

Marketing to Enhance Farm Viability



Working with the Media: Public Relations & Publicity

The media

The media can be a great asset and offer good exposure for your business. Building a relationship with the media requires preparation and consideration. If you contact the media, be prepared to be interviewed and asked questions! Be sure that when you contact them you have something newsworthy to say. They have limited time and do not like finding out that there is really no story and you are just fishing for free publicity.

STEP 1 WRITING RELEASE OR ADVISORY

A news release or press release is a news article that you write and send to the media (print, radio, television). It is not an advertisement or a letter to reporters or editors.

When a reporter receives a press release, he or she asks one question: is this of interest or value to my readers? If they

like the release, they have to sell it to an editor who will be asking the same question. Understanding this will help you write a better release and increase your chances of getting it published or aired.

Communicating with your customers via the media is one tool for marketing your business, but shouldn't be the only one you use. For information on other

marketing tools, see the CISA Tip Sheet Developing a Marketing Plan for Your Farm.

You might write a news release about:

- ❖ Special events
- ❖ New products
- ❖ Products in season
- ❖ Your involvement in local, regional, or national issues
- ❖ Research projects
- ❖ Awards and grants.

An effective news release shows:

Relevance

Make your news relevant to the reader.

Impact

Explain how the reader will be affected.
Tell the number of people affected.

Timeliness

Write about an upcoming event or recent event, or relate the story to a current issue.

Focus

An effective news release has a clear goal, e.g., getting people to attend your event, promoting a new product, or increasing customer sales. Know your goal and be clear.

Pictures tell stories

High resolution photos on disks or available from a website are valued by editors and increase the chances of a story getting picked up.



Contact CISA for sample press releases and media advisories if you have never written one.

Writing the news release

When writing your news release, be accurate, be brief (one or two pages), put the most important facts in the lead paragraph, and use correct grammar and spelling (have someone else check it if you are not sure).

The press release has evolved over the last few years from the "Five Ws"—who, what, where, when, and why—to a more dynamic and descriptive format. Press releases are still expected to have the Five Ws, but they must be surrounded by seductive text that grabs the readers' attention and draws them in.

There are two reasons for this trend. One is that the media, just like the rest of us, is getting jaded and they need to be hooked by a good story. They don't want to spend the time reading between the lines to find one. The other is that newspapers and other media, especially in small communities, have very limited staff





and can't always spend the time to write a story. If you send them a well written and descriptive release they often print it without any edits!

Here are two short sections of press releases from CISA's Strawberry Festival to illustrate this point.



The Traditional Approach **Strawberry Festival June 26–27**

CISA announces their third annual Strawberry Festival at the Deerfield Inn. Celebrate strawberry season with strawberry food and fun and games. Admission is free.



The Modern Approach **Local Hero Strawberry Festival—** **the Valley's best berry blast!**

Two days of strawberry growing, picking, cooking, and eating.

Nothing says summer like sweet, juicy strawberries. Kids and adults alike love the fresh, aromatic flavor of these ruby red locally grown jewels. Celebrate all that the strawberry has to offer at CISA's Third Annual Local Hero Strawberry Festival on June 26 and 27, at the Deerfield Inn, rain or shine. Enjoy sweet and savory berry dishes, cooking demonstrations, family fun and games. Admission for all activities is free.

Both versions contain the Five Ws. But which one do you think sounds more enticing to your customers?

Deb Habib is one of a group of twelve neighbors who organizes the North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival in Orange, MA (www.garlicandarts.org). "I write the news release the way I would like it to be written, making sure to include the key points," she says. "For example, in a press release before an event, I would highlight things that are enticing and will make readers want to come to the event."

The media often uses news releases that Deb has written. "If it is well written, many local papers will reprint a press release verbatim. I recommend asking them in advance what their policy is about using news releases."

STEP 2 PRESS RELATIONS

If you've written a good press release you should be hearing from the media soon. Now you are going to be building up your press relations: giving the interview, providing follow-up information, and thanking the reporter for the coverage.

Interviews

When you are being interviewed, treat the experience as a conversation between you and a friend. Use conversational language rather than jargon. Give a specific answer when asked a specific question. Be careful about using slang or making jokes. While they may make perfect sense in the context of a conversation, they often look odd in print.

