://ofrf.org/resources/organicfaqs.html>

Union of Concerned Scientists: http://www.ucsusa.org/food_and_agriculture/

Sample: Just 10 years after changing from a confinement-based operation to pasture-raised, ABC Farm's customer base has grown over 25 percent and profits soared over 50 percent as a result of the premium prices paid by customers who preferred their higher quality meat products.

STEP 6: Include quotes and testimonials: Quoting local voices makes a difference

When print journalists work on stories, they often cover several viewpoints. Therefore, try to incorporate one or two quotes to accomplish this in your release (write in third person, and feel free to include quotes attributed to yourself, as if you were being interviewed; or from folks and families that frequent your business – these quotes increase the likelihood of your words appearing directly in print exactly how you framed it). Quotes should summarize the key issue

Sample: “I've never tasted a more delicious chicken than those I've purchased from ABC Farm,” says Chef Peter Poullion, of the nationally recognized Farm Fresh Restaurant.



Don't Forget the Big Picture

Refer Back To Worksheet(s)

Make Information Newsworthy

Strike a balance between telling your story about your business and framing it in a newsworthy way to elicit interest. Journalists call it an “angle” to the story. The best release for print media, for example, is one that could possibly be printed with little or no editing by the editors; presenting your information in a fair, balanced and objective way increases this likelihood. Press releases should answer key media questions: who, what, where, why and when. Getting press coverage of your family farm as a “lifestyle” piece is one way to garner attention, but this type of story has lots of other potential candidates vying for a feature. Try making what your operation produces tie into a broader national issue, like America’s obesity epidemic, food security issues or health concerns related to how food is grown. For example, in the context of a mad cow disease outbreak, explain why your grass-fed and locally processed beef is a healthier and safer option.

Focus on Unique Qualities

Every farm operation is unique or special in some way. Perhaps it’s powered by renewable energy or offers a product inspired by a child’s 4-H project. Maybe one of your customers is someone famous (like a celebrity chef). Without detracting from the rest of what you’ve accomplished on your operations, craft a message around this unique aspect. Another strategy to garner media attention is to position your farm or business as a part of a larger newsworthy event or topic. Consider tying into some of the events about which the media are already searching for stories, like Earth Day (April 22) or National Organic Month (September).



Press Release Format & Tips

BE ACCESSIBLE AND SUPPLY CONTACT INFORMATION

Don't make reporters chase you. Put the number reporters are most likely to reach you at. Always provide an email address below the phone number where reporters can reach you. If you have an up to date website, include that as well.

LESS IS MORE

Get to the point quickly and provocatively, and don't include the entire history of an issue in a press release. Save that for a farmer bio, farm fact sheet, or background sheet to follow up with if they're interested.

CREATE HEADLINES WITH IMPACT ... SHOOT FOR ONE LINE IF POSSIBLE

When writing a press release, pull the reader into your story by using headlines that have a catchy appeal, share emotions, solve problems, offer solutions, and/or that are big on benefits.

Example: "Sustainable Agriculture Leads to Year-Round Local Eating."

If possible, shoot for a one sentence or one line of text headline. Summarize the news using verbs and avoid dependent clauses.

UNDERSTAND THE FIRST SENTENCE & QUOTES

The best leades (defined as the first sentence of a story or press release) are clever, colorful, and succinct without being precious and cute. Also the first paragraph should be no more than two or three sentences. Imagine your cell phone battery will go dead in 30 seconds and say what you have to say in the lede.

Usually the best place for quote is right after the lede. Never editorialize in press releases; for example, do not write that a speaker is gifted. Keep opinions and judgments within the quotes.

KEEP IT SHORT

There is rarely a need for a press release longer than one page. You should prepare a farmer bio, farm fact sheet, or background sheet that outlines key facts in a separate document. The press release is your chance to sell your event or issue to the media. If you do include the extra fact sheets, its best send your release by mail, otherwise the email is too long.

