

From The Big Apple to The Sunset Strip America's Farmers and Ranchers Are Leading The Food Dialogues

Ketchum and maslansky + partners and U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance, Jan 1,2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award Winner — Events and Observances (Seven or Fewer Days)
—Associations

Trust in American agriculture is eroding. Stories about antibiotic “superbugs” and GMO “Frankenfoods” run rampant in today’s media while consumers have begun to question how their food is grown and raised. Up until now, farmers and ranchers have been left out of the conversation. That’s why the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance (USFRA) created the Food Dialogues: LA and the Food Dialogues: NY panel events. For the first time, farmers and ranchers started talking in some of the most important cultural epicenters with the most powerful voices in academia, science, entertainment and consumer activism.

Events and observances (seven or fewer days) includes programs or events scheduled for one to seven consecutive days (not including planning and preparation). Events may include commemorations, observances, openings, celebrations or other special activities, and must occur within a time span of one week. The association subcategory includes trade and industry groups, professional societies, chambers of commerce and similar organizations.

Full Text: SITUATION ANALYSIS

Trust in American agriculture is eroding as consumers’ concerns about the food they feed their families grow daily. Stories about antibiotic “superbugs” and GMO “Frankenfoods” run rampant in today’s media while consumers have begun to question how their food is grown and raised. Up until now, an important voice has been left out of the polarizing food production conversation – America’s farmers and ranchers.

That’s why the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance (USFRA) was launched in 2011 to renew trust in American agriculture by inviting farmers and ranchers and the most influential people from across the food spectrum to groundbreaking dialogues aimed at answering American’s real questions about complex food issues.

Through the Food Dialogues: LA and the Food Dialogues: NY panel events, farmers and ranchers started talking in some of the most important cultural epicenters with the most powerful voices in academia, science and nutrition, entertainment and consumer activism. With the support of media partnerships, a growing online community and a robust digital campaign, USFRA carried momentum from the dialogues off the stage and into the dining rooms of influencers and consumers throughout the country. And for the first time, farmers and ranchers were sitting at the head of the table to lead the conversation.

RESEARCH

For more than a decade, the agriculture industry has tried to improve its image through beautiful campaigns about family farms and commitments to producing “safe, affordable and abundant food.” Millions of dollars were spent but public trust continued to deteriorate and the campaigns

weren't working. USFRA and Ketchum worked with maslansky, luntz + partners to conduct message testing through a research technique known as dial testing. Often used in the presidential debates, dial testing provides immediate feedback on how messages resonate emotionally – what audiences hear and feel versus what messages say.

Five sessions were conducted with farmers, ranchers and food influencers in NY, DC and LA. Here are the findings:

- **“Committed to Safe, Affordable, Abundant Food Production” didn’t resonate as a message.** 200+ messages were tested – most fell flat or were perceived as negative, even though they were true. The polarization of the food wars was so entrenched that almost no traditional messages were seen as credible. Specifically the mantra of the farming community: *Safe, Affordable, Abundant Food* was falling flat. When farmers say “our methods are proven safe,” people heard “pesticides, antibiotics and hormones may not be safe in the long-run.”
- **Americans love farmers but not farming.** Americans still love farmers and ranchers as individuals but distrust farming and ranching as an industry. 75% of consumers and influencers view farmers and ranchers favorably while only 42% see the way our food is grown and raised favorably.
- **People care about long-term health effects of food.** And the messaging wasn't answering the questions people had.
- **To gain credibility, farmers and ranchers need to acknowledge concerns, listen and show commitment to improving.** Overall, there needed to be a strategy around conversation, listening and shifting from old messages to being dedicated to answering consumers' questions about food.

PLANNING

Objectives

- Enlist 20 panelists from media, academia, consumer activists and science to participate in panels with farmers and ranchers
- Grow Facebook community by securing 16,500 'likes' and an online engagement rating of five percent
- Generate 22 million media impressions
- Increase the number of people who believe agriculture is headed in the right direction

Target audience

- *High-Impact Influencers* who affect media and entertainment coverage on food, customers' decisions/policies and policymaker opinions;
- *Food Elite* a.k.a. consumer communicators whose opinions and word-of-mouth reach other consumers.

Messages

- The U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance (USFRA) is a coalition of more than 80 agricultural groups and their partners that recognizes that Americans want to know where their food comes from, how it was grown or raised and if it is good for their long-term health.
- Farmers and ranchers haven't always done the best job answering Americans' questions about how our food is grown and raised. That stops now. Consumers rightfully want to know that we are treating animals well, maintaining food quality and doing our jobs in ways that don't harm the environment.
- We are creating channels to answer Americans' questions about food. USFRA is inviting people who don't always agree in addition to all types of farmers and ranchers, including organic and small farmers, as well as our agribusiness partners to be a part of the discussion.

Strategy

The research insights were used to direct USFRA's strategy of creating the Food Dialogues event series. Now USFRA needed to **connect farmers and ranchers with the most important luminaries from across the food spectrum** in order to position themselves as true leaders in the food debate. The events allowed influencers from all sides of the issues to come together and answer consumer questions while restoring trust in agriculture. The team extensively researched themes, venues and participants, and conducted in depth interviews and briefings with everyone prior to the event. Through media partnerships, a thriving online community and a robust digital campaign that live-streamed the events on FoodDialogues.com for anyone to see, USFRA grew the conversation beyond the Food Dialogues events to engage more consumers and influencers in additional discussions.

EXECUTION

Bring Ag to New Places: Held seven discussions, all online, with four in LA – the entertainment capital of the world, and three in NY – the media capital in the world.

