



NUFFIELD
Farming Scholarships



COMMUNICATION

Communicating with people outside
of agriculture;

A Bitesize Guide

INTRODUCTION

Each year, up to 25 people aged 25- 45 are selected as scholars and sponsored by the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust to travel, research and report on subjects they are passionate about and which contribute to advancing farming, food, horticulture, forestry and ancillary industries.

These studies bring new thinking, technology or management approaches from across the globe to the UK. While many know of Nuffield Farming Scholarships, few people in the industry are aware of the huge knowledge base of global reports, dating back to 2006, that can be accessed via the online Nuffield Farming library.

This Bitesize Guide, supported by the Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust, Central Region Farmers Trust, Gloucestershire Agricultural House Foundation and the Royal Agricultural Society of England, gives an insight into the practical experiences and research freely available at :



<https://www.nuffieldscholar.org/reports>



WHAT IS THIS GUIDE, AND HOW SHOULD I USE IT?

Communicating with people outside of the agricultural sector can often feel like a difficult task. At times, it is easy to feel somewhat under attack from the questioning about what we do, media reports which we perceive as being one-sided and all the noise from social media, both positive and negative.

But being able to communicate better with those who do not understand agriculture helps build bridges, trust and knowledge for both sides of the discussion, and a better quality of discussion.

This Bitesize Guide on 'Communicating with people outside of agriculture' is designed to provide a range of ideas to help anyone the agriculture sector communicate better with our customers, consumers, critics and fans.

It's a broad topic, and this Bitesize Guide brings together key findings, discussions and ideas from relevant Nuffield Farming reports, all highlighted as 'Talking points' and 'In practice' sections, with 'Putting it into action' sections at the end. They're designed to be short, thought-provoking extracts, and each one includes a TinyURL link and QR code to access the relevant Nuffield Farming Scholarship report for more information, case studies and discussions.



TALKING POINT 1:

The challenge of communication

Amy Jackson NSch 2012



Britain has a long way to go in improving communication about how it farms.”

Britain has a long way to go in improving communication about how it farms. For years, many farmers have been communicating inadequately with their local communities, reflected in a more widespread lack of engagement with the public at a national level. Even now that we have increased our flow of communication against a backdrop of renewed interest about where our food comes from, we still haven't quite got it right.

Like the industry, our communication can be fragmented between different industry bodies who all convey slightly different messages. Each individual organisation has its own budget instead of pooling funds to avoid duplication and ensure money goes further.

Negative allegations and unsubstantiated asides frequently go unchallenged over social media. Compare this to the centralised efforts to challenge untruths and educate the public about farming as a whole made by [US Farmers and Ranchers](#), and [Agriculture More Than Ever](#) in Canada.

We need to start talking and sharing, being accountable and honest about where we are and where we are heading, and showing the many ways in which we farm and the efforts being made to make things better. The current dialogue is lacking on many fronts and there is a huge amount of work left to do.

More from this Nuffield study: Talking point 6: What does the public want to know? on p13 and In practice: Building relationships on p20.



Amy Jackson



Can we learn to love the megadairy? Politics, planning and PR:
<https://qrco.de/bgNBWw>



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Putting it into action

TALKING POINT 2:

Trust and values

Kendra Hall NSch 2022



The British public generally trust farmers, see them as experts and believe they care about their animals and the environment. However, farms and the food supply chain have moved on from the 'Old McDonald's Farm' image that most of the public expect to see."

The disparity between image and reality have brought increased concerns about common farming practices, and lack of engagement over previous decades has left the public behind.

According to academics, trust is given (or not) based on the perception of an entity's competence and whether they will act responsibly. In the USA, the Center for Food Integrity (CFI) developed a model for earning and maintaining consumer trust specifically within the context of the food system. It suggests that the three biggest drivers of trust are:

1. **Influential Others** – friends, media, scientists (could be anyone)
2. **Competence** - facts, data, information
3. **Confidence** - shared values

According to CFI's research, shared values are three to five times more effective than facts when building trust, emphasising that food is a values-based market.

"People want to know who you are and why you do what you do," explained Roxi Beck, Consumer Engagement Director at CFI. "You need to prove that you are heartfelt, and only then can you share the facts. If you go into a conversation with the goal of 'educating' or to 'win', everybody loses."



If you go into a conversation with the goal of 'educating' or to 'win', everybody loses."

Roxi Beck | CFI



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Putting it into action



Values first, facts later

In the past, industry engagement and communication has largely been driven by the idea that all we need to do is give people more information: if only they understood us better, then they would trust us and believe that we are right.

However, the CFI research on the importance of values means we need to show that when it comes to things the public cares about – like animal welfare, the environment, and food safety – we share their values and care about the same things they do. Facts will not work alone and are beneficial only after values are established.