WRITE IN PLAIN LANGUAGE

If you showed your press release to a friend or spouse, would they understand it? If members of your family do not understand it, rewrite the release in plain language avoiding any technical jargon etc. Remember that reporters typically write for a general audience, not special interest groups. Keep it conversational.

EMAIL PRESS RELESES AS TEXT, NOT ATTACHMENTS

Newspapers are equipped with spam filters and rarely accept unsolicited attachments. To avoid going straight to the junk folder, always send your press release in the body of the email. Avoid glitzy graphics and pictures that take time to download. Save those for later when you have told the reporter your story.

HAVE A SECOND PARTY PROOFREAD YOUR PRESS RELEASE

Nothing can sink a good press release faster than an embarrassing typo. All press releases require a second pair of eyes for proofreading and review.

* Credit to Colorado Nonprofit Association, Adapted by NSAC



SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

The bold text is sample text to give you context and ideas. Change the bold text with details specific to your farm business:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Your name: **Joe & Jane Farmer**

Farm Name: **Sample Farm**

Phone number: **123-456-7890**

E-mail: **Joeandjane@samplefarm.com**

Website: **www.samplefarm.com**

Headline: **Local Farm Family Stewards Landscape While Raising Community Health**

TOWN NAME, STATE (USE CAPITAL LETTERS):

A new generation of family farms prove agriculture can be the fuel that restores our local economies, community vitality and environmental health. As Americans demand more and better access to local, seasonal, healthy food options, the sustainable agriculture movement delivers with increasing numbers of small-scale, family-run operations like **Sample Farm** outside **Town Name** that prioritizes the farmer connection.

Since **1999**, **Sample Farm** has been running a **(insert short farm description) five-acre diversified farm operation, specializing in seasonal produce, eggs and pasture-raised meats**. Committed to sustainable agriculture principles, **Sample Farm** uses no pesticides or herbicides on their crops and employs land management techniques that partner with the landscape and aim to improve the quality of the soil with efficient use of resources, often using organic growing strategies. **Sample Farm** operates a seasonal farm stand at the weekly **Town Name** farmers' market. Their meat and egg sales are available year-round directly from the farm.

(Quote from farmer): "At **Sample Farm**, my family and I are committed to raising food that positively adds to the health of our region and protects our rural landscape for future generations," explains **Jane Farmer**, co-owner of **Sample Farm** along with her husband, **Joe Farmer**. "By providing healthy and fresh food options for **Town Name**, we see our farm as more than just a job for us. Farming reflects our passion for leaving this world a better place."

(Paragraph describing upcoming event/current news tie-in): Area residents can experience **Sample Farm** first hand next Saturday, July 23, at their annual **Summer Sample Farm Festival**, a free day-long public open house where local families can engage in a range of activities, including a farm tour, meet the new flock of baby chickens and play in a maze made out of strawbales.

(Additional farmer quote): "Our **Summer Sample Farm Festival** gifts us with the opportunity to share our farm and commitment to sustainable agriculture with our local community," adds **Joe Farmer**. "The more we can help increase awareness and education about the importance of raising fresh, local food while supporting a healthy environment, the stronger **Town Name** will be a quality community for our children's children."

"The sustainable agriculture movement is here to stay," says Ferd Hoefner, Policy Director at the National



National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, a national group that advocates for federal policy that supports farmers like **Joe and Jane Farmer**. “Healthy food from healthy soil, grown regionally, will be one of the most important variables to the long term well being of our communities, regardless of size or location.”

For more information on **Sample Farm** and a detailed schedule of the **Summer Sample Farm Festival**, see www.samplefarm.com or call **Joe and Jane Farmer** at **123-456-7890**.

#30 (standard industry protocol indicating the end of the press release)



A Quick Follow Up: Pitching the Press Release

Now that you have your brilliant press release, unless reporters start calling right away, usually you need to take a few minutes to call reporters and begin the pitch.