Influencer/Entertainment Outreach: Brought scientists, consumer advocates, celebrity chefs, restaurateurs and media-elite to join farmers and ranchers for in-depth and provocative conversations. Invited top-tier entertainment executives who are integral in shaping the way farmers and ranchers are perceived by consumers.

Online Buzz & Engagement: Held Tweetchats featuring farmers and ranchers to drive engagement around Food Dialogues: LA and NY. Live-streamed panels to FoodDialogues.com for expanded viewership; attendees were encouraged to live tweet using #FoodD. Footage and highlights from discussions were featured on FoodDialogues.com, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook to spark additional engagement with USFRA's social media community.

Strategic Media Partnerships: Developed proactive versus reactive agriculture news and access to influencers by creating two media partnerships surrounding Food Dialogues: LA and NY with *CBS Sunday Morning* and *Anderson Live*.

CBS media partnership surrounding Food Dialogues: LA to reach influencers captured footage at the events and conducted 1-on-1 interviews with panelists/moderators to produce four 2-minute mini-shows, :15 promo spots, a video piece for digital viewing. Video clips aired in 11 top US markets.

A partnership with *Anderson Live* for Food Dialogues: NY featured two segments: the first encouraging viewers to enter a contest to win a trip to event, and the second featuring the contest winner's trip to the event and engaging panelists.

Media/blogger Outreach: Developed surveys gauging consumer attitudes toward food issues to be used as news hooks; targeted ag/business, trade and broadcast media to drive attendance and coverage; invited food/ag bloggers to engage farmers to learn more about food production.

EVALUATION

Objective: Enlist 20 panelists from media, academia, consumer activists and science to participate in panels discussions with farmers and ranchers

- USFRA secured **47 high-profile panelists and moderators** to participate in the events, a 135% increase over the goal.
- Secured moderators like **Ali Velshi**, CNN Chief Business Correspondent, anchor of *Your Money* and *World Business Today*; secured high-profile panelists **Jon Shook**, Chef, *Animal*, **Danny Boome**, Celebrity Chef & TV Host; **Juliet D'Annibale**, TV director & producer; **Karen Rosa**, Director, American Humane Assoc.'s Film & TV Unit; **Scott**

Vernon, Prof. of Ag. Comm. & Pres. of Livestock Publications Council; **Paula Daniels**, Senior Advisor, Food Policy, The City of LA Office of the Mayor; **Rachel Surls Ph.D.**, Sustainable Food Systems Advisor; **Daniel M. Dooley**, Senior VP, External Affairs, Univ. of CA; **Dr. Bob Goldberg**, UCLA, Dept. of Molecular, Cell, Dev. Biology; **Eric Holst**, Dir., Environmental Defense Fund's Working Lands Program; **Neil Moseley**, Pleasant Acre Farms; **Karen Ross**, Sec., CA Dept. of Food/Agriculture; **Vinny Dotolo**, Chef, Animal; **Ray Martin**, VP, Culinary Dev. & Exec. Chef; **Gabe Segovia**, Culinary Innovation, El Pollo Loco; **Tracie McMillan**, author, *The American Way of Eating*; **Debbie Beauvais**, NY School Nutrition, Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics spokesperson; **Carolyn O'Neil**, WebMD nutritionist; **Dr. Christine Hoang**, Assist. Dir., Scientific Activities, American Veterinary Med. Assoc.; **Jean Halloran**, Food Policy Dir., Consumers Union; **Keith Ayoob**, pediatric nutritionist, **Dr. Julie Howard**, chief scientist, USAID; **Gregory Jaffe**, Biotech Director, CSPI.

- **Ali Velshi**: “We’re prepared to take all questions, **not everyone here shares the same views**, the only thing we share is that we all like food and need it.”
- **Kat Kinsman**, CNN Eatocracy: “If I can get one thing across today – farmers and ranchers – you have to get online and you have to **put your own story out there**, say it in your words.”
- Attendees included Bravo, Martha Stewart Living, PBS, Extra, Ellen, Anderson Live, CBS, Reveille, Telepictures execs.

Objective: Grow Facebook community by securing 16,500 ‘likes’ and an online engagement rating of five percent

- USFRA’s Facebook ‘likes’ grew by more than **120,000 ‘likes’** in just five months, a **627% increase** above the initial goal
- **Facebook engagement soared to 24%**, a 380% increase over goal, and far above other personalities and brand pages: Obama = 8%; average brand = 0.5% (calculated by number of people who ‘liked’ content on page and then return to comment, post, share and/or ‘like’ add’l content.)
- Via tweet-chats, events garnered **25.3 million** twitter impressions, nearly doubling the average for a tweet-chat.
- Encouraged engagement by posting multiple blog posts and 35 video clips of footage to FoodDialogues.com and YouTube.

Objective: Generate 22 million media impressions

- USFRA achieved a **36% increase** over its goal through media partnerships with CBS and Anderson Live that encouraged discussions and engagement online. **32,981,668 impressions** from CBS with clips airing in **11 markets**.
- Created relationships with media-elite to bring agriculture to elevated levels in media mainstream: **Ali Velshi**, CNN Chief Business Correspondent; **Kat Kinsman**, CNN Eatocracy; **Tracie McMillan**, author, *The American Way of Eating*; **Carolyn O’Neil**, contributor, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*
- Following event, Kinsman, CNN Eatocracy, tweeted, “...truly the most rewarding thing I’ve done in the past half year has been starting to talk to farmers.”

Objective: Increase the number of people who believe agriculture is headed in the right direction

- In Aug. 2011 and fall 2012, USFRA asked consumers “*Do you believe food production in America is heading in the right direction?*” Fall 2012 survey said consumers are **5% more likely to have confidence in American agriculture** compared with 2011 survey results.

Product #: 6BW-1303E04