Social Media Tools for Farm Product Marketing

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Social media can be a great tool for farmers to share information and build relationships with customers. This publication offers an overview of several social media tools, including how to use blogs, Facebook, email marketing, and Twitter, and also provides tips and case studies on using them more effectively.

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Introduction

Internet-based communication tools known collectively as “social media” are gaining popularity for large and small businesses alike, including farm businesses. Social media platforms such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter are great ways for businesses easily to share information about products and services, network with new people to build a loyal customer base, and stimulate market traffic.

The use of social media is growing due to the far-reaching use of computers and wireless technologies. It’s been estimated that four out of five Americans currently use the Internet (Zickuhr and Smith, 2012), creating a vast opportunity for online communication between producers and consumers.

Social media allows direct communication with customers that is personalized and targeted.

Farmers also use social media to put a face on how food is grown. Farmers share photos and stories about how their farms are operated, making a personal connection with consumers. Farmers can use social media to inform people about agricultural issues that matter to them, using Facebook and Twitter for activism or support of the local- and sustainable-food movements. Social media also is used to keep farmers engaged with other farmers—sharing ideas about crops, pest control, and marketing strategies.

This publication covers several social media tools and gives tips on how farmers can best use the tools to grow their businesses.
“Like it or not, there’s been a revolution in the way people expect to receive information and carry on conversations,” says Scott Stirling, a corn farmer from Martinton, Illinois, and Illinois Corn Marketing Board chairman. “There’s nothing magical about social media. These applications are just another way to deliver good information and encourage conversation” (Wisconsin State Farmer, 2011).

Marketing

The key to effective marketing is to love what you do, work hard, believe in your product, and let that shine through to existing and potential customers in your marketing strategy. The more authentic you are, the more people will be attracted to your product and want to participate and support your business.

Caring about your customers is vital for a successful social media campaign. If your goal is simply to get people to buy your stuff, you won’t have as much success. When you care about customer satisfaction, the quality of your products, and the experience customers have with your business, that concern will become apparent—and it matters to customers.

More than ever, people want to know where their food is coming from and want to get involved. Invite people to visit the farm and get to know you to build a lasting relationship that they’ll share with others. Also, by sharing your business approach, values, successes, and failures through social media, people will feel like they’re part of your farm when buying your food.

A common strategy among social media marketing experts is to determine a few goals to focus on: stimulating market traffic, generating awareness, building customer relationships, or promoting events. Keeping it simple in the beginning with an end result in mind will help you achieve your goals.

Blogs/ Websites

The word “blog” comes from the terms “web” and “log” and describes a body of text and other media published on the World Wide Web. Blogs are used to post text and photos, usually pertaining to a particular subject. Sometimes they are used as personal journals, and often they function as a business’s online information platform and advertising page. There are many free blog-hosting sites available, accessible to people with basic computer skills.

Blogs have become increasingly popular as software design evolves, making blogs more functional and easier to use. Blog software enables users to customize their sites, providing different layout options, font and image-placement choices, and tabs, and also offering plug-ins that add more functions to your blog site.

Blogs use a narrative format. Using this conversational writing style is a good way for farmers to provide updates to consumers while also building strong relationships with patrons. Blog posts can include photos and text that effectively communicate farm news and operations. Using photos to show how a farm operates is the best way to illustrate to consumers how their food is produced, which is important to a growing number of eaters. Recipes, local food news, and beautiful pictures give value to your site and give people incentive to visit your site more often.

Blogs can be used to update customers about crop harvests and are also being used for sales. Many farmers are using blogs to take orders before farmers markets, take orders for delivery or pickup, and offer online signup for CSA membership. Creating an editorial calendar can be helpful. Decide a day and time that you’ll always post content so that readers will know...
when to expect new information and will come back routinely.

Deciding whether to use a blog or website for your farm can be confusing. Many people assume that blogs are amateur or that developing a website will bring more credibility or success. Websites require more software (like Dreamweaver or Front Page), require more programming expertise, and usually require a monthly hosting fee.

Also, to clarify, blogs are websites; they are free, user-friendly, and allow you to post information easily and immediately. Many, like WordPress, look like websites. So if money is limited and you aren’t an experienced web designer, a blog will do just fine to get started with an online presence and you can look into a website later if you need more functionality.

