

Title:	Beyond the Farm Gate: Equipping Beginning Farmers and Ranchers with Online Tools for Agribusiness Marketing		
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Program Name: Beginning Farmer and Rancher

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Non-Technical Summary

The purpose of this project is to equip beginning farmers and ranchers (BFRs) with the knowledge of and ability to use online marketing tools necessary to make informed marketing decisions to promote their agricultural operations that would enhance their sustainability. This project will initially be conducted in Georgia, Illinois, and Texas with plans for expansion after the third year. To accomplish this, the project will be guided by the following objectives: 1. Develop effective training tools to teach BFR how to use online marketing tools 2. Train BFRs in the use of social media and other online tools to effectively market their businesses 3. Teach BFRs to use social media to find more information to make informed decisions 4. Apply the skills necessary to improve and strengthen consumer relations through the use of online tools The target audience for this project is BFRs in Georgia, Illinois, and Texas with a particular emphasis on alternative enterprise producers. Alternative producers experience more difficulty in marketing their products and must find creative ways to market effectively (Hazzell, 2005). These farmers tend to rely on direct marketing to increase cash flow and supplement their income. Through face-to-face and online training modules, this project will equip these BFRs with the tools necessary to utilize different social media platforms to market their agribusinesses.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

The purpose of this project is to equip BFRs with the knowledge of and ability to use online marketing tools necessary to make informed marketing decisions to promote their agricultural operations that would enhance their sustainability. This project will initially be conducted in Georgia, Illinois, and Texas with plans for expansion after the third year. Obj. 1. Develop effective training tools to teach BFRs how to use online marketing tools o Develop a one-hour recruitment presentation to be delivered at six conferences that the target audience typically attends o Create a standardized eight-hour face-to-face online marketing training workshop o Develop ten 30-minute online training modules that could include the following topics: identifying social media tools; evaluating social media efforts; how other farmers are using social media, basics of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or blogs; shooting video; creating effective messages; and other topics o Develop website to house online modules and serve as a promotional arm for the project o Identify 10 BFR opinion leaders to help promote the project o Develop a social media handbook for the face-to-face workshops that will include handouts, notes pages, PowerPoint slides and other curricula for opinion leaders and participants to further enhance the learning process that will also be posted on the

project website o Promote the online training modules to increase number of BFRs reached
 Obj. 2. Train BFRs in the use of social media and other online tools to effectively market their businesses
 o Create stronger, positive attitudes toward social media and its use in an agribusiness
 o Increase the awareness of the online marketing tools available for promoting their businesses
 o Teach 300 BFRs about website development, blogging, online direct marketing, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other emerging tools
 o Train 10 individuals who emerge as opinion leaders to conduct additional training sessions to further extend the reach of this project
 Obj. 3. Teach BFRs to use social media to find more information to make informed decisions
 o Create a database of BFRs that have participated in face-to-face or online training to serve as a catalyst for producers to network with each other
 o Empower producers to utilize online communities of practice comprised of industry peers to make informed decisions about their businesses
 Obj. 4. Apply the skills necessary to improve and strengthen customer relations through the use of online tools
 o 70% of participants in the training will establish an active (one post per week) social media presence to promote their businesses
 o BFRs will have effective and meaningful communication with their customers by using online marketing tools
 o BFRs social media efforts will result in an increase in following by other social media users
 o BFRs will perceive an increase in the value of their respective enterprises as a result of their online marketing presence

What was accomplished under these goals?

Obj. 1. Develop effective training tools to teach BFRs how to use online marketing tools

One hour presentations were developed and delivered

2012-13 = Six one hour seminars delivered in Texas, Illinois, and Georgia

2013-14 = One, one hour seminar presented in Texas with approximately 30 in attendance. One, one hour seminar delivered by a project partner in Kansas with 75 in attendance

Create a standardized eight-hour face-to-face online marketing training workshop

2012-13 = Three, eight hour workshops delivered. Between the one hour seminars and the eight hour workshops, approximately 340 attended.

2013-14 = Seven long format workshops delivered in Texas, Georgia and Colorado. There were 71 attendees in total.

