



A Social Media Guide for Farmers



Asap
Local Food
Strong Farms
Healthy Communities

What is social media?

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat—"social media" is the collective term for these websites and applications. Unlike traditional media, where a single author or organization talks to a passive audience, social media serves as a place for public conversations between many users. People use social media to share and discuss their daily lives, including their buying habits, with friends and family—it's online word-of-mouth, available for free to anyone. And just like word-of-mouth, social media can have a huge impact on the success of your business.

How does social media benefit my business?

Of all adults in the US, 68 percent use Facebook, and 66 percent of those users visit the site every day. A third of all US adults use sites such as Instagram and Pinterest. Among millennials, over 90 percent regularly use social media. Simply put, the people who will buy from you spend a lot of time looking at social media. You should make sure your business is in front of their eyes.

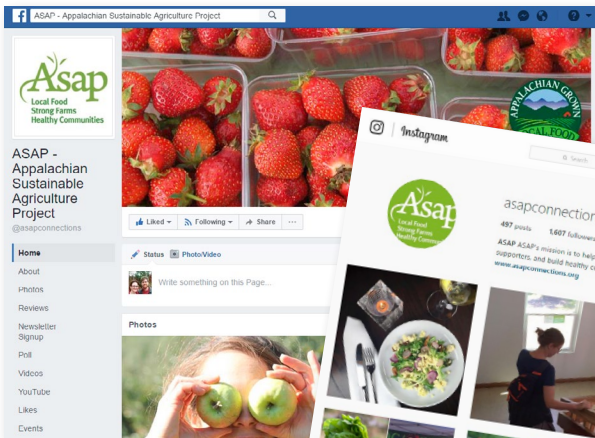
How do I use it?

The most important thing to remember about social media is that your business shares the same space as your customers' friends. Whatever you do must compete with the daily activities and interests of those personal networks. Instead of simply promoting your business, your goal on social media should be to build a community and participate in conversations. People enjoy learning about the day-to-day stories and interests of your business much more than they enjoy advertising. This neighborly approach will make your business more familiar to potential customers, create good feelings about your brand, and ultimately lead to greater sales.

November 2017

Written and compiled by ASAP staff. For more resources visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

Copyright © 2017 Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP). Permission granted to reproduce for personal or educational use as long as the document is not altered and this copyright notice is affixed.



Choosing Social Media

What platforms are right for my business?

When choosing the platforms for your business's social media marketing, you should have two main concerns in mind. First, who are your customers? Different sites tend to attract different demographics of users in terms of age, gender, and location. Second, how much effort will you be able to spend on social media? If you lack the time or resources to regularly update multiple sites with high-quality photos and videos, consider sticking to a single, simpler platform. The following sections describe the most popular social media sites and what roles they can play in your marketing.

Facebook

If you only have time for one social media platform, make it Facebook. As the world's most popular social media site, Facebook attracts the widest range of users; you're sure to connect with a large proportion of your customer base. Facebook allows you to maintain a detailed business profile, post a wide variety of content types, and create highly specific advertising to reach new buyers.

Instagram

Instagram is the premier social media site for sharing photos and other visual content. If your business has a lot of visually appealing products such as livestock, diverse produce, or fresh flowers, or if you have time to take pictures of your work in action, Instagram can be a great way to build excitement. Instagram users tend to be younger and more urban than those of other social media sites.

YouTube

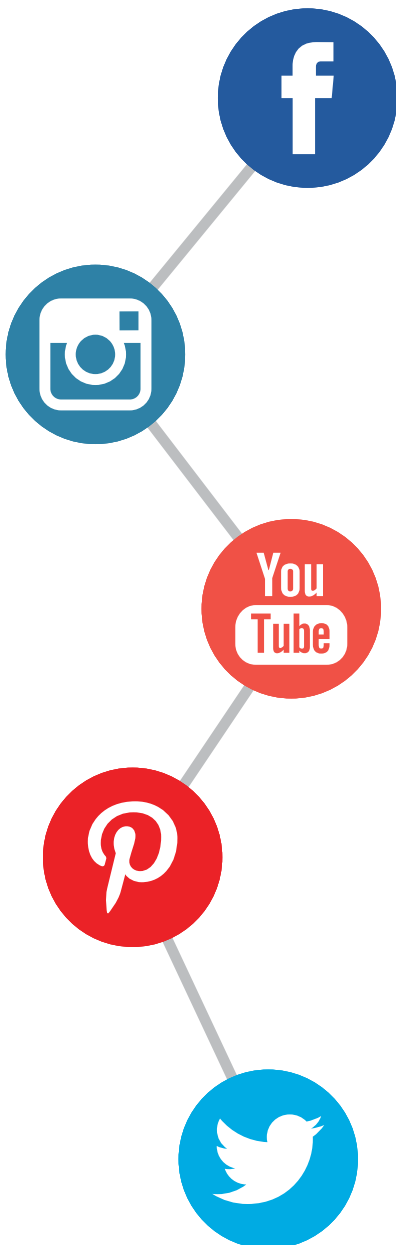
YouTube is the best place to share quality videos of your business. The emphasis here is on quality; if you don't have the time or resources to craft professional-looking content, you may want to avoid posting on YouTube. However, an investment in good video can yield big rewards, as amusing or interesting YouTube content is often shared widely over other social media platforms.