You will need to have your media list mentioned on page 19 (this involves researching reporters, as well as their interests and past stories so you can develop a relevant media contact list).

THE PITCH IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Always call reporters in the morning so that you can make contact well before their daily deadline (usually 5 p.m.). Introduce yourself and ask the reporter if she has five minutes to speak with you. If the reporter says its not a good time, ask if you can call them later in the day or the following day. If the reporter has time to speak, say that you're calling to follow up on a press release that you just emailed. Briefly summarize the story angle and why it's timely and newsworthy, and mention you have contacts available for the story.

Example: A successful pitch from a nonprofit

While all pitches vary, successful pitch calls to reporters contain similar elements. An example and brief analysis of why it works is below:

“Hello, my name is Susie Cares with the Save the Seals Coalition. We are working with community leaders and residents to preserve a local beach from development that happens to be a major breeding ground for the seals.”

“We have scientists, residents, and local officials available to talk with you and explain why we think this issue is critical to our quality of life here in Happy Town.”

“Would you have time to connect with some of these folks today or meet us at the beach so we can show you what is happening?”

Why this works

You get to your point quickly. You've informed them that a large number of people in their local community care about this issue, which is why it has new value. You have emphasized that it is a local issue. You have already assembled a roster of people waiting and willing to talk to the reporter on this issue. You have also invited them to the beach, which instantly provides a compelling visual for the story.

Accept & Manage the Interview

Relax and be yourself

Prepare for the Interview

Avoid going “off the record”

Consider offering warm hospitality



INTERVIEW TIPS

- Research the publication, media outlets and/or reporter or writer ahead of time to get a feel for their style and approach. Thanks to the Internet, this has become much easier to do.
- Ask what types of questions you will be expected to answer so you can prepare your replies ahead of time. Be prepared with details and prepared to back up your statements.
- Do not assume the audience or reporter knows much, or anything, about the topic – so start from the beginning. Remember to explain what “sustainable” and “organic” agriculture is as well as terms like “CSA” (i.e., community supported agriculture).
- Remember to say the specific name of your farm to get it on the air, instead of saying “our farm.”
- Focus on your farming story and why you choose to farm with sustainable agriculture principles in mind. Don’t attack other growing methods since the story may be perceived as hostile. Keep things positive. For example, don’t pit local vs. organic – not a good approach. The message we have for sustainable agriculture above better ensures how you come across – rather than getting into attacking/ defensive mode –where interviews can go in a different direction, and won’t help your business.
- Ask the reporter ahead of time if they would like one of your favorite farm recipes (that showcases what you raise or grow) for the station or publication’s website. A recipe offer is often well received since it prompts the audience to hit the media outlet’s website. Be sure to include your farm website with the recipe and ask for a link back.
- Ask when the piece will run or, if it is a video or audio, where it will be available online as video or a podcast. If the article or story is not archived on the Internet, ask if the reporter or producer can send you a copy of the clip for you to use on your own website pressroom.
- While mentioning your website is always suggested, providing some written material as well should not be overlooked.
- If you receive a call from a reporter out of the blue and you feel unprepared, ask them what their deadline is and set a time you will call them back. Never feel obligated to take the interview without any preparation or when you feel rushed or unfocused.



Pointers By Specific Media

TELEVISION

- If a TV crew will be coming out to your farm, suggest attractive backdrops to film against. A vibrant growing field, aesthetically pleasing barn, flowerbeds, animals or renewable energy systems are good options. Having some harvested vegetables on hand in attractive containers (i.e. tomatoes in a rustic bushel basket) add a lot to the filming session.
- If you will be doing the interview at the TV studio, offer to bring some produce, plants or other items for colorful props that showcase your business.
- Clothing: Wear something you're both comfortable in and that presents yourself well on camera. Solid, bright or pastel colors look best. For example, a solid royal blue shirt is always a good choice for TV. Avoid white or black since it can make you look washed out. Also avoid clothing with fine patterns or shiny jewelry since they can be distracting. Don't wear sunglasses or T-shirts with logos or words (unless you have something with your farm that would be easily identifiable and appropriate).
- Look directly at the camera or your interviewee whenever the crew is filming and smile as much as possible. You will often be directed to whom you should face to carry on the interview (sometimes you will be directed to not look at the camera at all). A warm grin goes a long way on film. Even when the interviewee is talking a camera may be directed at you, so keep smiling.

