



**SHARE YOUR FARM STORY: MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL KIT**  
**Farm & Agriculture Resources for Media (FARM)**  
**WAYS TO GENERATE MEDIA**

**STEP 1: Identify your media goals**

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**

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

Note: “Create Your Compelling Story” Worksheet in Tool Kit takes you through Steps 1 and 2.

**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.

**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.**

After an article or story has run or aired, send a thank you note with ideas for future story ideas.



# National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

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### 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. 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/](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**

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.

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.



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### Farm & Agriculture Resources for Media (FARM)

#### WAYS TO ENGAGE MEDIA

##### **1. Create Headlines with Impact**

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.”

##### **2. 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.

##### **3. 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).

##### **4. Prepare for the Interview**

Determine the journalist’s name/affiliation and ask when the article might run and if the writer or journalist has a deadline. Confirm the topic and consider requesting the questions in advance. Be prepared with details and prepared to back up your statements. Don’t assume the reporter knows much, or anything, about the topic, so start from the beginning. While mentioning your website is always suggested, providing some written material as well should not be overlooked.

##### **5. Create 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.



## **6. Host a Field Day on your farm**

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. Consider offering a contest to generate excitement and make the event more visual. 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.

## **7. Offer a community educational seminar**

Outreach into the community helps build bridges and address concerns neighbors might have related to how you approach farming or ranching. Seminars could address sheep shearing, food processing, flower bouquet arrangements, renewable energy or other aspects of your operations that might be of interest to community members.

## **8. 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](http://www.localharvest.org)

[www.eatwellguide.org](http://www.eatwellguide.org) (go to “suggest a listing” and suggest yourself)

[www.csacenter.org](http://www.csacenter.org) (Robyn Van En Center )

[www.allorganiclinks.com](http://www.allorganiclinks.com) (Various organic products)

## **9. Set up a Press Room**

Using the media kit templates available on-line on the NSAC site, set up a special section that links from your farm’s main home page to specifically target and assist the media. This can be called a “Press Room” or “Media Room” or “Information for Media” or “Media Kit.” Think of it as a “one-stop shop” to make things easier to someone who wants to do a story on your operations.

## **10. Be Quick to Respond**

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.



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**INTERVIEW TIPS**

- Research the publication, media outlets and/or reporter or writer ahead of time to get a feel for their style and approach. Thank 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.
- Do not assume the audience knows everything you do. 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.
- 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.
- 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.



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## SHARE YOUR FARM STORY: MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL KIT

### Farm & Agriculture Resources for Media (FARM)

#### 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 100<sup>th</sup>/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.



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## **SHARE YOUR FARM STORY: MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL KIT**

### **Farm & Agriculture Resources for Media (FARM)**

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/CREDITS**

Portions of this Tool Kit were made possible by Renewing the Countryside, a non-profit organization that strengthens rural areas by championing those who are renewing the countryside through sustainable and innovative initiatives, businesses and projects.

<http://www.renewingthecountryside.org>



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## **WORKSHEET: CREATE YOUR COMPELLING STORY**

### **Identify your communication goals:**

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

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

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

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**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)

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2)

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3)

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### **Three key words that capture your business philosophy:**

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### **Describe your farm:**

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

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**SHARE YOUR FARM STORY: MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL KIT**  
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**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. 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 fact check their piece to make sure they have accurate information on your farm.

**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.
- 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.

**Press Kit Key Elements**

**1. Farm Fact Sheet**

- Quick and concise overview of key farm information.
- Starter templates (downloadable Microsoft Word documents) available via FARM Toolkit.

**2. Farmer Bio**

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

**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>