Develop ten, 30-minute online training modules

Eleven modules created and housed on beyondthefarmgate.org

Identify 10 BFR opinion leaders to help promote the project

Train the trainer workshop offered in Illinois with eight in attendance

Develop a social media handbook for the face-to-face workshops that will include handouts, notes pages, PowerPoint slides and other curricula for opinion leaders and participants to further enhance the learning process

Handbook was developed and given to each workshop participant

Promote the online training modules to increase number of BFRs reached

Training modules and website were promoted at each workshop

Obj. 2. Train BFRs in the use of social media and other online tools to effectively market their businesses

Create stronger, positive attitudes toward social media and its use in an agribusiness

Preliminary research found that beginning farmers and ranchers commonly used websites and Facebook to gain information and communicate about their businesses, but not other social media sites. Pre-then post surveys administered to workshop participants and found that before the workshop, participants had moderate opinions about using social media to communicate about their businesses. On a five point, Likert-type scale with five being strongly agree Facebook had a mean agreement score of 3.45, Twitter had a mean of 3.06, blogging had a mean of 3.26, and social media planning had a mean of 3.39. Following the workshops, participants reported mean scores in agreement of using social media to communicate with customers as follows: Facebook, M = 4.55; Twitter, M = 4.06; blogging, M = 4.23; and social media planning, M = 4.65, indicating an increase in attitude about using social media to communicate about their businesses. A more complete presentation of changes in attitudes will be compiled in a research manuscript to be submitted to the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists in October.

Increase the awareness of the online marketing tools available for promoting their businesses

Before the workshop, participants rated their ability to use on a five point Likert type scale with five being strongly agree. The reported mean scores are as follows: Facebook, M = 2.78; Twitter, M = 2.26; blogs, M = 2.25; social media planning M = 2.31. Following the workshop, participants reported ability to use social media tools as follows: Facebook, M = 4.53; Twitter, M = 4.22; blogs, M = 4.23; and social media planning, M = 4.53.

Teach 300 BFRs about website development, blogging, online direct marketing, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other emerging tools

Over the life of the project, we estimate we reached more than 500 beginning farmers and ranchers with face to face contact, either through the long format workshops or the one hour seminars. As of August 13, the online modules had received more than 1,500 views.

Train 10 individuals who emerge as opinion leaders to conduct additional training sessions to further extend the reach of this project

A train the trainer workshop was offered in Illinois in the spring of 2012

Obj. 3. Teach BFRs to use social media to find more information to make informed decisions

Create a database of BFRs that have participated in face-to-face or online training to serve as a catalyst for producers to network with each other

(This was eliminated when we made our budget cut prior to receiving funding)

Empower producers to utilize online communities of practice comprised of industry peers to make informed decisions about their businesses

A Facebook page was created (<https://www.facebook.com/BeyondFarmGate>) that has 311 page likes. A Facebook group was also created as a forum for producers to join and share information with 22 members

(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/beyondfarmgate/>).

Obj. 4. Apply the skills necessary to improve and strengthen customer relations through the use of online tools

70% of participants in the training will establish an active (one post per week) social media presence to promote their businesses

-In a follow up study with the Texas participants, we found that more than half the participants began using Facebook for personal and/or business use, and the number of participants using Twitter doubled.

What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?

This project is all about professional development for beginning farmers and ranchers. Many times the farmer or rancher is the sole employee and is therefore in charge of all product marketing or advocating. These workshops provided the development that many need to help promote their business.

Outside of the participants, the project directors have each attended various professional development conferences to learn about new technologies and techniques involving social media. In addition, a trainer presented a workshop for the Texas collaborators on Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, which are becoming increasingly important in social media communication.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

Through academic journals and conferences. See the products page for a complete list of all manuscripts produced relevant to the project.

Although not included in the initial project objectives, the collaborators did additional research related to the project on ag producers' social media use and attitudes. We did research relevant to this topic far beyond what was initially set for this project and found some very interesting results on social media use in agriculture. The list of manuscripts in 2013-14 is included in this report, but there were more manuscripts listed in the two previous annual reports.

There have been other, site specific promotions, such as local radio shows, interviews with newspapers, and presentations to academic peers.

What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?

{Nothing to report}

Participants

Actual FTEs for this Reporting Period

Role	Faculty and Non-Students	Students within Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Scientist	0	0	0	0	0
Professional	5	0	4.5	0	9.5
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Administrative	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	5	0	4.5	0	9.5

Target Audience

The target audience reached by this project during the reporting period was primarily beginning farmers and ranchers in Texas and Georgia. There was a shift since the last reporting period. CoPI Katie Abrams moved from University of Illinois to Colorado State University; therefore, we reached farmers and ranchers in Colorado.

The demographics varied greatly; however, there were slightly more female participants than males. Ages varied significantly, from approximately 17 to 75.

Types of agricultural operations (cattle, horses, greenhouses, produce, etc) varied across the three states. Acres in production varied greatly.

Products

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Journal Articles	Under Review	2014	YES

Citation

White, D., Meyers, C.A., Doerfert, D.L., & Irlbeck, E.G. (2013). Exploring agriculturalists' use of social media for agri-marketing. *Journal of Applied Communications*. (Under Review).