RADIO

- The radio station will most likely call you directly at the designated interview time or a few minutes before. Ask if the interview will be live or recorded, approximately how long it will be and if there will be listener call-in questions. To keep the interview conversational, it helps to occasionally repeat the host's first name. For example: "That's a great question, (insert name of host)." If the show has call-in questions from listeners, referring to the caller by name is also helpful.
- Test your landline phone ahead of time. Do not use a cell phone. Turn off call waiting for the duration of the interview. Contact your local phone company for specifics on how to do this. Usually it is a simple number code to enter in your phone to make call waiting inactive for the duration of the interview.
- Remember radio interviews go by very fast. Feel free to keep notes in front of you during the interview to remember key points. It's easy to talk fast when being interviewed on the radio. Remind yourself to speak slowly and avoid "ums," "likes," or "you knows."
- Keep your energy level high. One way to do this is to stand up while talking. Feel free to use your hands when you talk and smile – even though no one is looking at you. Your positive energy will come through in your voice.
- Radio listeners can't "see" your farm, so be sure to include detail and "colorful" descriptions: "I harvested a rainbow of fresh produce this morning."

WEB-BASED MEDIA

- Interviews for blogs and other web-based publications are often handled by the writer sending you questions to reply to via e-mail. While this may take more time investment on your part, it



enables you to fully control your answers and avoid being misquoted. Additionally, you can be longer and more detailed in your reply for web-based publications. Use catchy language that reflects the personality of your farm and try to avoid clichés and simple generalizations.

- Ask if they can use a photo of you and your farm to enhance the piece and what size/format they need.
- The benefit of web-based media is that any corrections can be readily and quickly made. Be sure to check the final piece on-line (including any links) and contact the Webmaster or writer if any suggested corrections need to be made.



Farm Photography Guide

Any media effort you make can be enhanced if you have high-quality, high-resolution, digital photos of your farm on file and ready to go. With the increasing, cost-effective availability of professional-grade digital cameras, using the tips below can result in plenty of media-quality photos of your farm. Additionally, as the media are faced with budgetary pressures, publications are less likely to pay for a photographer to go out and shoot on location for a story. Having your own photos on file (and available for free use) greatly increases chances of publication.

Key things to remember:

- **Plan a Formal Photo Shoot Outside**

Don't wait till the media calls needing photos; shoot when the lighting and setting are perfect. Have great photos on file. While candid shots can be great, take the time to specifically shoot some photos of yourself (and your family or other farm members) to maximize quality and take advantage of sunlight (see "timing" below). Similar to the advice on the TV tip sheet, wear solid colors (no white or black; royal blue works well). Shooting outside captures both your farm essence and can take advantage of natural light. Plan the shoot during early to mid summer when greenery and the gardens are in abundance but before the heat of summer dries things out.

- **Time your Shoot**

Lighting is one of the biggest factors in taking a good picture. Fortunately, this is something you can easily control by shooting either during the morning sunrise (within a few hours after it's up) or late afternoon as the sun begins to set. During those times of day, the sun casts a warm light that enhances photos with a natural glow. Avoid taking photos mid-day when the sun is the brightest and harshest (and directly overhead in the summer).

- **Shoot at a High Resolution**

Shoot photos at the highest resolution the camera will allow. Your image, often expressed as a "jpg" file, should be at least 5-inches by 7-inches and taken at a resolution of 200 dots per inch (or "dpi") or higher. The file size might be around 3 megabytes (MB) to 5 MB, or larger. A publication can always adjust a photo to a lower resolution if needed (i.e., for Internet use) but not the other way around.