Embracing this approach allows us to establish common ground – of which there is more than we think – and engage more effectively on difficult topics.



Kendra Hall



Building public trust in British farming through increased transparency of livestock production: <https://qrco.de/bgNBY6>



TALKING POINT 3:

The next generation

Wallace Currie, NSch 2024



How often do we go to shows where both farmers and the public are present only to spend the day chatting to people we already know?"

We gather in the same busy spot, talking about the weather, wild nights out or whichever government drama is unfolding, while missing the real opportunity: speaking to the public. Too often consumers are seen as obstacles. They slow the queue at Fairfax and Favor or block the sheep race. But they are also our audience. Shows and events offer vital chances to tell our story and we should be doing it year-round, not just during sun cream season.

Clarkson's Farm has sparked global interest in British agriculture. Across all ten countries I visited it was mentioned, regardless of language. Shows like Countryfile and This Farming Life keep farming in public conversation in a positive light. So do digital creators, from YouTubers to TikTokers, although we still need better data on who they are reaching.

The most overlooked but powerful route is primary education. It gives us a consistent opportunity to shape how young people think about food and sustainability. If agriculture was embedded in the curriculum we could change the national conversation from the ground up.

Consumer engagement is both an output and input of rural education. Early exposure to food systems improves public trust, reduces misinformation and encourages informed decision-making. It also helps producers develop communication skills that are vital in the digital age.

Organisations like FFA (Future Farmers of America) teach students how to share their story with pride and professionalism. SRUC's new microcredential in Agricultural Communications signals a growing awareness that public engagement is part of the job. The next generation must know how to farm, but also how to connect.



Wallace Currie



If agriculture was embedded in the curriculum we could change the national conversation from the ground up."



Slamming doors open: Pathways into agriculture through rural education, youth groups and consumer engagement: <https://qrco.de/bgNBao>



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Putting it into action

TALKING POINT 4:

Passing responsibility

Claire Taylor NSch 2023

Across the world, farmers are voicing frustration at lobbying bodies and industry groups, often blaming them for not pushing back hard enough against growing scrutiny. But this blame is not always matched with action.

Many organisations reported aggressive emails, phone calls and confrontations at events, with staff bearing the brunt despite working tirelessly behind the scenes. Low morale and staff turnover are ongoing challenges.

In New Zealand, Sam McIvor, CEO of Beef and Lamb NZ, expressed concern that while many of the 9,000 farmers he represents are vocal about anti-farming sentiment, few are willing to engage directly with the public.

“Research shows we should open our farms and connect with the public, yet many are unwilling to do so while still criticising farm bodies. It’s not just their role. Everyone in agriculture must ask, what can I do?”

In Australia, Georgie Somerset, former President of AgForce, highlighted similar challenges. At The Ekka, Queensland’s largest agricultural event, drawing half a million visitors, securing volunteers to represent the sector proved difficult despite a membership of over 6,000.

“This was a fantastic opportunity with a curious audience, yet our members didn’t want to participate,” she said. “We are abdicating responsibility and expecting someone else to do it for us. We all need to show up.”

With 85% of Australians living within 50km of the coast, the rural–urban divide continues to grow. Events like The Ekka are vital moments to bridge that gap. But farming’s voice can only be heard if those within the industry are willing to step forward and speak.



AgForce’s Georgie Somerset (left) and Claire Taylor



We are abdicating responsibility and expecting someone else to do it for us. We all need to show up.”

Georgie Somerset



Turning the tide on the anti-farming agenda: <https://arco.de/bgPwGf>



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Putting it into action

In practice: Lack of unity in farming

Anna Jones NSch 2016



There are mixed messages coming out of the farming industry, and a tendency for farmers to highlight the downsides of another agricultural system rather than the upsides of their own. Conventional and organic producers are equally guilty of this tactic.

Midwest rancher Larry Reinhold has a good example as we drive around the vast prairie where he raises Hereford cattle and quarter horses.

“South Dakota is one of the leading buffalo states,” he says. “I know people that raise them and as soon as they have a microphone they’re saying it’s so much better for you than beef, it’s this and that, it’s grown and raised in the same place. But you’re not doing anyone any favours by putting down another farmer.

“If you have to put somebody down to raise yourself up you have lost. You cannot do that. You have to measure your product by its own standard otherwise you’re not doing anyone a service.”

Disunity and industry sniping confuses journalists trying to understand the real story.



Larry Reinhold



If you have to put somebody down to raise yourself up you have lost.



Help or hinder? How the mainstream media portrays farming to the public:
<https://qrco.de/bgNBbK>



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Putting it into action

TALKING POINT 5:

Establishing common ground

Ruth Grice NSch 2023



During my Nuffield studies looking at how dairy farmers and environmental organisations could work together, whenever I encountered successful, symbiotic relationships between the two, there was always a leading light who was driving change.”

