



AWA GUIDE TO USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is an umbrella term used to describe a number of new online tools that allow people to stay in touch with each other and share information and ideas through their computers and, increasingly, smartphones and tablets.

But while social media is great for staying in touch with friends and family, it also provides businesses of all shapes and sizes with a fantastic opportunity to communicate directly with new and existing customers—and at minimal cost! The *AWA Guide to Using Social Media* is designed to help farmers of all ages and abilities get connected with their customers and other farms and businesses by using the two most widely used social media platforms: Facebook and Twitter.

These social media websites allow small businesses to market themselves widely and effectively, not to mention free of charge! Reaching hundreds—even thousands—of existing or potential customers with up-to-date information and promotions has never been easier or cheaper. Both Facebook and Twitter allow small businesses to share descriptions about themselves, photographs, and information about their products—and how to buy them—with new and existing customers at the click of a mouse. Encourage Facebook or Twitter users that you already know to “like” or “follow” you; urge these new “Facebook friends” or “Twitter followers” to help you spread the word about your farm’s new social media presence. Before you know it, your farm could have hundreds of new supporters!

Finally, don’t assume that social media is only suitable for farms that sell directly to the public. Facebook and Twitter (in particular) are great ways to stay in touch with the latest goings on in your region, share information and ideas with other farmers and businesses, get advice on particular management problems, source new breeding stock, read the latest news or reports, find potential new customers, contribute to all manner of discussions and debates, and much more! You’ll be surprised how many individuals, businesses and organizations you know will have Facebook and Twitter accounts you can follow and interact with.



FACEBOOK

Facebook appeals to a wide range of people of all ages because it is easy to use and includes a variety of features for communicating with family and friends. With Facebook, you can basically build your own mini-website, free of charge. Any new updates you make to your Facebook page will appear on a list of recent activity that each of your Facebook supporters will see when they log on to Facebook. It functions as an instant news blast to all of your Facebook supporters.

For businesses, a Facebook page is a working tool with which you can broadcast new information to both potential and existing customers. It is interactive for both the Facebook page administrator (you) and visitor. Updating your Facebook page at least twice a week with a new photo, information, or even a

meaningful anecdote about your activities on the farm, will keep customers informed and entertained. In doing so, they are likely to “share” your business details with friends and family, thereby building your audience. Use your Facebook page to advertise events you attend, such as farmers’ markets or conferences; inform your “Facebook followers” about your community involvement and encourage them to meet you in person at such events; publish frequent photographs to share life on the farm and explain the benefits of high welfare, sustainable farming. Remember: the things you see and do every day on the farm—things you probably take for granted—are likely to fascinate your customers!

Business advantages of using a Facebook Business Page:

- Facebook is free of charge!
- Facebook is popular with all age groups
- It provides a format that most users are already familiar and comfortable with (from perusing other Facebook pages)
- Your Facebook Business Page appears in Google Search
- It is public, so you can link it from your website
- It is a two-way communication channel with existing customers *and* prospects
- It has easy-to-manage photo albums - *a picture speaks a thousand words*
- You can manage the page yourself
- You can share the management of the page with others in your team using the administrator feature

Think about including the following information on your farm’s Facebook page:

- Basic contact information, such as your email, phone number and website, if you have one
- Hours of operation (if your farm is open to the public)
 - Directions to your farm or farmstand
- Farm history
- Farming philosophy
- Details about why your farming operation is unique and the wider health, welfare and environmental benefits
- Photos of your farm, staff, animals, products, label, sunsets, landscapes... anything your customers might find interesting
- News updates, such as promotions, events, sales, pick-up locations, additions or changes to your operation
- Detailed descriptions of your products, including availability, where they are sold, prices, methods of purchasing

The following are good examples of Facebook posts—informative, friendly, inviting and fun! Think about the kind of messages you might like to send out to your customers:

Example 1:

Hasselmann Family Farm of Marengo, IL, posted this friendly update on their popular Facebook page to encourage their followers to visit their stall at the local farmers’ market, letting customers know the price and availability of product on the day, as well as information about home deliveries:

“Don't forget to come see us at the Rockford Market tomorrow or at the Palatine Market on Saturday. We have TONS of eggs in stock right now - preorder a flat of 2.5 dozen small eggs for only \$8, or a flat pullet eggs for only \$5.50! (Pullets are very small eggs from young hens). And we'll be delivering next week to the Northshore and St Johns/Old Irving, so feel free to place orders for home delivery.”

Example 2:

Grassfields Cheese of Coopersville, MI, posted this informal, friendly update to their Facebook page to notify followers of a Soft Cheese Making class they were hosting at the farm, what it involved, and the costs for the day:

“Next Soft Cheese Making class is on Saturday, July 14th from 9-11.30am in the Grassfields Chapel. I will teach mozzarella, ricotta, cream cheese and butter making. \$40/person and you get cheese making supplies and a \$10 gift card to the Grassfields Farm Store. Message me if you want to sign up. It's a blast!”

Visit [AWA's Facebook page](#) to find more successful farms and examples to follow.