- **Leave Space around your Subject Matter (for some shots)**

Besides capturing images at a large enough size, you'll also need to make sure that for some shots, you capture them with enough space around the main subject matter. This allows for the editors to creatively crop your image for use, possibly for a magazine cover image which must have "open space" for text and titles. For some photos that establish your operations, make sure there is plenty of background space around all sides (top, bottom, and both sides). This approach need not apply to all images, but should be considered for at least a few.

- **Use a Tripod if Available**

A tripod minimizes the chance of camera shake and will give you an extra clear photograph. For people using a hand-held SLR (single lens reflex) camera, try shooting the photo at a speed of



National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

100th/second or faster to help reduce the chances of camera shake that results in fuzzy or blurry images. Getting the eyes of people or the main subject matter in clear focus is crucial.

- **Take Horizontal and Vertical Shots**

Publications often have very specific photo needs based on the page layout. By shooting both a horizontal and vertical version of each shot, you will have more options available to them. Also important is to capture images of varying perspectives of your operations: establishing landscapes, product shots, people portraits, action shots, and close-up detail images of perhaps your favorite tool, farm animal, or farm sign.

- **Shoot Both Headshots & Action**

Take a few basic headshots of yourself that clearly identify you as the farmer. Shoot some photos with you holding things that represent your farm and your farm work (i.e., a bushel of produce). Additionally, take some staged shots of you “in action” on the farm (i.e., harvesting greens or feeding animals). These action shots can include more of the farm background.



Other Ways To Engage Media

Write and Submit a Letter to the Editor

The letters-to-the-editor section is one of the most widely read sections of any newspaper. Letters to the editor are usually written in response to an article or editorial published earlier in the newspaper.

1. If you see an article or opinion piece that presents a position that is opposite your farm or business philosophy, write a letter to the editor disagreeing with the article and stating your farm/ business position. If you don't disagree but have a different perspective, that too can be the basis of a letter to the editor.
2. Call the newspaper and ask to speak to the "letters-to-the-editor" department. Ask how long the letter should be. Find out the name, fax number, and mailing address of the person you should send it to.
3. In the first paragraph of your letter, refer promptly to the article or position that you are writing about. Name the reporter who wrote the article and the date and the title of the article. State why you disagree and proceed to give your farm's position on that particular issue. Short and pitchy is better than long and rambling.
4. Send with a cover letter addressed to the appropriate editor. Attach your business card. Be sure to sign the letter with your name, title and the name of your farm or business.

* Credit to Colorado Nonprofit Association, Adapted by NSAC

Other Ways To Engage Media

Write & Submit an Op-Ed

1. Opinion-Editorials, also referred to as Op-Eds, is an opinion piece a publication's reader writes and submits to a newspaper or magazine on a topic relevant to the publication's audience.
2. Learn the name of the newspaper's op-ed page editor, and the length specifications for op-eds and the address or fax number. Most are 700-800 words long, so you need to be succinct in your writing.
3. Monitor your paper's op-ed page to see what kind of op-eds it publishes. If the paper recently ran a piece on a position that your farm business disagrees with, you might have a better chance of getting your organization's position in print.
4. There should be a compelling hook to generate interest in the op-ed and demonstrate its relevance to the readers and the community. Give it a strong local angle. The reader needs to be able to relate quickly and easily to your story.
5. Decide what message you want to convey. Write it in a brief sentence. Decide the key arguments supporting your message and develop each in turn.
6. Have an opinion and state it forcefully. Make your case from the top down. Begin with the premise of your opinion and then back up your opinion with facts. Don't present facts first and save your opinion for the conclusion.
7. Consider printing your op-ed on your farm's letterhead and sign your name and title.
8. Send your op-ed with a cover letter and background information on your business to the op-ed editor. Include your business card with both home and work numbers. Make a follow-up call a day or two after the editor has received your op-ed. Ask if the paper intends to print it. If so, find out when. Get a copy.