After the interview is over be sure to tell the interviewer that you are available for follow-up questions and give them a reliable telephone number and time they can reach you. Provide your company brochure and business card. Ask the reporter to visit your website and suggest that they include the website address in the story.

Don't ask to see a story ahead of time. Rather, ask if they can quote back to you what you said so that you can be sure you were clear. Use this request sparingly; a reporter is not going to read back the entire 15 minute interview to you!

tip

Use a media advisory to alert the media of a news event or photo opportunity that they might want to cover. A media advisory is not intended for publication, it's not a news article, but a notice that contains basic information such as the date, time, and location of an event, who will attend or speak at the event and whether there will be photo opportunities. The media will use the information to determine whether to attend your event and cover it with a story or a photo.



Follow-up

If you are contacted for follow-up information, respond promptly. Reporters are on deadlines and many times they need the information right away.

After the story. Don't be disappointed if the story differs from what you expected. Even a positive story may contain one or two negative points. Be sure to thank the reporter for covering your farm! They appreciate praise as they often get criticism for 'blowing' a story or quote from people they interview.

Relationship building

Be sure to keep an accurate list of press contacts, especially those that have given you good coverage. You will have an easier time working with someone you already know and they will do a better job with the story because they know you. Rather than offering exclusives, give all your regular press contact a heads up when you know you will be sending them a release. Be aware of staggering deadlines. A weekly paper needs more lead time and they don't like to be seen as following the dailies. You might want to consider

Why not try a postcard offering 10% off their next farmstand visit?

giving them the release in advance so they have time to get it into their schedule.

If you do this well, you will develop good relationships with local reporters, and they may seek you out rather than waiting for your press release!

"I always follow-up a news release with a personal conversation with my media contacts," says Deb Habib. "It really helps if you can make a personal contact in a way that reflects the event. For example, if you are having a Peach Festival, invite the reporter over for peach pie to talk about the upcoming event."



Good relationships with local media outlets can result in regular features about your farm. For example, TV weathercasters often look for interesting locations for remote broadcasts. If they come to your farm and find it attractive and welcoming they may come back several times a season. Karen Randall, president and owner of Randall's

Farm and Greenhouse, in Ludlow, Massachusetts, is often contacted by local television stations to address how the weather is affecting seasonal crops, such as strawberries. This began happening after Karen developed a relationship with the station. "Building relationships is the key to effectively working with the media," says Karen. "Now I am used as a resource person when the media wants to talk about the weather, a certain crop, or farming in general."

Two other local media features that you might want to explore include writing as a guest columnist in the local paper or a participating as a featured guest on a local radio or television talk show. While not for everyone, if you find yourself with the talent, interest, and time to take advantage of these publicity opportunities, you will reap the benefit of added publicity for you and your farm business.





STEP 3 OTHER PUBLICITY TOOLS

Product samples

Give away samples of your products at your farm stand or in a local store that sells your products. It is an inexpensive way to build good will and hand out your business card and brochure. Take advantage of the time to talk up your product to customers.

Donations to a local charity event

Donations are like tastings, only done on a larger scale. Be sure to talk to your tax advisor on the deductibility of your donation, if that is a concern for you. The charity you donate to should give you ample opportunity to distribute materials at the event. At minimum, you should be allowed to distribute your brochures to attendees. You might even be able to sell your product at the event or get recognition in the event program or in any paid advertising promoting the event.

Archive

And don't forget to archive any press that you, your business or your special event receive. Deb's partner, Ricky Baruc, cuts newspaper articles out of the paper and saves them in a waterproof three-ring binder with each article in a plastic

sleeve. Deb and Ricky bring the binder with them to all events and speaking engagements to show attendees what the press is saying about the North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival and about their farm business and non-profit education center, Seeds of Solidarity Farm and Seeds of Solidarity Education Center, Inc. (www.seedsofsolidarity.org). "When I show other people what has been written about us in the press, it builds word of mouth publicity about our farm and what we have to offer the community," says Deb. "It also helps other farmers and non-profit directors see that it is not impossible to get the press to cover your farm in the way you would like the story to be written."



Therese Fitzsimmons adapted materials for this "Tip Sheet" from Creating Successful Agritourism Activities for Your Farm by Mark Lattanzi (May 2005), a CISA publication. See www.buylocalfood.com to order a copy. She also used material from Start Spreading the News: Writing an Effective News Release by Diane Baedeker Petit.

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