Pinterest

Pinterest focuses on collections of labeled photographs, known individually as pins. As with Instagram, businesses with lots of visually appealing products can attract lots of interest on this platform. Advice in visual form, such as cooking or baking recipes and infographics on farming practices, can also do well. Pinterest users tend to skew more female than those of other social media sites.

Twitter

Twitter allows users to quickly post short updates, known as tweets, that are often marked with hashtags to join with broader conversations. Because the average lifespan (time seen after posting) of a tweet is only 14 minutes, Twitter is most suited to businesses that can post multiple times throughout the day. Twitter's users skew more male and educated than those of other social media sites. Twitter is also particularly popular among media workers and journalists, which makes it useful for businesses that regularly generate interesting news.



Starting a Social Media Profile

What do I need to get started?

Regardless of which social media platforms you choose to use, you'll want to do some preparation before establishing your profile. First, write out a description of your target audience—who are they, where do they live, what do they like, how do they interact with you? This audience analysis will help you think about how best to fit in with your customers' online lives. Second, create a schedule for when to publish content. Consistency is crucial for making your customers feel like you're a part of their community. Third, determine who in your business will be responsible for running your social media. Make sure that person understands your audience, the social media platforms you choose to use, and the regular schedule for posting content on your pages.

Profile creation checklist

The following checklist outlines the must-have content you'll need to establish a Facebook profile. You can use the same content for many other social media sites, so consider following this checklist even if you decide not to use Facebook. Note that if you establish multiple social media profiles, you should use the same branding (images and description) across all of them.

□ Cover image

This is the featured at the top of your profile and is your audience's first impression upon arriving at your page. Choose an image that represents your brand, such as a landscape of your farm or a shot of people enjoying your products. Consider overlaying your business's slogan or tagline on top of the photo for extra placement of your main message. After you upload this image, make sure you click on it to add a description with a link to your website.

□ Profile photo

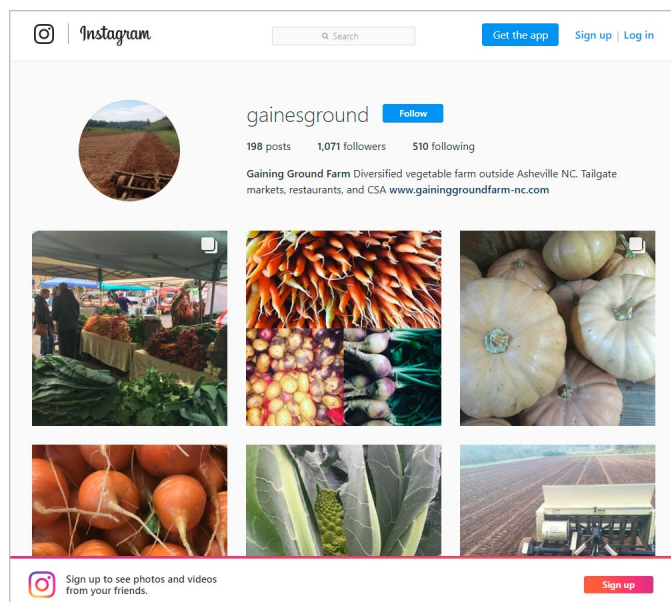
Your profile image appears in the upper left corner of your page and is included next to every post or comment you make. Because your profile photo is used at different sizes throughout Facebook, make sure you upload an easily recognizable image, such as your logo, in this slot.

□ About section

The About section includes your page's category, description, address, hours, products, and contact information. Fill out every available field so interested customers can learn as much as possible about your business.