Someone who believed in the potential of bringing the two communities together. Someone who found the shared beliefs, values and common ground.

Often, these individuals were not active dairy farmers. Most represented either farming co-operatives or environmental organisations. Their leadership style was one of incredible humility and they weren't always senior leaders within the organisations they represented. Crucially, these individuals were outstanding leaders who had taken the time to develop a non-judgemental understanding of the dairy farmers they wished to work with. Time and time again, these individuals ensured that farmers were in the driving seat.

This respectful, collaborative way of establishing partnerships was endorsed by Jolanda Jansen, a communications consultant at St. Anna Advies in the Netherlands. For Jolanda, the principles she uses to improve communication between veterinarians and livestock farmers also apply to building partnerships between dairy farmers and environmental organisations.

FIVE KEY INGREDIENTS FOR FINDING COMMON GROUND

1. Looking at what you have in common.
2. Being interested in each other's opinions
3. Asking questions.
4. Finding out what motivates people.
5. Acknowledging that change takes time.



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Putting it into action



For those working in roles within the dairy supply chain, and those within environmental organisations, I urge you to reach out to one another.

- Meet face-to-face.
- Listen to one another with open ears. When doing so, imagine you are Louis Theroux interviewing an unconventional community off the beaten track. No judgement. No shame. No assumptions. Be curious. Be kind.
- Set ground rules. Discuss what you agree to disagree on and leave them at the door.
- Find your common ground.
- Celebrate successes. From little acorns, mighty oak trees grow.



Ruth Grice



Working together: How dairy farmers and environmental organisations can achieve sustainable food security and combat climate change: <https://qrco.de/bgNBcE>



In practice: Derrick Josi and TDF Honest Farming

Kendra Hall, NSch 2022



One thing that was stressed to me continuously throughout my Nuffield study was the importance of authenticity when engaging with stakeholders and members of the public.”

There were several reasons given for this, including:

1. The people we are trying to engage with want honesty and connection with real human beings. The world (and media) is full to the brim of polished, ‘perfect’ content and people can smell inauthenticity a mile away.
2. The story we know best is our own; no one can tell it better than we can. When we own that story and share what we do – warts and all – it doesn’t allow anyone to ‘catch us out’ because there are no secrets.
3. Acknowledging when we get things wrong shows vulnerability and reminds people we are human – this makes people trust us more than ‘everything is fine’.

What drove many to adopt this was confidence in their choices to act as they did. In other words, they didn’t have anything to hide and took pride in sharing their story. Additionally, few had experienced any problems with activists or NGOs aside from comments on social media.

Few embrace a commitment to authenticity and openness more whole-heartedly than Oregon dairy farmer Derrick Josi, whose social media content about his farm reached more than 217 million people in 2022 alone.

Using ‘raw, unfiltered transparency’, he shares every aspect of life on the farm in Tillamook as well as his thoughts about current events and policy. Derrick doesn’t shy away from hard questions, choosing instead to tackle them head on by showing videos of his calves being taken off cows, how the rotary parlour works or explaining why his Jersey herd is completely housed.

He started the channel in 2017 after the release of a vegan propaganda video. Derrick saw his neighbours, many of whom had grown up around dairy and been on farms themselves, starting to doubt that dairy farmers were doing the right thing. Frustrated with the lack of engagement from the industry, Derrick picked up his phone and started telling his story in his own words.

“Obviously whatever we were doing as an industry wasn’t working, so I thought I could try and do my part. I never thought it would get as big as it has, and now, six years later, I have almost a million followers across my channels.”



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Putting it into action

According to Derrick, his open and unfiltered approach is what really resonates with his followers, and he quickly realised that professionally produced content isn't always right. "People just like 'authentic'... They want to know that you're an actual human being."

I asked him about how he approaches the more difficult topics in such a public forum, and his answer was refreshingly simple: "I'm just honest."



*Derrick Josi and
Kendra Hall*

**“ People just like
'authentic'.. They want
to know that you're an
actual human being.”**

Derrick Josi



Building public trust in British farming through increased transparency of livestock production: <https://qrco.de/bgNBY6>



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Putting it into action

TALKING POINT 6:

What does the public want to know?

Amy Jackson NSch 2012



In America, US Farmers and Ranchers (USFR) comprises more than 80 farmer and rancher-led organisations and agricultural partners representing virtually all aspects of agriculture.”

It works to engage consumers in a dialogue about how today's food is produced. What is interesting is its exceptionally robust approach to the issue.

With the help of a healthy \$10m budget, it is: uniting cropping and livestock areas of farming; engaging consumers in conversation rather than telling them; leading that conversation and setting the agenda; driven by a long-term commitment; and using the same sources and platforms from which influencers obtain their information. It's a very grown-up, smart concept and it's been given the resources to do its job.