It may seem like everyone and their dog has a personal blog, but don’t let fear of competition discourage you from using the format too. The most successful blogs target a specific interest group, post regularly, and offer valuable information to viewers.

For farm blog examples, see www.seametrics.com/blog/top-farm-blogs.

**Free Blog Sites and Fee-Based Web Hosting and Design Options**

There are three free blog templates that many people and businesses use: WordPress, Blogger, and Tumblr. Each offers something different and attracts a certain type of user.

**Word Press**

WordPress is the most-used blogging tool worldwide. It can be obtained to use for free by downloading and installing WordPress software, which allows users to build individual blogging websites. WordPress is unique because a community of web designers has written programs and created templates without being paid, improving the software for personal intrinsic rewards. The result of this vast public collaboration and design of WordPress is a large variety of blog customizations. The plug-ins for WordPress also add to the appeal. Plug-ins are code added to the original code of a software program that increases the functionality of the software. An example is Google analytics. If you enable this plug-in for your WordPress blog, you can track how many people visit the site and get other user statistics.

To begin using WordPress to create a blog for your farm, the website http://codex.wordpress.org/Main_Page may be the best place to start. There you’ll find several tutorials about how to begin and will also find information helpful to more advanced users. Specifically, you’ll find instructions for getting started, creating posts, using themes and plug-ins, and troubleshooting. You’ll also find links to WordPress support forums.

An example of a WordPress blog is Bit of Earth, created to promote a family farm’s production and sale of honey, eggs, and free-range beef. Check it out at http://bitofearthfarm.wordpress.com/home.

**Blogger**

Blogger, also called Blogspot, is a free blog template owned by Google that can be used to share text, photos, and video. Blogger has been in service since 1999 and was a paid blog-publishing tool until Google bought the site in 2003 and made it free to the public. It is user-friendly and allows domain names other than blogspot.com. For example, your blog domain name can be snoringpigfarm.org if you choose rather than snoringpigfarm.blogspot.com.
A guide for getting started is available at http://support.google.com/blogger/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=112498&ctx=cb&src=cb&crid=-32xjz2t9zyqq. The guide provides information and videos on how to create and customize a blog using Blogger, how to write posts, and how to add images and video. If you need additional information about Blogger, you can search the web for forums or tutorial videos.

Also check out the links below to visit farms that have used Blogger to create blogs.

http://greenedgegardens.blogspot.com
http://coldantlerfarm.blogspot.com

Tumblr

Tumblr is an alternative blog site, designed as a short-form blog, and is a cross between Facebook posts and traditional blog posts. Tumblr allows users to post photos, videos, music, links, and text. It also is similar to Twitter and Facebook in the sense that Tumblr users follow each other and get updates when something new is posted. With almost 53 million users, Tumblr is one of the newest social media sites and is catching on quickly.

Tumblr is known for its user-friendly features. A free blog account can be set up by visiting www.tumblr.com. The site will walk you through setting up a blog page, and if you have questions, see www.tumblr.com/help. You can customize the site with your choice of text, colors, or layout using different themes.

Ole Dern Farm uses a Tumblr site; see http://oledernfarm.tumblr.com.

Blog Case Study

Carney, North Pulaski Farms
www.northpulaskifarms.com

Kelly Carney is a retired IT executive now running a successful organic farm, North Pulaski Farms in central Arkansas. Needless to say he is tuned in to online marketing and uses several platforms for his farm.

Because of his background in IT, Kelly understands how to design a website that his target consumers can find easily. His farm website, Northpulaskifarms.com, is designed to surface at the top of search engine lists because of the wording that he uses on the blog title and description as well as new blog posts. “It’s one thing to have a great product, but it doesn’t do much good if people can’t find it,” Carney said. This concept is known in the industry as Search Engine Optimization, SEO.

SEO: Most search engine optimization techniques are very complex and require some web code knowledge. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#Methods. For basic users, it is important to add content to the site that includes words and phrases frequently searched by your target audience. Add relevant words to the title and description.