Op-ed Questions — Prior to writing an op-ed, answer the following list of questions to ensure that you make the necessary points for an effective piece.

- What policy or idea do you stand for or against? What problem are is your farm business trying to solve?
- How does your farm or business help address the issue?
- Describe your farm business. How does it work?
- Is there a villain in the story?
- What is the cost of the solution you propose?
- How can you "paint a picture" in someone's mind through your words?
- Which community leaders, groups or people in the community agree with you? Why?
- Which community leaders, groups or people in the community disagree with you? Why?
- What is the urgency?
- Who does this affect?
- What is the history of this story? What has been done before? What was the process to get to this point? Was there a cliffhanger or suspenseful event?

* Credit to Colorado Nonprofit Association, Adapted by NSAC



Putting it all Together in One Place: How to Create a Press Kit

Press Kit Definition

A press kit (also called a media kit) provides the media with quick and easy access to concise information about your farm – consider setting up a special media section on your farm home page to specifically target and assist the media. The media kit is important because writers and reporters, like farmers, are busy people, often writing on deadline. The easier you can make their job, the more likely they will include your operation in their piece and call on you in the future as a source. Consider the press kit your “public showroom” where you can control how your farm is portrayed to the media. The goal of the elements of this kit is to entice the reporter to call for more information and an interview. The kit also provides opportunity for the reporter to quickly factcheck their piece to make sure they have accurate information on your farm.

Press Kit Key Elements

1. Farm Fact Sheet

- Quick and concise overview of key farm information.
- See below for starter templates; downloadable Microsoft Word documents are available via FARM Toolkit under the “Take Action” heading on NSAC’s website

2. Farmer Bio

- Background
- See below for starter templates; downloadable Microsoft Word documents are available via FARM Toolkit under the “Take Action” heading on NSAC’s website

3. Photos

- Include a page with a sample of low-resolution photos. Add a line to contact you directly if high resolution photos or additional photo options are needed.

4. Press Release

- Starter templates (downloadable Microsoft Word documents) available via FARM Toolkit.

5. News articles/press links

Keep a list of media links about your farm. An easy way to do this is to set up a free Google Alert with your name and the name of your farm. Google will send you a link via e-mail every time they track something with your name in it. Set up an alert here: <http://www.google.com/alert>

Press Kit Tips

- Include your contact information on each page and farm logo (if you have one).
- Make sure the on-line pages of the press kit are formatted so they will print in a readable fashion.
- Include quotes from you throughout the kit that reporters can pull directly and attribute to you. This will increase the chances of a reporter including a quote from you if they are on deadline and unable to reach you in person.



National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

- Create the elements so they are easy for a journalist to quickly skim. Use short sentences and bullet points.
- Don't use agriculture jargon without explaining what it is. Include definitions for words such as "CSA," community supported agriculture.
- Consider the press kit a live document and keep information accurate and updated.
- Structure and write the press kit using the elements listed below. It is important to structure the kit in a way that's familiar to journalists.

Closing Tips:

- **Consider creating your own "tips."** Many print media editors or producers of TV or radio programs search for simple, helpful ideas for readers, listeners or viewers. Create your own "tips" sheet to help facilitate this process. For example, develop a series of tips like "Farmer Johnson's top ten ways to eat tomatoes" or "Five ways to add more vegetables to your diet, with recipes." With the present obesity problem in the U.S. likely to only grow, devising a way to make the healthy products your farm sells address this issue would make your story more newsworthy, timely, relevant, and practical.
- **Answer all press inquiries immediately.** As most reporters are on deadline, it is vital that you answer these inquiries right away, even if other farming priorities need to be put on hold for a short while. Give reporters a phone number where you can be accessed and a good time to reach you or set up a specific interview appointment time via e-mail.