USFRA founded its strategy on some ground-breaking research that established what the public did and didn't want to hear. The research found that consumers were most concerned about long term health. Anything deemed 'not natural' was a threat. And most interestingly, using science did not help. It was a revelation to find that when we say "the amount is miniscule", "research shows it is safe", "let's feed the world", "give people choices", "keep prices low" or "it's better for the environment", we're saying things that few members of the public can actually relate to.

In terms of subjects like animal welfare, people simply wanted to know animals aren't being abused. So messaging focuses on how standards are being tightened and training implemented, and that the consequences of doing the wrong thing – such as stricter penalties – are being well-publicised.

Regarding antibiotic use, people want to know concerns are recognised and farmers are doing their bit to prevent resistance.

Sustainability messages are best shared through stories about recycling, reusing resources and minimising waste. Messages need to move from the present to the future, and from facts to storytelling and narrative. Continual improvement must be conveyed.

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Putting it into action



You say	They hear
SAFE	“We don’t know if pesticides, antibiotics or hormones are safe in the long-term”
AFFORDABLE	“How? At what expense to quality?”
ABUNDANT	“We have an abundance of food, and it’s part of America’s health problems”

USFRA market research findings



Can we learn to love the megadairy? Politics, planning and PR:

<https://arco.de/bgNBWw>



In practice: Empower the Individual

Anna Jones, NSch 2016

There are times when one voice can speak louder than an entire industry, when a personal story cuts through the political noise.

Traditionally the job of promoting agriculture and liaising with the media has fallen to our farming unions but increasingly individual farmers are stepping up and speaking out.

Danish pig producer Peter Kiær felt the farmer's side of the story was not cutting through in the general media, so he made a video on his mobile phone and sent the footage to Denmark's national broadcaster DR. "I wasn't trying to make it look good or bad - just neutral. I tell it how it is, and you can see how the pigs live," he says.



Screenshot of Peter Kiær's Facebook video

Peter filmed every area of the farm, including the pregnant and farrowing sows. He posted the video on Facebook and it was viewed more than 40,000 times. There were some challenges to the images, with some likening it to a prison, but Peter is not deterred by opposition – in fact he embraces scrutiny.

"First of all, people can see what's going on," he explains. "Then they can have their reaction. The benefit is that I also learn something from the people who look at it, from the citizen. Everybody can learn something."

Peter suspects there are only two or three conventional pig farmers in all of Denmark filming their farms and posting the videos on social media. He urges others to join him. "They don't think it's necessary! For many years we just leave all those things to the main farm organisation. But this is just so simple - anybody could do it with an iPhone. There is a vacuum in the media."

“Everybody can learn something.”
Peter Kiær



Help or hinder? How the mainstream media portrays farming to the public:
<https://qrco.de/bgNBbK>



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Putting it into action

TALKING POINT 7:

Building bridges and credibility

Kate Mayne NSch 2018



Key to building bridges is credibility on the part of the agricultural industry. Agriculture needs to challenge itself as an industry if we want freedoms of prescription - light rules and choice in approach.

To build credibility we must demonstrate our commitment to the environmental agenda by delivering real change.

Setting our own targets is one way of achieving this, as it shows a clear intent to drive change but external auditing of this is crucial for it to be legitimate. Buy-in from outside our industry and joint ownership of initiatives would help validate the targets and ensure that as an industry we push for betterment rather than basic level compliance.

Part of improving our credibility as an industry is setting our own standards and policing ourselves. We should not tolerate bad practice but highlight it from a knowledgeable position which understands that things can go wrong, but that some actions are inexcusable. In Queensland, Cotton Australia were investigating a possible system of de-registering producers who broke the law, particularly in terms of water use, during the drought conditions.

Some actions, however, may not be illegal but represent the sort of poor practice that can give agriculture a bad name; they “don’t pass the pub test” as one farmer described it to me. The Pomahaka Water Care Group in New Zealand is trialling a ‘farmer to farmer support group’, the intention of which is to have a quiet word with someone for poor practices and avoid regulator involvement.

The idea has strength in working on peer-to-peer relationships and challenging poor practice from a knowledgeable standpoint. It does however rely on people living where they farm and being part of a community; and this is becoming less and less a reality as farm businesses change and expand.