Carney’s main intent is to drive consumer traffic to his website for online purchases. Carney said that once his webpage/blog was up and established, he made higher sales in one month than in his entire first year farming. He uses Facebook as a supplement for his existing web presence, to serve as a photo repository. See www.facebook.com/groups/319886493064. There are too many photos on the Facebook page to count, which is intentional. Carney’s Facebook marketing strategy is to use loads of photos to help consumers interact virtually with the process of growing their food.

Carney noted that Facebook is a great, low-cost way for beginning farmers who don’t yet have a webpage to gain an Internet presence. He added that Facebook is good for a hobby farm, but a commercial farm really needs a webpage because not everyone is on Facebook.

Another online tool that adds to North Pulaski Farms’ success is the locallygrown.net food...
marketing website. Locally Grown is an online farmers market of sorts, or food hub (see www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5097957), where consumers throughout the United States can find produce. Consumers can buy from one or several farms, and the order can be picked up at a central location. Individual markets are created for different areas around the country, and farmers can add their products to one or several nearby markets. Locally Grown is a hub for growers, facilitating online sales beyond traditional farmers markets. Companies or individuals can go to locallygrown.net, find North Pulaski Farms, see all of their Facebook photos, and decide to support the farm.

**Food Hubs** are organized local food markets where buyers and sellers can connect to benefit each other. Many food hubs have emerged recently as online systems where farmers can sell fresh, local produce and livestock to businesses. Food hubs are efficient. Buyers can find exactly what they want at the price they want, and the orders are customized to allow same-day harvesting on the delivery date. For more information on online food hubs, see www.yesmagazine.org/planet/how-the-web-can-benefit-farmers-eaters-and-communities.

If your social media strategy includes several platforms such as a blog, Facebook, and Twitter accounts, be sure to post links on your blog for users to see that you’re using different platforms. Different people may prefer one mode of social media over another, so if you use several you may capture a broader audience.

There is a balance in deciding which tools to use. On one hand, the more tools you use, the broader the audience you may attract. On the other hand, each medium requires an investment of time and effort, and you shouldn’t take on more than you are able to maintain.

**RSS Feeds**

RSS stands for Rich Site Summary or Real Simple Syndication, depending on whom you ask. This feature allows subscribers to receive new information posted on a blog without visiting the blog. RSS feeds use an aggregator or news-feed collector that checks the sites a person subscribes to, usually every hour, and collects all the updates into a folder. A subscriber can check their designated folder on the desktop and find all of the feeds from a particular site (Richardson, 2004).

The benefit to users of an RSS feed is that their folder contains only updates that they want to read from websites they’ve subscribed to, with no spam or viruses involved. Most blogs are built with this capability, so your blog will produce feeds automatically. If users subscribe to your blog’s RSS feed, they’ll receive any updates made to your site.

**Social Media Consulting Services**

Many farms use social media consulting services for the benefit of their expertise or to preserve time for farming—what farmers do best!

Consulting firms offer services like strategic planning, social media development, marketing, and outreach.

For example, the Edibles Advocate Alliance offers small-business consulting, advocacy, and support for grassroots and socially innovative organizations. To find out more, visit their website, www.ediblesadvocatealliance.org.

Similarly, Small Farm Central provides website and ecommerce services as well as direct-marketing for farmers. The service helps farmers develop a website and also can set up the site for web sales. For a one-time startup cost and monthly fee you get a website, setup support, and domain hosting. To find out more, see www.smallfarm-central.com.

The Hollygrove Market & Farm used Small Farm Central to create their website, www.hollygrovecarnet.com.

Hollygrove Market & Farm is an urban farm and local-produce market located in New Orleans. Its mission is to increase accessibility of fresh produce in New Orleans. They promote sustainability through support of local farmers and the local economy and act as a demonstration site for environmentally sustainable practices. Hollygrove Market and Farm operates a CSA-style cooperative market. In place of members buying shares from individual farms, Hollygrove buys produce from many small farms and urban growers in the region and creates CSA-style boxes of produce for sale. With this

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Facebook

**What is Facebook?**

Facebook is a social networking website used by 905 million people worldwide to communicate with others through photos, text, and personal interests.