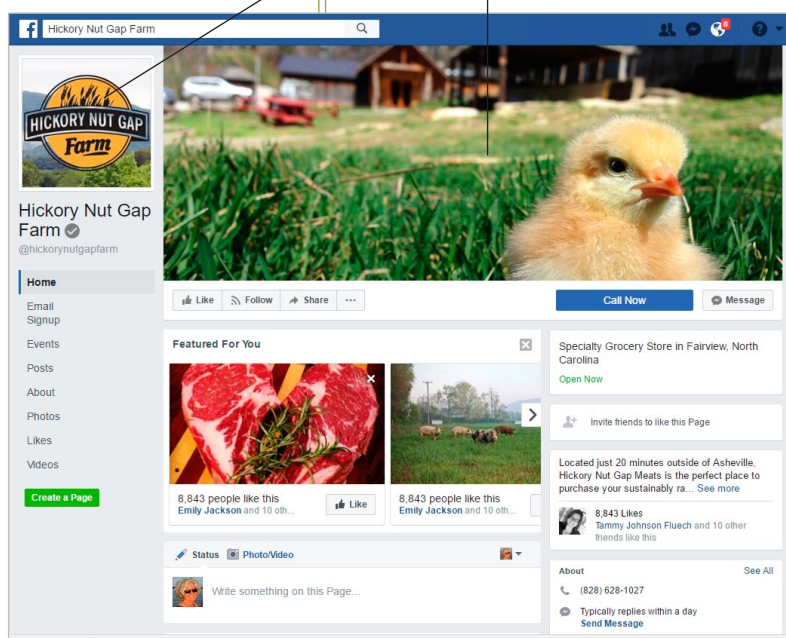
□ Page roles

Page roles, located under Settings on the upper right of your Facebook page, allows you to assign people to perform specific tasks on your page. By default, you will be the admin of the page once you create it and have full access to all of its functions. If other employees at your business will be handling social media, it's best to add them as editors.



profile photo

cover image



Creating a business page

Business accounts are preferable because you have access to insights, which provide analytics and reports about the visitors to your social media sites. To make a Facebook page for your farm business you must first have a personal account. Create a page for your farm or business, and select the business type. In Instagram you can convert your current profile into a business account in settings.

Running a Social Media Profile



Social media calendar

Social media is a marathon, not a sprint: its benefits accumulate over time as you build a base of followers for your business.

Therefore, you should plan for the long term using a social media calendar. By keeping tabs on what and when you plan to post, you'll ensure the right balance of promotional and informational content. You'll also ensure you have room in your schedule to promote crucial events such as new product launches or market openings.

Simple calendar tools such as Google Calendar can make months of social content visible at a glance. If you also use a digital calendar for your business's events, you can easily match social postings to that activity. Scheduling content around holidays often helps boost engagement, and lists of lesser-known holidays can give you more ideas. For example, National Siblings Day, National Farmers Markets Day, and National Puppy Day all have their own place on the calendar.

Scheduling posts

Social media tools are available to schedule your posts in advance, making it more convenient to deliver content at the right time. Facebook's Publishing Tools offers a Scheduled Posts tab that allows you to create posts weeks or months in advance of publication. Twitter's TweetDeck also allows you to generate content on your own time. If you plan to use multiple social media platforms, consider using Hootsuite, which lets you see and manage all of your social profiles in a single location.

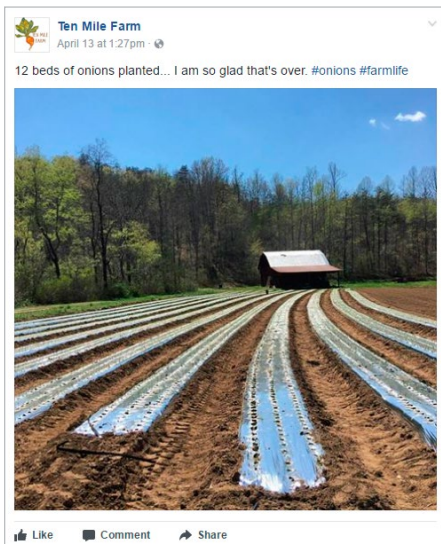
What should I post?

Remember that your social media presence exists in the same place as your customers' friends and family. Your content is competing for attention with baby pictures, breaking news, and travel stories—if you spend all your time advertising your products and services, your customers will tune you out or stop following your page. Because social media sites show users more content from people and pages with which they are actively involved, you want your posts to attract as many likes, shares, and comments as possible.

To that end, many social media professionals recommend the 80-20 rule: roughly 80% of your content should entertain or educate your customers, while only 20% or so should directly market your business. Applied to a farm, that 80% could include recipes for seasonal produce, attractive pictures of your fields and livestock, short "day in the life" stories or images, announcements of local food events, videos discussing your farming process, and planting advice for home gardeners. The 20% of marketing content could include your presence at local farmers markets, CSA share availability, new partnerships with restaurants or groceries, and farm tour or event announcements.

Remember why people want to connect with your farm. This is a chance to help customers connect with the joys and challenges of farming, offering them a chance to share in the story of your farm and the cycles of the seasons. Customers seeking out local food and farms are looking for authenticity, transparency and the stories behind where their food comes from. Posts that offer insight into your growing practices, the amount of work and risk that goes into farming, or a peek into your farm story are going to be engaging.

When should I post?