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Putting it into action

KEY CONCLUSIONS:

- The environmental debate in the countryside is polarised and unconstructive and is holding up progress on environmental recovery. This is a global phenomenon.
- The right people are essential in getting successful engagement.
- An equal and horizontal relationship between scientists, eNGOs and the farming community will better serve the environmental agenda as it will avoid top-down distortion.
- Developing healthy relationships with environmental organisations will help our industry gain credibility on green issues and increase our influence on future policy



Kate Mayne

“ *Some actions.....don't pass the pub test*”



Building cross sector bridges and engaging farmers to own the environmental agenda: <https://qrco.de/bgNBeC>



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Putting it into action

In practice: Changing the narrative

Claire Taylor NSch 2023



Agriculture often defaults to a defensive mindset, viewing scrutiny as a threat rather than an opportunity. In reality, scrutiny can be a chance to challenge misinformation, build trust with non-farming audiences, and share a more authentic, positive story.”

Case Study: CLEAR Center, UC Davis

Dr Frank Mitloehner established the CLEAR Center at UC Davis to improve public understanding of livestock’s role in sustainability. The centre combines scientific research with communications expertise, aiming to make complex data about emissions and livestock systems accessible to the public, policymakers, and the media.

Dr Mitloehner emphasises that many farmers struggle to explain their practices in ways that resonate. For example, “improving feed efficiency” may be technically correct, but it means little to most people. A better comparison is a fuel-efficient car, using less fuel, producing fewer emissions, yet still performing well.

“We need to adapt our messaging to find relevance in people’s everyday lives,” he said. “We are great at talking to each other and terrible at talking to people in cities.”

“We are great at talking to each other and terrible at talking to people in cities.”

Dr Frank Mitloehner

Case Study: Kakuzi Farms, Kenya

Kakuzi Farms is a 14,000-hectare operation in Thika, Kenya, producing timber, avocados, macadamias, tea, blueberries and Boran cattle.

The farm faced intense scrutiny during the COVID-19 pandemic, when a legal firm accused it of over 200 human rights abuses. The allegations made global headlines, costing Kakuzi contracts with UK supermarkets and damaging its reputation.



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Putting it into action



Kakuzi Farms' macadamia processing factory

Subsequent investigations revealed the claims were false and part of a paid smear campaign. However, damage was already done and Kakuzi embarked on a process to build back trust in their operation by publicly reporting all incidents on the farm and in nearby communities, along with action plans for resolution.

Simon Odhiambo, Head of Corporate Affairs, explained that they created an Operational Grievances Mechanism, giving workers and community members direct access to a human rights committee to voice any concerns.

This proactive approach presented its own challenges, whilst supermarkets praised the transparency, they also expected a flawless record, posing challenges for an organisation managing a large workforce in a country with high poverty levels. Nonetheless, this strategy has gradually helped Kakuzi regain trust and contracts, while building a reputation for honesty and integrity.

What began as a reputational crisis sparked a shift in mindset, with Kakuzi now using scrutiny as a platform to demonstrate openness, integrity and strong community engagement.



Claire Taylor and Simon Odhiambo



Turning the tide on the anti-farming agenda: <https://qrco.de/bgPwGf>



In practice: Building relationships

Amy Jackson NSch 2012



Many new and expanding farms I saw in other countries had succeeded in gaining community support for their operations (called 'social licence' in Australia) because of sheer hard work with communication, attention to detail and relationship-building."

Social licence is the earned recognition between the public and those that farm and produce food – it builds trust and, in turn, connectivity.

Once this relationship was in place and being maintained, it created a much more solid base for any future expansion plans. It hadn't been a quick win for most of them; there is little point in suddenly throwing yourself into building relationships when you already have a planning application on the table. Genuine, productive relationships with local communities based on mutual respect had been built over a period of years. The farmers saw it as an investment – and an insurance policy – for the future. So whether it was holding open days, barbecues, school outreach programmes or flying neighbours to existing farms in other states to see what they might expect, this rigour had paid dividends.

Peter Lundgaard

Peter Lundgaard at Bramming near Esbjerg works hard at public relations – he and his brother Søren are always inviting neighbours to see the year-round housed herd and, on open days, people come from as far as Esbjerg, 20 miles away.

The brothers also keep the roads clean – the day before I visited they had been cutting maize but had cleaned and swept the roads afterwards, even though they were going back out harvesting again that afternoon. They join other local farmers in donating funds to support the supply of milk to the local nursery school.



Peter Lungaard



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Putting it into action

Milk Source

Milk Source is one of the largest dairy farming operations in Wisconsin. The farms have open days every year. Director Jim Ostrom says: “We tend to take the approach that there will be inherent opposition. You cannot gain total acceptance in a local neighbourhood. You need to communicate with neighbours and county leaders and go through substantial opposition, and this will continue.

“But nevertheless we issue a quarterly newsletter to towns in the area, sponsor food fairs and the local baseball team. We give away gifts of cheese, clean our roads – and even other people’s roads. We try to look after our staff and reward them for long service. Some of our employees have been here up to 25 years.

“A lot of farms will have a family member as a spokesperson. Larger farms are now employing a PR person. They open up to the public and try to develop a strong relationship.”



