



## From The Farm Belt to Facebook and Beyond - America's Farmers and Ranchers Are Leading The Food Dialogues

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

**Summary:** 2013 Silver Anvil Award Winner — Integrated Communications — Associations

Trust in American agriculture is eroding. Stories about antibiotic “superbugs” and GMO “Frankenfoods” run rampant in today’s media while consumers question how their food is grown and raised. Up until now, America’s farmers and ranchers have been left out of the conversation. That’s why the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance (USFRA) started a movement of putting farmers and ranchers at the forefront of these discussions through robust trainings, online tools and groundbreaking dialogues with everyone from across the food spectrum. For the first time, farmers and ranchers finally had the confidence, tools and platforms to share their stories and set the record straight.

Integrated communications includes any program that demonstrates leadership of public relations strategies and tactics in a creative and effective integrated campaign, along with other marketing or communications. The program must demonstrate the clear leadership of public relations, along with its integration with other disciplines. 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 food is produced. 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 starting a movement of putting farmers and ranchers at the forefront of the discussion about how food is grown and raised. In order to do so, USFRA traveled from east to west and everywhere in between to train and empower thousands of farmers and ranchers to educate the public, listen to their concerns and answer their questions about food. And through robust on and offline strategies, USFRA built the ultimate community for farmers and ranchers to engage consumers and influencers in these groundbreaking discussions.

### **RESEARCH**

For many years, commodity and agriculture groups and food companies have tried to improve the image of modern agriculture – often through beautiful campaigns about family farms and commitments to producing “safe, affordable, abundant food.” Millions of dollars were spent but the campaigns weren’t working and public trust continued to deteriorate. USFRA and Ketchum worked with maslansky, luntz + partners to conduct message testing through a technique known as dial testing. Often used in the presidential debates, dial testing provides immediate feedback on how messages resonate with audiences emotionally – what audiences hear and feel versus what messages say. Sessions were held with farmers, ranchers and food

influencers in NY, Washington, 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 if they were true. The polarization of the food wars was so entrenched that almost no traditional messages were seen as credible. The mantra of the farming community: Safe, Affordable, Abundant food was falling flat. When farmers say “our methods are proven safe,” people heard “pesticides and antibiotics 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 rancher favorably while only 42% see the way our food is grown and raised favorably.
- **People care about long-term health effects of what they are eating.** Messaging wasn’t answering the questions people had. Today, the research showed people are most concerned about the long-term health effects of what they eat. Farmers and ranchers weren’t addressing those questions.
- **Anything considered “unnatural” is a major concern to consumers.** Consumers are particularly concerned about issues like antibiotics, hormones and GMOs and current messaging is only adding to the confusion.
- **To gain credibility, farmers and ranchers need to acknowledge concerns, listen and show a commitment to continual improvement.**

Overall, the research pointed to a strategy around conversation and listening, and shifting from safe, affordable and abundant to being dedicated to providing healthy food choices for people everywhere.

## PLANNING

### *Objectives*

Secure 150 farmers/ranchers to opt in to receive online alerts

- Create an online community on Facebook to hold a real-time dialogue on food production questions by securing 16,500 ‘likes’ and an online engagement rating of five percent
- Establish an online destination for info and secure 17,000 unique visitors in the first six months
- Create awareness for USFRA’s online properties by generating 22 million media partnership 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, policymaker and customer decisions, policies and opinions;
- **Food Elite** a.k.a. consumer communicators whose opinions/word-of-mouth reach other consumers

### *Strategy*

The research insights were used to guide the team in developing a strategy that would leverage farmers and ranchers as the true experts in the food debates.

## EXECUTION

**Grow What You Know:** When unfair or untrue articles surface in the media, they often go unanswered. That’s why USFRA built the FARM Team community that allows farmers and ranchers to submit inaccurate, misleading or unfair information or articles to the Grow What

You Know system on [FoodDialogues.com](http://FoodDialogues.com). Then, the article is distributed to The FARM Team, a database of farmer and rancher rapid responders, who then comment on the article with their own real-life examples to help clarify inaccuracies.