More important than the timing of your posts is consistency. Your followers should learn to expect something new from your page on a regular basis. That schedule could be several times per day on Twitter, once a day on Facebook, or once per week on Pinterest, but it should stay as constant as possible. This approach makes your business look more professional and shows new followers that they can expect regular activity from you.

The actual timing of posts depends on your audience. As a general rule, the best times to post social content are roughly 12 noon and 3 pm—during lunchtime and the afternoon slump, when people are likely to be checking their computers and smartphones. However, your audience may be most involved with social media at different times. On Facebook, check the Posts tab of your page's Insights to see a graph of when your fans are online, then plan to post for those peak hours.

How should I post?

Social media posts should generally be short and simple. On average, the Facebook posts that receive the most engagement have 80 characters or fewer, and the optimal range for Twitter tweets is roughly 71–100 characters. Pinterest descriptions and Instagram captions can be longer: the best Pinterest captions have approximately 200 characters, while Instagram captions can contain up to 2,200 characters (although only the first 110 or so are displayed in picture previews).

With that little text, how can you engage your audience? As the old adage goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. Use the written part of your post to explain an interesting image or give context to an infographic. You can also use hyperlinks to pages with longer content. Facebook automatically pulls pictures, titles, and descriptions from linked pages, all of which you can edit. Importantly, you can delete the web address from hyperlink posts on Facebook to save characters while keeping the link itself.

Interacting with followers

If you've successfully identified the interests of your followers, they should begin liking and commenting on the content you post. That's your invitation to continue the conversation. Like as many comments and shares of your content as possible; every time you do so, your follower sees your business's name and understands that you value their attention. If you have a way to add more insight to someone's comment, add a comment of your own. Remember that your goal is to make your business become another trusted voice in your followers' social communities.

On occasion, visitors to your page may leave negative feedback about your services or products. Don't shy away from responding to these comments. By promptly addressing complaints with respect and compassion, you make your business appear more professional and demonstrate concern for your customers. Hiding or ignoring negative posts often just makes your critics more critical.

Advertising





Words to Know

Like any activity, social media has its own vocabulary. Here are some of the key words marketers use when talking about social media.

Analytics—technology that records what happens on social media, including who visits your business, what interests they have, and how they interact with your content.

Boost—advertising on Facebook to show your posts to people who wouldn't otherwise see them.

Content—anything you post on social media, including text, pictures, videos, audio, and links.

Comment—a user's response to content, usually displayed below the original post.

Engagement—any action someone takes on your content, including likes, shares, and comments.

Hashtag—a word or phrase preceded by the # sign that links users to all other posts with the same hashtag, allowing them to discover new content on their topics of interest.

Insights—Facebook's built-in analytics about visitors to your social media account.

Like—the main way users show support or interest in content on Facebook.

Mention—the act of tagging another user's social media account in a post, usually by using the @ symbol followed by that user's name.

Platform—a social media site or application, such as Facebook or Instagram.

Post—a single piece of content on social media.

Reach—the number of unique people who have seen content from your business.

Share—the act of reposting someone else's content to your own social media page.

Trending—a word, phrase, or topic that is popular on social media at a given moment.

Viral—any content that is shared widely through social media networks.

Why advertise on social media?

No matter how engaging your content is, your business can normally only reach your followers and their social connections. To grow, you need to reach people who haven't heard of you, and advertising can be a quick, cost-effective way to do so. By spending as little as a few dollars, you can get your business's name and products in front of hundreds of potential new customers.

What do I advertise?

Advertising on social media generally focuses on two main objectives: building brand awareness and driving interest in sales. For the first objective, you might use a colorful image of your farm's products linked to your webpage or Facebook profile. For the second, direct links to event Facebook pages with short, engaging copy work well. Once customers express interest in an event, you can continue to reach them by posting on the event page.

Targeting your ads

The success of social media advertising is tied to how tightly ads can be targeted to specific groups of people. For example, a Facebook ad can be shown only to people ages 45–55 who live within 10 miles of Asheville, have a college education, and show an interest in local food. If you know the demographics and interests of the people who currently buy from you, you can easily direct ads to find similar customers on social media.

How to advertise

The options for advertising can be overwhelming, so the best place to start is with Facebook's on-site tutorials. These resources will guide you through how to set an ad objective, target your audience, and create copy for your ad. Searching Google for "social media advertising guide" will also yield a huge number of resources to inspire your advertising strategy. In general, remember that short is sweet when it comes to ad copy and that attractive, high-quality images grab the most attention from potential customers.

Analytics and Insights

Social media analytics let you see who your followers are and their interests. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter provide a free analytic dashboard with key statistics about your account, including demographics about your followers (i.e. age, gender, location), which of your posts have been most popular, and when your users are most active. Use these insights to plan what and when to post to strategically appeal to your audience.