

# One Size Does Not Fit All

Targeted communication key to reaching your consumers.

by **Barb Baylor Anderson**

Whether you are selling bulls to a commercial buyer, branded beef to a local consumer, or an environmental message to community leaders, the right message must be targeted to the right audience to be effective. Likewise, your message must be delivered through the right pathways to reach your audience. Agricultural groups with experience in helping craft and deliver messages offer some tips for talking to your consumers.

## Define your audience

Angus producers must interact with a number of different categories of consumers. Each audience requires distinct messages and communications tools. The key, say the experts, is to define your audience by their age, tastes, interests or other qualifying factors.

“We reach school children with our Real Trees for Kids Program (<http://realtrees4kids.org>) to emphasize the value at an early age of choosing a real Christmas tree,” says Steve Drake, president, Drake & Co., Saint Louis, Mo., an association management company. “We’ve found the older generation has made up their minds on many issues, so we have had success going after Generation Y (those born between 1975 and 2000).”

Drake, who manages the National Christmas Tree Association, says science teachers are another audience they have identified for their messaging as a way to reach students. They set up booths at



national teachers’ conferences, for example, and developed an “advergame” to attract young people. The advergame allows the association to use online video gaming to educate players about real trees and reach Generation Y consumers.

“It is a viral marketing concept. You hope people will use it and send the game link to their friends,” Drake says. “Our game has been requested by 3 million people. We are able to track who has gone to the site to view or play the game. It has been one way for us to get our message out to the audience we want to reach more effectively.”

## Deliver clear, concise messages

Once you determine your audience, developing the right message is important.

“Your message has to make sense to your audience,” says Linda Funk, president, Food Insight, who works with The Soyfoods Council. “It must be clear and concise.”

Funk says that, as with soy foods, beef producers must find ways to communicate that their product is healthy, nutritious, good-tasting and easy to use.

“Define what it is, how to use it and why it is good for you,” she says, adding that words are not the only effective way to deliver a message. “Show your product in the context of a healthy meal, use pictures and deliver your messages with recipes and brochures and even use a blog to talk about your product. Provide your messages to the media.”

When it comes to delivering messages to consumer groups, Don Lipton, public relations director for the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), Washington, D.C., says producers need to communicate in consumer-friendly terms.

“Don’t overload them with information. First and foremost, consumers want to know that producers share their values,” he says. “Talk to them using language they will understand. They will be more receptive to the information you provide.”

Dairy Management Inc. (DMI), which manages the national dairy checkoff, has developed the, “Telling Your Story” program to help dairy producers build positive relationships with neighbors, community and the media. They have three training modules: Connect with Your Community (community outreach training), Capture the Crowd (presentation training) and Control the Questions (media training). The modules are open to producers who want to effectively tell their stories.

“Producers learn to communicate with the public and to be an advocate for their operations. We help them develop a community relations program for their business plan that includes a mission statement, tagline, farm fact sheet and more,” says David Pelzer, DMI industry relations senior vice president, Rosemont, Ill. “We do presentation training so producers can go to community groups such as the Rotary or Boy Scouts and talk about how dairy farms benefit the community. Our focus groups test messaging, so farmers know what consumer issues are and how to address them in relevant, credible ways.”

### Offer on-farm experiences

Many agricultural groups recommend producers host an open house or serve a meal on their farms to deliver messages to key audiences, such as raising awareness of an operation’s environmental sustainability or showcasing a product.

“Producers are the best people to talk to

consumers about on-farm practices. Our research shows that consumers trust farmers and rate them as highly credible and relevant sources,” says Pelzer. “Consumers are interested in what goes on at the farm level, and they want to learn more.”

Pelzer recommends producers choose the best spokesperson for the farm before an event is held. A spokesperson does not have to be the producer, but can be the person in the operation who has strong communication skills. He even suggests that communications become part of an employee’s job description, so it is taken seriously.

“Put a face on your operation through tours and visits. The more consumers understand and appreciate the quality of your operation and good management practices, the better,” he says. “Veterinarians, ag lenders and nutritionists are also highly credible sources. Encourage them to speak up for your operation and be a partner in your success.”

### Focus on social media

The advergaming developed by the National Christmas Tree Association is just one example of the innovative ways the Internet can deliver a message. Many farm-related organizations have developed web sites devoted to consumer questions.

*Dairyfarmingtoday.org* is a resource that DMI uses to educate consumers about on-farm practices. The site offers information about life on the farm, environmental practices, quality and safety issues and dairy technology. Consumers can get questions answered about how the dairy products they consume get from the farm to the table.

DMI is also using the Internet to conduct webinars for dairy producers to become better advocates by using consistent messaging and learning effective blogging techniques.

The AFBF has launched the consumer web site “Your Agriculture” at [www.fb.org/yourag](http://www.fb.org/yourag). The site is designed to educate the nonfarming public about agriculture issues, farmers and ranchers, and food, fiber and fuel.

The site includes a “Meet a Farmer” section complete with audio slideshow and Q&A, a series of quizzes to test farm IQ and determine if the consumer is “smarter than a fifth-grade farm kid,” a consumers’ guide



to farm policy, and agriculture issues. AFBF also offers the FBlog, the Foodie Blog and a Facebook page to reach consumers.

“If you can’t bring consumers to the farm, then using the Internet is a good alternative. Blogs and YouTube are good resources,” Lipton says. “People in your own community may not understand what you do, so look for new, effective ways to communicate.”

### Partner with a cause

Another fresh approach to reaching consumers is through cause marketing, partnering a for-profit operation with a nonprofit cause. The National Christmas Tree Association and Christmas Spirit Foundation created a “Trees for Troops” program to deliver real Christmas trees to the families of troops serving in active duty. The groups partnered with FedEx for delivery of the trees, which to date involve more than 50,000 families.

“About 60% of our members are involved with Trees for Troops,” Drake says. “We developed a template news release for our members, and the local press has covered many of these farms donating trees to troops’ families. The local media response has been so great that FedEx even decided they didn’t need to use their agency for publicity.”

For more information and resources to begin a targeted communications program for your operation, visit [www.angus.org](http://www.angus.org), and view the marketing tools section.