Useful reading:

- A vast number of books and online guides are available on setting up and managing your Facebook page. This one by Social Media Examiner on *How to set up a Facebook page for business* is useful. Or try the *For Dummies* series' online introduction to Facebook.
- The Eat Well Guide has produced a video and downloadable guide on the role social media can play in connecting and communicating with customers, called *Cultivating the Web: High Tech Tools for the Sustainable Food Movement*.



TWITTER

Twitter is a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news from individuals and organizations you might find interesting. By joining this network as a small business owner, other Twitter users can “follow” you; by doing so, your “tweet” (posted message) will appear on a list of recent activity when your “followers” log-in to Twitter.

As a new user, it's important to create a short username that will be easily recognized by your followers (preferably your farm's name). Usernames must no longer than 15 characters.

The basis of Twitter lies in small bursts of information called tweets. Each tweet can be no more than 140 characters long and provides an opportunity to update your followers on news about your farm, products, or market availability. You might want to share or comment on an interesting story or event, or provide a link to a relevant websites. You can also send photos you have taken of your farm.

Twitter can be just as interactive as Facebook. You can tell your Twitter followers where they can buy your food, where the next farmers' market will be, send images of your farm and animals, send links to

interesting website or articles you've read, and much more. Your followers can tweet messages or questions to you at any time; responding with answers will help build a dedicated customer base. Over time, your followers will "retweet" your messages to their own followers, helping to build your audience further. "Retweets" will then show up on the homepage of *their* followers, reaching even more people—and potential customers.

As well as tweeting to your existing followers, you can also attract new followers by using the hashtag symbol (#) in your tweets. People use the hashtag symbol # before a relevant keyword or phrase (no spaces) to categorize their tweets. If you tweet with a hashtag, anyone who does a search for that hashtag may find your tweet (see examples below).

Business advantages of using Twitter account:

- Using Twitter is free!
- It's an excellent forum to broadcast new information or updates about your farm, your product, or its availability
- Put your farm philosophy or message in front of your brand advocates
- Network with like-minded people
- Keep up to speed on the buzz in your community or industry
- It provides a format that most users are already familiar and comfortable with

Possible information to include in a Tweet:

- Updates about product availability, pricing, or development
- Updates about farm operations, processes, milestones, achievements
- Photographs of your farm, products, animals, staff
- Links to websites, online news articles, other media related to your brand or farming philosophy
- Thoughts and comments on the burning topic of the day

Twitter is simpler to use than Facebook, but gives the user far fewer options about posting information. Twitter is better suited to instantaneously sharing information or advertising your farm, whereas Facebook is a much more appropriate substitute for a website. Twitter is also faster-moving. Users may send a dozen tweets a day, but only share once or twice on their Facebook page per day. In turn, users would probably expect to see multiple tweets a day, but might be less receptive to multiple Facebook updates a day. Here are a few examples of effective Tweets from AWA farmers and other organizations:

Example 1:

Grazin' Angus Acres of Ghent, NY, used the following tweet to tell customers about their market stall at the Union Square Green Market in NY, and what will be on offer. *Grazin Angus Acres* have been smart: by including the twitter name of the market—@UnSqGreenmarket—in their tweet, it's highly likely that the market owners would have seen it, and "retweeted" it to their hundreds of followers! Remember: tweets can be no more than 140 characters, so keep it concise:

"Get your grilling needs @UnSqGreenmarket today, Chip has fresh pastured Chicken, Rib Eyes, NY Strips, Burgers, and No-Nitrate beef hot dogs."

Example 2:

Animal Welfare Approved sent the following tweet to its 4,500 followers to highlight a great article in the New York Times which included coverage of AWA Meili Farm. Note the weblink to the article which is automatically shorted by Twitter, but followers can still click on the link to read the article:

“Craig Meili, of Meili Farm says he "has had to administer antibiotics to his animals only once or twice for illness." nytimes.com/2014/01/21/bus...”

Example 3:

Good Food Team NRDC not only include a weblink to an article by AWA’s Andrew Gunther to their followers, but they also used a hashtag (#) to promote their tweet. So anyone who has set their Twitter account to show tweets using the “#antibiotic” keyword will also have received this tweet. Also, note the shortened website link—using a free website called **BitLink**—which helps to keep the total number of characters in the tweet below 140:

“Great opinion piece by Andrew Gunther of @AWAapproved on FDA's new voluntary #antibiotic guidelines: bit.ly/1bW1aPt”

Useful Reading

- A huge number of books and online guides to Twitter are available, but this guide on **How to Use Twitter for Business and Marketing** by Social Media Examiner is a great place to start.

LOOKING FOR BASIC ADVICE?

Your AWA Farmer and Market Outreach Coordinator can answer your questions or provide a quick tutorial on using different features in either Facebook or Twitter. You can find their contact details on the AWA website [here](#).

About Animal Welfare Approved

Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) audits, certifies and supports farmers raising their animals according to the highest welfare standards, outdoors on pasture or range. Called a “badge of honor for farmers” and the “gold standard,” AWA has come to be the most highly regarded food label when it comes to animal welfare, pasture-based farming and sustainability. All AWA standards, policies and procedures are available on the AWA website, making it one of the most transparent certifications available.

Animal Welfare Approved

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