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Theses/Dissertations	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Gibson, C.D. (2014). An investigation of agricultural crisis communication via social media: A grounded theory study. Doctoral dissertation. Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Accepted	2014	YES

Citation

Gibson, C., Irlbeck, E.G., Meyers, C., Akers C., & Price, P. (2014, September). An investigation of agricultural crisis communication via social media: A grounded theory study. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Region American Association for Agricultural Education, Kona, HI.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Accepted	2014	NO

Citation

Gibson, C.D., & Irlbeck, E.G. (2014). What's all the pinning about? A descriptive content analysis of agricultural communications students' Pinterest activity. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Region American Association for Agricultural Education, Kona, HI.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Accepted	2014	NO

Citation

Krause, A., Meyers, C.A., Irlbeck, E.G., & Chambers, T. (2014). What side are you on? An examination of the persuasive message factors in Proposition 37 videos on YouTube. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Region American Association for Agricultural Education, Kona, HI.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Accepted	2014	YES

Citation

Meyers, C.A., Gracey, K., Irlbeck, E.G., & Akers, C. (2014). Exploring the uses and gratifications of agricultural blog readers. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Region American Association for Agricultural Education, Kona, HI.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Shaw, K.F., Meyers, C.A., Irlbeck, E.G., Doerfert, D.L., Abrams, K.M., & Morgan, A.C. (2014). Identifying Agriculturists' Online Communication Tool Training Needs. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Agricultural Education, Salt Lake City, UT.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Conference Papers and	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Shaw, K.F., Meyers, C.A., Irlbeck, E.G., Doerfert, D.L., Abrams, K.M., & Morgan, A.C. (2014). Agriculturists' personal and business use of online communication tools. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Agricultural Education, Salt Lake City, UT.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Abrams, K.M., Wagner, C.E., Irlbeck, E.G., Meyers, C.A., and Morgan, C. (2014). When you give a farmer an online marketing workshop, what changes? An analysis of effects on time spent in online communication activities, social capital, and revenue. Research poster presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Communication Excellence in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Life and Human Sciences, Portland, OR.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Morgan, C., Meyers, C., Abrams, K., Gibson, C., & Irlbeck, E.G. (2014). Evaluating social media workshops for beginning farmers and ranchers. Research poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Agricultural Education, Salt Lake City, UT.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Gibson, C., Garcia, A., Irlbeck, E.G., & Meyers, C. (2014). Sowing the seeds of social media: Using a longitudinal evaluation to assess the effectiveness of a social media training workshop. Research poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Agricultural Education, Salt Lake City, UT.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Krause, A., Meyers, C., Shaw, K., Doerfert, D., Irlbeck, E., Abrams, K., & Morgan, C. (2014). Identifying agriculturists' motivations and barriers to participate in online communication tool training workshops. Research poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Agricultural Education, Salt Lake City, UT.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Morgan, C., Meyers, C., Abrams, K., Gibson, C., & Irlbeck, E.G. (2014). Evaluating social media workshops for beginning farmers and ranchers. Research poster presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists, Dallas, TX. Second Place Research Poster.

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2014	YES

Citation

Krause, A., Meyers, C., Shaw, K., Doerfert, D., Irlbeck, E., Abrams, K., & Morgan, C. (2013). Identifying agriculturists' motivations and barriers to participate in online communication tool training workshops. Research poster presented at the annual meeting of the Western Region American Association for Agricultural Education, Lubbock, TX. Fourth Place Research Poster.

Other Products**Product Type**

Audio or Video

Description

Video recording of the "Promoting your Business Beyond the Farm Gate" workshop presented at the Dallas Farmers Market. Will be available at beyondthefarmgate.org by Sept. 1

Product Type

Data and Research Material

Description

Evaluation data from each workshop presented.

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Helpful information and links available on the "Learn" page of beyondthefarmgate.org

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Eleven tutorials on photography, blogging, Pinterest, smart phones, and email campaigns available on beyondthefarmgate.org and on YouTube

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Workbooks for all workshop participants.

Product Type

Evaluation Instruments

Description

Workshop evaluation survey. Stored on Qualtrics

Changes/Problems

In 2013, Katie Abrams moved from the University of Illinois to Colorado State University.

In the last report, we noted that we were decreasing the length of the workshops from eight to five-and-a-half hours. We found that 5 1/2 hours was also too lengthy; therefore, we shortened again to three hours for workshops presented in Dallas

and Lubbock. Three hours was exactly right for this audience.