Milk Source open day

“A lot of farms will have a family member as a spokesperson. Larger farms are now employing a PR person. They open up to the public and try to develop a strong relationship.”

Jim Ostrom, Milk Source



Can we learn to love the megadairy? Politics, planning and PR:
<https://qrco.de/bgNBWw>



TALKING POINT 8:

Shows and the public

Aled Rhys Jones NSch 2015



Fairs (agricultural shows) in the US see their role as informing the public about agriculture and food production given the decline in the farming population. The level of resources they dedicate towards providing education at their events far surpasses any UK equivalent.

Terms such as 'edutainment' and 'agritainment' are widely used in the US to describe the provision of education through entertainment. My recommendations for UK shows are;

- More focus and resources need to be placed on delivering education to the public and children on the importance of farming and food production.
- Show organisers should explore ways of informing and engaging their non-farming audience about agriculture through the use of entertainment.
- Consideration could be given to making livestock competitions more of a spectacle.
- Shows need to consider ways of introducing more performance-based and commercially-focussed livestock competitions in order to remain relevant to progressive farmers.
- An industry-wide code of ethics needs to be introduced to ensure the highest standards of animal welfare at shows are maintained and to negate any adverse publicity.
- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on effective reason-giving by judges and commentary at shows, whilst remembering to be relevant to both farming and non-farming audiences.
- Surveys should be conducted regularly to identify trends, visitor preferences and to measure the effectiveness of shows in increasing visitor knowledge about agriculture.
- Agricultural shows need to capitalise on the prominence of food culture and be aware of changing consumer habits towards health and wellbeing. Shows have an opportunity to champion local, regional and national food whilst connecting consumers with producers.



Aled Rhys Jones



Agricultural societies and shows: where do we go from here?

<https://qrco.de/bgNBfA>



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Putting it into action

In practice: Just Farmers

Anna Jones NSch 2016



The urban/rural disconnect is real, more so in Western and urbanised societies, and both the media and farming industry are contributing to it. While 'rural affairs' is a growing genre, agricultural specialism in the mainstream media remains incredibly rare."

Urban bias is endemic. This can lead to farming and rural issues being ignored, over-simplified or viewed purely from a metro-centric angle. Healthy journalistic scepticism can cross the line into ideological bias against conventional, intensive or large-scale farming systems.

Farmers and the industry are fuelling the disconnect through a lack of openness and transparency, disproportionate defensiveness in the face of legitimate challenge, disunity among farming sectors and a sense of 'exceptionalism' or entitlement to positive coverage.

Taken in a global context and in spite of urban bias, UK farming receives a fair amount of media coverage, relative to the industry's size. Programmes like Countryfile, which have broadened the appeal of farming to huge audiences, are doing the industry a valuable service.

The public narrative around agriculture is also being dominated by farming unions and lobbyists. Politics at an industry level is drowning out individuals at a farm level, contributing to more distrust in the mainstream media.

Farmers must get better at talking to journalists and the mainstream media. Challenge is not criticism, questions are not attacks. Fight the red mist and learn to embrace scrutiny by acknowledging, and responding to, the views of those who think differently.

Increased openness and transparency, particularly around controversial subjects like intensive livestock production is vital. Access to farms is absolutely essential to bridge the urban/rural disconnect.

Attempts to keep journalists in the dark about the realities of modern food production are doomed to fail. Farmers must be prepared to not only defend, but champion their production systems. If they don't believe in them, no one else will.



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Putting it into action

Following my Nuffield, I launched [Just Farmers](#) CIC - a network of independent, trusted and diverse on-farm communicators. Just Farmers gives farmers and growers the confidence to tell their stories with pride and without politics through fully-funded media education workshops, while helping journalists and programme makers find independent voices at the grassroots of farming.



Anna Jones

“ Farmers must get better at talking to journalists and the mainstream media. Challenge is not criticism, questions are not attacks.”



Help or hinder? How the mainstream media portrays farming to the public:
<https://qrco.de/bgNBbK>



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Putting it into action

TALKING POINT 9:

The Five C's Framework

Claire Taylor NSch 2023

In a world where agriculture faces increasing scrutiny, the greatest opportunity lies not in resisting it but in reframing the conversation. The following Five C's outline how the sector can move from defence to dialogue and position itself as a trusted, forward-looking voice in global discussions.

1. Curiosity

Agriculture must step outside its echo chambers and engage in unfamiliar conversations, especially with those who hold different views. Rather than responding with blame or defensiveness, the sector should listen with intent, seek to understand other perspectives and acknowledge shifting social values.

2. Communication

Agricultural messaging needs a reset. We must move away from jargon and reactive language and instead tell stories that connect on a human level. Communication should be transparent, inclusive and grounded in shared values.