Many businesses and special-interest groups use Facebook to promote their products and network with existing and potential consumers. Facebook is a good tool to engage personally with consumers and learn about their needs and preferences. Because of the smart phone and wireless Internet technologies available today, people stay connected easily and anywhere. Farmers can use Facebook to:

- Increase sales
- Build their customer bases
- Generate buzz about products and crops
- Let customers know about new products and programs
- Build preference and differentiation between local, small-farm-produced food and conventionally grown food. (Facebook, 2012).

**How To Get Started**

Starting a Facebook page is simple. Go to [https://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php](https://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php) to create a page for your farming business. The start-up is very user-friendly and guides you through the process. It is important to decide who will create the page because that person becomes the administrator. The administrator has control of the layout and what is posted and removed. Some farmers have traded CSA shares in exchange for Facebook administration duties, deciding to spend their time farming instead of being on the computer. Others want more control of how their farm is perceived and decide to take on the social media duties themselves. Both strategies work: simply decide what is right for you and your farm.

Bill Pastellak, the community coordinator for the farm, said that he would definitely recommend using Small Farm Central. “The templates are functional and it was really helpful in getting us on our feet,” (Pastellak, 2012). The farm began with a blog, but it wasn’t as customizable as they needed for their operation. The website allows them to use ecommerce and do online sales with their home delivery service and restaurant sales.

Hollygrove Market & Farm uses Facebook, Twitter, and enewsletters to distribute information on what will be in the weekly baskets, as well as photos and farm event information. Pastellak said that he tries not to send out too much fluff but focuses on sending concise, valuable information to the consumers so that they don’t have to take time to wade through a lot of unnecessary information. The weekly enewsletters are definitely the focus of Hollygrove’s efforts. The farm has a small staff and could benefit from more use of Facebook and Twitter, but those tools are secondary to the website updates and newsletter.

Hollygrove Market and Farms website, [http://hollygrovefarm.com](http://hollygrovefarm.com)
At this point you have a blank slate to build on. Facebook has different ways to add information to your page in order to inform fans about your farm business or products. There are four important places to add information:

- The Info Tab. Post a short phrase or sentence that provides users with a better idea of who you are and what you offer.
- The Profile Picture. Upload a picture or image, such as a photo of your farm, a product, or your business logo. This visual should further help fans understand your service and build stronger connections.
- A Short Paragraph About the Page. Add a paragraph about your Facebook page and include a link to your farm’s website if you have one.
- Cover Photo. Add a great photo that represents your farm.

You can customize your Facebook page by using Facebook markup language (FBML) and software applications, ‘apps’ designed specifically for Facebook. Here’s a link for a video that will walk you through the process: www.facebook.com/iwipa?v=app_106878476015645. This allows you to create custom tabs.

More advanced users can add a sales tab where people can order products from the farm through its Facebook page. There are several applications that allow you to launch a store feature for Facebook.

For example, the company Voiyk provides Facebook users with the ability to create a Facebook fan-page store. Product images are loaded and purchasers are rerouted to your website outside of Facebook. The service costs $69 per year and is free for the first month.

**Facebook User Tips**

Now that you’ve created a Facebook page, you’re ready to start posting. Facebook posts for your farm or business should include exceptional

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**Getting More Facebook Fans**

There are many guides and articles on the Internet that offer tips on how to make your Facebook page more popular, consequently delivering more sales for your farming business. Listed below are just a few tips gleaned from the enormous body of research:

- Look at Facebook pages that are working and those that aren’t to give you a better idea of how to make your page effective for marketing.
- Add exclusive Facebook content: FB-specific discounts, giveaways, user-generated content, exclusive video, stories, or clips. The better the content, the more “likes” your page will receive, which translates into more people seeing your page.
- Facebook is a quick way to update consumers about what products are ready for harvest and what is coming up. Post things on your FB page that wouldn’t otherwise be known: for example, when lambs were born or getting first prize for the tastiest tomato at the fair.
- Always respond to comments, answer and ask questions, comment on a shared photo, and “like” friends’ comments.
- User-generated content will draw more interest to your Facebook page; for example, encourage users to share recipes and photos from their own gardens or post growing tips they’ve learned.
- Ask CSA members for input on what crops they would like to see more of. This will generate more interaction with Facebook followers.
- Invite CSA members or farmers market consumers to post reviews.
- Post links to your farm’s webpage or Twitter account that leave the Facebook site and land where people can sign up for your CSA or place an order online.
- Add interesting photos and videos to your Facebook page that you know will interest your audience—come up with a photo/visual strategy. Remarkable photos drive people to your site.
- Learn about customer preferences from feedback and posts from your Facebook friends. You also can use reporting tools like Google Analytics to see what generates the most interest in your page.
- Don’t try to be everything to everyone. Find your voice and create a Facebook page that trumpets who you are and what you have to offer. Be creative and make your page remarkable.
- Tell customers at the market or from your CSA to find you on Facebook, and also tell them how they’ll benefit. Detail what your Facebook content includes: recipes, photos, event updates, information links, etc.
content: relevant to your audience, entertaining and engaging, and such that users want to share it. One farm posted a chicken wearing a sweater, and 500 people visited the site in one day. The picture went viral because the farmers posted something that was remarkable, resulting in more traffic to the site and awareness of the farm.

You should post regularly, but not too often, keeping content up to date. Once per day or less on Facebook is enough. If you post too often and the content is not valuable to users, you risk the chance that fans will block you from their feeds.

Another basic tip is to respond to comments, either good or bad, which goes back to caring about your customers. Care about their preferences and opinions and consider them in some business decisions. Also, share worthwhile content from others, which might include gardening, farming, food, and environmental-stewardship news or information.

The name of the game for businesses using Facebook is to get more “likes” for their page. When a Facebook user “likes” your page, that preference is displayed to their Facebook friends, giving your page the opportunity to be seen by more people.

Facebook users “like” fan pages for several reasons: they like to preach their beliefs; they want discounts; they want to be in the know about new products; they want to learn more about businesses or organizations; and they may also want to meet people with similar interests (Ente, 2010).

### Facebook Case Studies

#### Greyrock Farm CSA
[www.greyrockfarmcsa.com/index.html](http://www.greyrockfarmcsa.com/index.html)

The Greyrock Farm CSA is a local, year-round, diversified CSA near Cazenovia, New York, offering seasonal vegetables, grass-fed beef and lamb, pastured pork and chicken, eggs from pastured laying hens, and unpasteurized milk.

Their Facebook approach uses photos of the happy animals they raise. The images inspire connection to the work that they’re doing and the food that the farm has for sale. Through photos, consumers know that they are supporting a particular lifestyle and healthy agricultural practices.

#### Clagett Farm CSA
[www.facebook.com/ClagettFarmCSA](http://www.facebook.com/ClagettFarmCSA)

Clagett Farm is a working farm in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, owned and operated by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF). Their Facebook page provides updates on events at the farm, including a CSA program.

The Clagett Farm CSA is very active and sells out its available shares every season. Supporters surveyed at the end of each season are very enthusiastic about the farm. Survey respondents overwhelmingly requested more proactive communication about what will be in the shares and what’s going on at the farm, so the farm began using social media.

In exchange for a food share, Clay Dunn manages Clagett Farm’s Facebook and blog pages. During the CSA season he adds about two posts per week:
increase awareness about their business and draw more CSA members, Beth hasn’t offered rewards for ‘liking’ their page. “When I see other farm Facebook pages offer something to get more ‘likes’ it seems fine, but when I think of doing it, it feels gimmicky. People should do what fits the soul of their farm” (Weaver-Kreider, 2012).

Another benefit of using Facebook and a blog to communicate with current members is that nonmembers who have yet to commit to buying a CSA share can see throughout the season what crops and volumes are in the shares and how the food is produced. Dunn said many shareholders comment that by following the Clagett Farm Facebook or blog page, they became convinced to purchase a share the following year (2012).

Goldfinch Farm uses social media not only to update shareholders but also uses it as a marketing tool. Facebook has been optimal for Jon and Beth because it doesn’t involve the commitment to post a long blog regularly and doesn’t seem as foreign to them as Twitter.

