

Taking pictures of your farm



A GREENER WORLD



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Good photos are becoming increasingly important for businesses, especially farms, where they're a wonderful proxy for a public who can't always visit a farm. But capturing quality photos isn't easy. For several years I've taken photos on behalf of A Greener World. I hope this guide will help you take great shots—and benefit your business, too.

Mike Suarez

Work with the sun

Photography is all about light. The quality of light can make or break a photo. When using the sun as a light source, it's best to shoot early in the morning (usually for the first two or three hours after sunrise) and just before sunset (again for the last two or three hours before sunset). Photographers often refer to the best of these times as the "golden hour," because the light is perfectly soft with a golden cast. As mid-day approaches, the light starts to come straight down casting a harsh light with dark shadows—grass will look particularly harsh.

Because the light during these hours comes at an angle, it is often best to shoot with your back to the sun. This way, your animals or landscapes will be evenly lit with a full and beautiful light. With this said, rules are made to be broken. During a particularly golden sunrise or sunset, I will often turn toward the light which casts the animals in a dark shadow enshrouded in a soft golden light (although this often requires a good amount of editing work).



Light during the "golden hour" is warm, rich, and soft



Turning the camera toward the sun at sunset can give a nice effect

Shooting landscapes

Landscapes are a wonderful way to show the overall beauty of your farm or ranch, but capturing the bucolic nature of your farm can be daunting. Too often the photographer looks at their landscape and compares it to what is in the image, and the image never really stacks up. This is okay, and to be frank, it's quite normal. So, when taking landscape photographs, pick one element of what you see and focus on that.

I like to make the focus of my landscapes something in the distance, like the sky, hills, or mountains. But remember that picking something far away by itself will lose some of the grandeur of the scene. So I suggest putting something close in the picture, too. This could be anything from an animal, a barn, or a tree.

An even better approach is to include something close, something in the middle (like hills), and something far away (like a mountain or the sky). This gives a sense of depth and gives your eye somewhere to go when looking at the picture. Go to your favorite spots and ask yourself what makes that spot so beautiful. Pay attention to what you see near you, in the middle, and far away. Then, apply these things to your photograph.



Notice the three different levels of depth in this image



Here the foreground is in focus

Animal portraits

Taking photos of animals is actually similar to taking photos of people. We subconsciously do things when taking photos of people that can be applied to animals as well. If you approach your animal photos just like you would a human portrait you'll find that they'll begin to stand out as individuals, rather than generic animals.

It's often said that eyes are the window to the soul, and this is true for both people and animals. A cow's eyes are often flirty, a pig's wise, a chicken's curious, a sheep's sanguine, and goat's mischievous. Focus on the eyes: if the nose is out of focus, this is okay as long as the eyes are in focus. I also try to make sure that the eyes are in the light. This isn't always possible, but it's always my first thought.

When we take photos of people we usually put the camera around the same height as their face. In order to make my photos of animals as similar to my portraits of people, I always try to get my camera at the height of the animal's eyes. This can mean getting low: lay down on the ground, kneel on your knees, do whatever it takes to get on their level. It's amazing how much more connected the viewer will be with the animals in your photos. But remember: Getting that perfect close-up isn't ever worth putting yourself at risk for. When animals are involved, always plan for the unexpected!



In this close-up portrait we are drawn to the eyes



Chickens can look larger-than-life from their eye level

Rule of thirds

There is a general rule in photography called "the rule of thirds." Look at most photographs, divide the image in thirds, both horizontally and vertically, and you'll notice that the main subjects of the photo sit along or near these lines (particularly where the lines meet). The reasons are somewhat outside the scope of this guide, but think about this guideline when taking your images.

For portraits, because I like to focus on eyes, I generally try to put them on the thirds in close-up. If you are taking wider shots, try to keep the animal that is the main focus somewhere near these lines.

Finally...

The best way to take great photos is like anything else, practice. Take some photos, look at them, and see what you like or don't like about them. The more you take and the more you pay attention to them, the better your photos will be. And, if you'd like to read more, I suggest *John Shaw's Nature Photography Field Guide*—an amazing book with wonderful advice.



The piglet, the water pipe, and the post all sit near thirds



The eyes of the goat in the bus meet on a horizontal and vertical third



A GREENER WORLD

With so much negativity around food and farming today, A Greener World serves as a beacon of positive change. We exist to promote and support real-life farming models to the public and to offer practical guidance on achieving truly sustainable livestock farming systems to farmers.

We believe the way we farm, the nutritional quality of the meat, milk and eggs produced, and the impact of farming systems on wildlife, the environment and wider society are all connected. Our goal is to offer a 'one-stop shop' for anyone interested in food, farming and sustainability, providing simple solutions based on your own personal concerns. We're proud of our reputation among consumer groups, farmers and the wider food industry as a pragmatic organization driven by practical science and common sense.

Our growing family of trusted certifications includes AWA, Certified Grassfed by AGW and Certified Non-GE by AGW. Each program is designed to have positive and measurable impacts on the environment, society and animals, and to encourage truly sustainable farming practices. AGW's standards and procedures are robust, transparent and achievable.

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