3. Conscience

It is no longer enough to ask for a social licence to operate. Agriculture must demonstrate a social conscience—showing its role in addressing climate change, food security, public health and community wellbeing. This means recognising trade-offs, being transparent and acting with integrity.

4. Connection

Avoiding difficult conversations erodes trust. Transparency and vulnerability build credibility. When agriculture shares its challenges as well as its progress, it becomes more relatable and real in the eyes of the public.

5. Collaboration

Agriculture must move beyond a siloed, individual approach and embrace collaboration. Working across sectors, disciplines, borders and generations is essential to building a resilient and unified voice. This also means elevating emerging leaders who reflect the diversity and direction of modern farming.



Agriculture must step outside its echo chambers and engage in unfamiliar conversations, especially with those who hold different views.”



Turning the tide on the anti-farming agenda: <https://qrco.de/bgPwGf>



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Putting it into action



Action that can be taken immediately (Do now)

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Putting it into practice: Engage in three simple steps

Kendra Hall NSch 2022

The Centre for Food Integrity in the US provides shared values communications training which helps people in the agriculture sector engage with others. It is based on three simple steps:

1. Listen – Actively listen, without judgement, for agreement and points of connection to understand how their concern is tied to their underlying values. Listening empowers you to:

- Find shared values
- Show you care
- Bridge the gap between consumer expectations and industry behaviours

Key skill: Realise it's not about you ... it's about them. It's easy to feel targeted by comments and to feel defensive when asked pointed questions. Consider it a compliment that you are the person they've asked to be in the conversation in the first place.

2. Ask – Ask questions to invite dialogue and clarify their perspective.

- Helps embrace scepticism, and their reality
- Helps them understand you're interested and willing to commit to a conversation
- Clarifies their opinion/concern
- Best practice: Ask at least three questions to ensure you're on the same page

Key skill: Embrace the scepticism about what's happening in production and in the food system as a whole. Consumers don't know what you do on a daily basis, and many have never set foot on a farm, so the ideas, questions and concerns that may be very real to them are based on very little real-world context. Be open to the journey of seeing the world through their eyes before you try to convince them of your reality.

Putting it into action



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3. Share – Share your values-based perspective and provide relevant information to foster understanding and reinforce connection.

- Avoid getting defensive
- Incorporate the values most important to you
- Remember the golden rule*; apply it
- Share information that has been confirmed as relevant
- Use analogies that can help simplify concepts
- Use personal perspective and storytelling to paint the picture

Key skill: Connect your passions and interest to theirs while you share what you've learned during your time in the industry. The opportunity here is to convey where you share common perspective and leverage that to share your deeper understanding of industry-specific topics, in small doses.

*Treat others as you would want others to treat you.



Building public trust in British farming through increased transparency of livestock production: <https://qrco.de/bgNBY6>





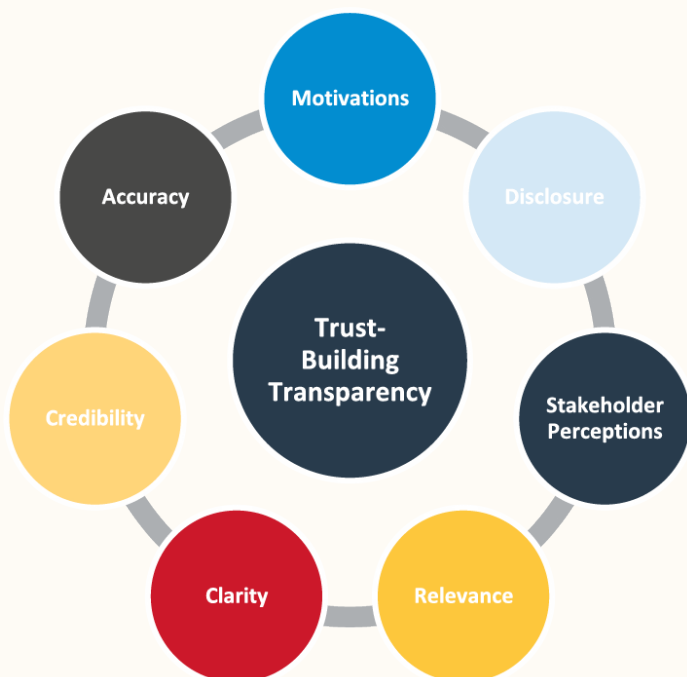
Actions that require some planning (start planning)

Putting it into action: Building trust

Kendra Hall NSch 2022

The role of transparency in driving trust is significant, and several pieces of academic work have shown that it positively correlates to customer loyalty, purchasing intention, and recommendations to peers. Transparency is also incredibly important to retain during and after a crisis - a lack of it is a trigger for outrage - and it has been found to be a leading contributor to ensuring peace of mind.