Beth manages the Facebook page: posting a photo, farm update, or sustainable agricultural news link once or twice per week throughout the CSA season and about twice per month in the winter months. She doesn’t want to overwhelm people with too many posts, so she keeps it simple.

Beth carries a camera in her pocket, shoots photos of farm happenings, and uses the images to update regular shareholders and also as eye candy for nonshareholders.

Despite using Facebook as an advertising tool to increase awareness about their business and draw more CSA members, Beth hasn’t offered rewards for ‘liking’ their page. “When I see other farm Facebook pages offer something to get more ‘likes’ it seems fine, but when I think of doing it, it feels gimmicky. People should do what fits the soul of their farm” (Weaver-Kreider, 2012).

Goldfinch Farm also uses social media, specifically Facebook, as an educational platform to inform their community about the importance of sustainable agriculture through policy and news. “There is a balance between using the farm Facebook page for activism and using my personal [FB] page for opinion pieces.” She’s been using Facebook for nearly a year and said she’s finding her voice using Facebook for grassroots activism. Generally, Beth uses Facebook to share their passion for farming, inform people about the Goldfinch Farm CSA, and promote the importance of sustainable agricultural practices.

Email-Based Newsletters

Many farms and CSAs use email-based newsletters to deliver information directly to consumers. CSAs frequently use email newsletters to update members about what’s in this week’s share and also offer recipes or food-storage tips. Farms may offer weekly specials or notes from the farmers. Email newsletters are easy to forward to others, so people can share information about your farm with others who may then subscribe.

Email newsletter software allows you to track who
opens your emails, know who forwarded them to friends, and see what links within the newsletter people click on—helping you to understand what your audience is most interested in. You also can insert links to your social media pages into the email.

**Formats**

There are several email marketing services. This publication describes a few, but if you search online for “email marketing services,” you will find others to choose from. There are a few benefits of using email marketing software over Gmail or Outlook email. The benefits include list management (managing new subscribers or unsubscribers) and tracking who opens what emails. Another advantage is that you can send multiple emails without having them considered spam. Personal email accounts won’t let you send more than 50 emails at a time to prevent spam. Email marketing software also includes the ability to include a sign-up form on your website or blog.

**Constant Contact**

Constant Contact offers a free 60-day trial of its email marketing software. It has several email templates to choose from, which you can further customize. Users can import contact lists from several database formats. To try Constant Contact, see [www.constantcontact.com/email-marketing/index.jsp](http://www.constantcontact.com/email-marketing/index.jsp).

**MailChimp**

MailChimp is an email marketing service that offers newsletter templates designed to be used with social media tools. It is easy to use and it is possible to use a free account, depending on what features you need.

The MailChimp website provides several guides that walk users through using the website and service. There is a “Getting Started with MailChimp” guide that explains how to create an email list and helps you send out your first newsletter. This guide also will help you use analytic reports to get feedback about what people clicked on most for your next newsletter. There are several guides about how to use templates and “MailChimp for Bloggers.” To see the guides, go to [http://mailchimp.com/resources](http://mailchimp.com/resources).

Bluebird Grain Farms sends out a monthly newsletter that includes a summary about the farm, news and announcements, recipes, and monthly specials. The email newsletters are archived on their website and can be found at [www.bluebirdgrainfarms.com/newsletter-2012-04.html](http://www.bluebirdgrainfarms.com/newsletter-2012-04.html).

**Twitter**

**What Is Twitter?**

Twitter is a social media tool that allows users to submit brief (140 characters or less) messages to a network of other users. Twitter is known for communication in a casual, conversational way and provides a platform to tell your story about your farming operation. Twitter is known as a referral site, because “tweets” sent on Twitter are viewed by users beyond your acquaintances, referring your farm information to many, many others.

People may want to follow your farm’s Twitter account to get information about how their food is grown, stay informed on agricultural issues, and generally be connected to their farmer and support the sustainable-agriculture movement.

**How To Get Started/ User Tips**

The first step in signing up is to decide whether you want to start a company or personal account. A company account represents the company and can be used to inform the public about news, events, and products. A personal account is used by an employee, is more personalized, and is used to build relationships and act as a liaison for the farm. If you choose a company account, your Twitter name should be your company name.