National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

SAMPLE FARM PRESS ROOM ELEMENTS: FARM FACT SHEET

Fill in the blanks. This is designed to give reporters and writers a quick, snapshot overview of your farm operations. The bold text is sample text to give you context and ideas. Change the bold text with details specific to your farm business. Feel free to add additional questions and edit as you see fit.

Owner Names: **Jane and Joe Farmer**
Farm Name: **Sample Farm**
Address: **123 County Road X, Town Name, State, Zip**
Nearest metro area: **Bigger Town Name**
Phone: **123-456-7890**
E-mail: **Joeandjane@samplefarm.com**
Website: **www.samplefarm.com**

Farm Info

Year you started farming: **1999**

Current Age: **40s**

Acreage: **Five acres**

Type of Operation (a couple sentences describing what you grow/raise): **Sample Farm is a diversified family-run farm operation, specializing in seasonal produce, eggs and pasture-raised meats. We sell weekly during the seasonal Town Name Farmers' Market and sell eggs and meat year-round directly from the farm.**

Farming philosophy (a couple sentences describing your commitment to sustainable/organic growing practices; see Worksheet):

Committed to raising healthy food to feed the local Town Name community, Sample Farm prides itself on prioritizing our children who will inherit our landscape by raising produce, eggs and livestock in as sustainable a manner as possible with no chemical or pesticide use.

Organizations: (key farming and community organizations you belong to, including NSAC member groups):

**Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service (MOSES)
Women, Food & Agriculture Network (WFAN)
Center for Rural Affairs**



SAMPLE FARM PRESS ROOM ELEMENTS: FARMER BIO

A bio should provide a quick overview of your background, experience and commitment to sustainable agriculture. The bio should be written in third-person. Including a quote about your farming philosophy enhances your bio and provides the media with a tangible quote they can possibly use directly in the piece.

A sample bio follows below. Feel free to adapt and use with your own information.

Bio: Jane Farmer

Jane Farmer runs **Sample Farm in Town Name, State, a diversified farm operation, specializing in seasonal produce, eggs and grass-fed meats.** Along with her husband, Joe Farmer, and their family, Jane strives to raise healthy, fresh and seasonal produce, eggs and pasture-raised meats for their local community through area farmers' markets and sales directly from the farm.

Jane and Joe launched **Sample Farm in 1999, moving back to Jane's Midwest rural family roots. While she grew up in Chicago, Jane spent summers working on her grandparents' farm outside Town Name, an experience she credits with sowing her farming roots.**

"My grandparents taught me how to love and care for the land and the importance of a strong work ethic," explains Jane. "From an early age I was out riding in the tractor with my grandfather or canning in the kitchen with my grandma. I graduated college with a degree in biology and worked a few years in the city, where I met my husband, Joe. Together we both realized our heart and passion was in farming and the rural lifestyle. We attended several farming conferences and programs for new farmers and purchased our land, which is just a few miles from my grandparents original property."

Jane and Joe have two young sons and are both active in area 4-H and boy scouting groups.



Resources

Sign up for FARM today so the media can COME TO YOU!

FARM: Farm and Agriculture Resources for Media

- An internal NSAC database of farmers in sustainable agriculture from across the country who are available to reply to media inquiries as they come up specific to their background and business.
- This database will not be public on the NSAC website. Communication will be via e-mail or phone with you individually as timely opportunities arise. Your info will not be sold, exchanged or used for other purposes outside of NSAC.

List on Free Directories

- Get your farm listed on one or more of the many free national Internet listings of CSA farms, farmers' markets, pastured meat products, or organic products. This will be another means for media to access your information.

www.localharvest.org

www.eatwellguide.org (go to "suggest a listing" and suggest yourself)

www.csacenter.org (Robyn Van En Center)

www.allorganiclinks.com (Various organic products)

NSAC Action Alerts & Weekly Roundup

- Sign up today to stay in touch with the federal legislation and Farm Bill priorities that matter to you. Sign up for our Action Alerts and Weekly Roundup of blog posts on federal farm and food policy.