**Create a Place for Dialogue:** Through Facebook, USFRA was able to engage everyone from food influencers, consumers and detractors and provide them with an educational and engaging platform to discuss food issues and have their questions be answered by farmers and ranchers.

**Online Storytelling through Faces of Farming and Ranching contest:** Rather than an agriculture executive or a public relations expert, USFRA needed a real life farmer or rancher who embodied USFRA's values of continual improvement to become a spokesperson for the organization. Each contestant's video entry was posted to FoodDialogues.com and through social media promotions, anyone could learn more about the contestants, their families and the innovations being made on their farms while voting for their favorite contestant the site.

**The Food Dialogues:** panel discussions held in LA and NY brought together some of the most important food luminaries today. The events were live-streamed to [FoodDialogues.com](http://FoodDialogues.com) for expanded viewership around the world.

**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*.

**Online Engagement:** Attendees were encouraged to live tweet using #FoodD and follow @USFRA. After the event, footage and highlights from discussions were featured on FoodDialogues.com, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook to spark additional engagement with USFRA's robust social media community comprised of influencers, consumers, farmers and ranchers. USFRA encouraged daily conversations and debates on its Facebook page encouraging people from all sides of the food spectrum to weigh in. USFRA held Tweetchats featuring farmers and ranchers to drive high level of receptivity and excitement around key events while using #FoodD.

**FoodSource:** The custom-created site on [FoodDialogues.com](http://FoodDialogues.com) was built around the nine hottest food issues in food production today: everything from Animal Welfare to Antibiotics and GMOs. Each section featured detailed answers to the 10 most frequently asked consumer questions, USFRA's official POV, links to original third-party sources, relevant infographics and videos of talks given by farmers, ranchers and experts, as well as the most relevant content from past USFRA events. The site also featured a live Google News feed that was filtered by each of the nine topics, encouraging visitors to come to the site daily to get the latest in agricultural news.

## EVALUATION

Through a robust online digital campaign and an army of farmers and ranchers to lead the discussion, USFRA was successful in creating engaging and productive conversations about how food is grown and raised.

### **Objective: Secure 150 farmers and ranchers to opt in to receive online alerts**

- USFRA created a database of **443 farmers and ranchers** throughout the country to engage in online discussions about food production and to respond to inaccurate articles about the agriculture industry, a **195% increase** over the original goal
- Farmers and ranchers responded to **32 articles** that were posted to the Grow What You Know system
- USFRA conducted **39 EASE** trainings in 22 states to 5,629 farmers and ranchers

**Objective: Create an online community on Facebook to hold a real-time dialogue on food production questions 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** from the initial goal.
- USFRA **Facebook engagement soared to 24%, a 380% increase** above the initial goal, while other personalities and brands receive a much lower engagement average, like: Barack Obama at 8%, the average brand with 0.5%; non-profits: 2.2%. (Engagement is calculated by the number of people who have 'liked' something on the page and then return to comment, post, share and/or 'like' add'l content.)
- Via two tweet-chats, USFRA garnered **25.3 million twitter impressions**; both nearly doubled the average number of impressions for a tweet-chat.

### **Objective: Establish an online destination for info and secure 17,000 unique visitors in the first six months**

- FoodSource, a one-stop-shop for all food production questions saw **58,748** unique visitors since its launch in Fall 2012, **246% increase over the original goal**, with each visitor spending an average **2:38** on the site.

### **Objective: Create awareness for USFRA's online properties by generating 22 million media partnership impressions**

- USFRA achieved a **36% increase** over its original goal through media partnerships with CBS and Anderson Live that encouraged consumers and influencers to engage in the discussion online. (**Total: 32,981,668**; CBS media partnership garnered 22,621,600 broadcast impressions and 4,631,499 digital impressions with **clips airing in 11 markets**: NY, LA, Chicago, Philadelphia, Dallas, San Francisco, Boston, Atlanta, Washington, Houston, and Detroit; Anderson Live partnership garnered 3.1 million broadcast viewers).

### **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.

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