To set up an account, go to [http://twitter.com](http://twitter.com), fill in your name, email address, and password and then click the “Sign up for Twitter” button. Next, your user name will be checked for duplication. If your ideal name is taken, choose something as close to it as possible to make it easy for people to find you. Don’t use something random, don’t use numbers, and don’t use underscores. Next, read the Terms of Service and, if you agree to the terms, click the “Create my Account” button. Once your account is created, the software will guide you through a short tutorial explaining what “tweets” are and how they work.

Next, choose Twitter users to follow by searching interests in the search box and clicking on the “Follow” button, which will enable you to receive their messages. For example, type “local food” in the search box and several Twitter accounts...
To begin, tweet a few things to let people know what type of content you’ll provide. There are several types of tweets:

- Observations. What you think or feel.
- Media recommendations. Articles, videos, or music.
- Events. Links to local food or farming events.
- Retweets. Other people’s posts that your followers may find interesting.

You either can tweet to everyone following you or send a tweet to specific people. Place an @ symbol before the person’s name, called an “@reply,” and the message will be saved in an @reply tab. This message can be seen by all followers.

If you place an @ symbol in front of another user name in a tweet, it acts as a link to that user’s profile, making it easy for others to check them out.

For example, the @ATTRASustainAG twitter account posted this tweet on April 4, 2012: Follow our @energycorp mbrs as they blog about comm #service during #AmeriCorps Works week http://bit.ly/HjifDO #NCAT #ATTRA #green

You can send a direct message on Twitter that won’t be seen by the public. To do this, type D user name, followed by your message. You can only direct message people if they follow you and you follow them back. Direct messages are a good way to build relationships by sending someone a resource that they may find interesting.

If you click the star at the left of a tweet it is added to your Favorites Tab. This could be used for accolades from followers about your company or products.

To personalize your Twitter page, adding images and background, click on the profile symbol at the top right of the screen. Find the “Settings” button and click. Here you can upload images for your profile picture (your “avatar”), add a background image to your Twitter page, add your website address, add apps, and connect your Twitter and Facebook posts.

Now that you have set up a Twitter account you’re ready to start “tweeting!”

The most common way to gain followers is by providing valuable content, such as events, videos, CSA schedules or sign-ups, photos, and personal updates.

www.attra.ncat.org
free-roaming, also eating grass and shrubs. The chickens and pigs are respected and treated with care. Yezzi and Small’s primary goal is to keep land in agriculture. They sell diverse products to a variety of outlets to make their business work. Yezzi began using Twitter for the farm about two years ago and has built his number of followers to over 2,500. He tweets specialty-item availability on market days in New York City—things that usually sell out, like bacon. He retweets posts from customers about things they’ve cooked and other general comments that add to the conversation. Yezzi also tweets photos of new piglets, links to stories of interest from The New York Times about food and farming or ag policy. “Twitter and social media are easy ways to advocate an agenda, but you must decide what image you want for your farm,” (Yezzi, 2012).

Twitter has been a great tool for Flying Pig Farm to build strong local support and generate dialogue with customers, forging stronger connections that help sales. Yezzi notes that it’s important to decide whether Twitter will be helpful for you or a waste of precious time. In a metropolitan area Twitter can be very useful to let many people know that there are extra eggs at the market or remind them that it is market day. On the other hand if your operation involves selling a few sides of beef to neighbors or selling to restaurants, a phone call or email may be a more effective mode of communication. With all marketing and social media, it is important to decide what is right for your business and what is right for you. If you are a people person and enjoy selling at the farmers market, then Facebook and Twitter will be easy for you to use to promote your farm. Your

Have a Strategy for Getting Clicks

Tweet truly interesting and valuable info and your audience will begin to pay attention and look for your farm’s tweets or Facebook posts. Tweet useful resources or thoughtful tips to build your reputation as a go-to expert in the field (Hubspot, 2012).

Use the Twitter search tool to find people who are looking for products you can provide and look for questions/conversations that you can answer and join:

- The more clicks, the more exposure—more people will follow you.
- Ask anyone already consuming your content to follow you on Twitter.
- Find people talking about what is interesting to you in Twitter and join in on the conversation.
- Follow people who are interested in the same things.

Twitter Case Studies

Flying Pigs Farm
www.flyingpigsfarm.com

Mike Yezzi and Jen Small own and operate Flying Pigs Farm, a small-scale, pastured livestock operation in Washington County, New York. They raise heritage-breed pigs, meat chickens, and laying hens using sustainable methods. The animals are fed grain and fruits and vegetables and are free-roaming, also eating grass and shrubs. The chickens and pigs are respected and treated with care. Yezzi and Small’s primary goal is to keep land in agriculture. They sell diverse products to a variety of outlets to make their business work. Yezzi began using Twitter for the farm about two years ago and has built his number of followers to over 2,500. He tweets specialty-item availability on market days in New York City—things that usually sell out, like bacon. He retweets posts from customers about things they’ve cooked and other general comments that add to the conversation. Yezzi also tweets photos of new piglets, links to stories of interest from The New York Times about food and farming or ag policy. “Twitter and social media are easy ways to advocate an agenda, but you must decide what image you want for your farm,” (Yezzi, 2012).

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personality and operation type determine the best markets and ways to advertise.

Yezzi said that Twitter keeps him involved in dialogue and the debate in sustainability and farming but isn’t a huge sales tool, in part because it’s hard to tell whether a tweet announcing a sale on bacon draws customers to the market. They don’t offer coupons, which would be a good way to test how effective social media is for sales.

Yezzi stressed that Twitter is most effective when you can engage people: if people have a question, you reply, creating a conversation back and forth. He said that people want a connection with their farmer. People like looking at pictures and getting a few updates. Yezzi keeps his posts simple and just enough. He doesn’t tweet minute-by-minute updates like what he’s listening to in the tractor because he thinks it’s too much. One or two posts per day are adequate.

**Return on Investment**

Developing an effective social media strategy and sticking with it requires an investment of time, so it is important to get some results from your work. Measuring the economic effect that social media has on consumers is not a straightforward proposition. Those who are attempting to measure return on investment have different theories and approaches.

Some say it’s easy to measure return on investment through increased numbers of Facebook friends and Twitter followers. The problem is that you don’t know which of those followers are actually consuming your products.

To determine whether your blog, Twitter, or Facebook presence is influencing sales, you could offer a coupon or early-bird special on the site and see how many people redeem it. Contests are another effective way to determine whether people are using your social media tools and who those users are—contest ideas range from naming a new pig or calf to guessing the weight of the prize pumpkin.

If you are the one managing the social media communication for your farm, you’ll probably have a pretty good idea of whether or not you’re benefiting from better customer relations and raised awareness about your products. Keep in mind that it takes time to build a strong social network; if you put the time in, it will produce results (Swallow, 2011).

Mention of particular companies, products, or services in this publication does not constitute an endorsement of those products, companies, or services by the National Center for Appropriate Technology, its ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service program, or program funders.
References

Weaver-Kreider, Beth. Goldfinch Farm. 2012. Personal communication.

Yezi, Mike. Flying Pigs Farm. 2012. Personal communication.

Further Resources

The Agchat Foundation supports farmers with connecting communities through social media. They offer an annual training course for farmers on how to use social media and also provide tips on their website, at http://agchat.org/ category/social-media-2-0.

The Farmers Market Federation of New York put out a series of educational opportunities on social media techniques to help people connect with local farms and farmers markets. The factsheets from the webinars and YouTube videos are available at www.nyfarmersmarket.com/resources/publications.html?start=10. Information provided includes tips on Twitter, Foursquare, Facebook, blogs, YouTube, Hoot Suite, and Stumble Upon, as well as general info on social media and marketing.

Tractor View is blog that offers several blog posts on how farmers can use social media tools effectively at http://tractorview.com/index.php.

The University of Vermont’s New Farmer Project offers several webinars on marketing and social media which can be found at www.uvm.edu/newfarmer/?Page=webinars/webinar_recordings.html&SM=webinars/sub-menu.html#marketing_webinars

The University of Missouri Extension office published two reports about how social media can be used for marketing farmers’ markets and can be found at http://extension.missouri.edu/p/G6227.