According to the US's Centre for Food Integrity, in order to build trust through transparency, there are seven elements that we need to get right:



The elements of trust-building transparency

1. **Motivations** – act in a manner that is ethical and consistent with stakeholder interest. Show you understand and appreciate issues and take action that demonstrates you put public interest ahead of self-interest.
2. **Disclosure** – share information important to stakeholders, both positive and negative, even if it might be damaging. Make it easy to find; helpful in making informed decisions; easy to understand and timely.

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3. **Stakeholder participation** – ask those interested in your activities and impact, for input. Make it easy to provide; acknowledge it has been received and explain how and why you make decisions.
4. **Relevance** – share information stakeholders deem relevant. Ask them. Show you understand.
5. **Clarity** – share information that is easily understood.
6. **Credibility** – admit mistakes; apologise; accept responsibility; engage critics; share plans for corrective action. Demonstrate you genuinely care and present more than one side of controversial issues.
7. **Accuracy** – share information that is truthful, objective, reliable and complete.



Building public trust in British farming through increased transparency of livestock production: <https://qrco.de/bgNBY6>





Long-term options to consider (Think ahead)

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Putting it into action

Putting it into action: Think about your future development

There are great opportunities in the agriculture and agribusiness sector to develop your communication and/or media skills, and to put them to use. The organisations and courses below (the list is not exhaustive) all seek to help and welcome applications:

Just Farmers

Just Farmers, set up by Anna Jones as the result of a Nuffield Farming Scholarship, offers fully-funded storytelling and media education workshops to farmers and growers. This pioneering training programme helps individuals in agriculture think like storytellers, so they can understand what makes a story and how to tell it, whether it's for social media, television, radio or podcast, or in print.

<https://www.justfarmers.org/>

LEAF - Speak Out Toolkit

LEAF's online communications toolkit has been written and developed by leading agricultural communications experts. With easy-to-use guidance and resources, it provides step-by-step support and best practice advice for farmers and researchers, covering topics such as writing, using social media, increasing interaction and presenting.

<https://leaf.eco/speakout>

Open Farm Sunday

Organised by LEAF, Open Farm Sunday, in June each year, is an opportunity to welcome people onto your farm, helping to drive awareness and appreciation of farming's vital role in producing food, nurturing nature, and protecting the environment for future generations. Farms taking part are offered plenty of support and resources, with 271 farms hosting more than 200,000 visitors in 2025.

<https://farmsunday.org/>

British Guild of Agricultural Journalists – John Deere Agricultural Journalism Training Course

Running for more than 30 years, this course offers a free place on a two-and-a-half day course run by a professional journalism tutor alongside farming media professionals. Practical writing exercises and theory sessions are followed by short-term work experience placements with farming and horticultural publications or PR agencies to provide real-world experience of the job.

<https://www.gaj.org.uk/cpd-event/journalism-training-award-sponsored-by-john-deere/>

NFU – media training online hub

A resource for NFU members, this online media training hub aims to help people prepare effectively for any media interviews. It says this could be as a local farmer reacting to a local incident, or maybe as a county or regional board chair speaking on behalf of the NFU, and the story could be positive and proactive or the opposite; the hub will help prepare for a successful interview.

<https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot/service/programmes/rural-leadership-programme>

The NFU also has a free access page with tips for social media and video for farmers:

<https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/social-media-and-video-tips-for-farmers/>

SRUC

SRUC offers a range of short online microcredentials courses in agricultural communications. Each equivalent to one-third of a postgraduate certificate, they are on topics such as agriculture journalism and communications, digital media in agriculture, issues management and crisis communications in agriculture and science communication in agriculture.

<https://www.sruc.ac.uk/study-with-us/study-options/micro-credentials/>

Worshipful Company of Farmers – Challenge of Rural Leadership

This two-week course runs aims to develop the personalities and business acumen of delegates, helping with self-confidence and communication, with visiting influential speakers covering policy and their own leadership styles. Delegates can share their experiences and develop mentors and friendships that have been demonstrated over the years to offer considerable on-going support.

<https://farmerslivery.org.uk/courses/challenge-of-rural-leadership/>

Institute of Agricultural Management – Farm Management Skills Programme

Part of a longer course, IAgrM offers two, day-long modules which can be booked as individual stand-alone courses. ‘Influencing for success’ is about understanding the importance of effective influencing, how to negotiate for ‘win-win’ and the power of networking. ‘Owning your story - presenting and communicating with confidence’ is about fine tuning your presentation skills, learning how to handle the media and thriving in a complex political landscape.

<https://www.iagrm.com/events/farm-management-skills-programme/>

Institute of Agricultural Management – Agricultural Leadership Development Programme

Next scheduled to run in 2027, this three-week residential programme is aimed at management-level candidates seeking to challenge and empower their leadership and management potential. A Masters-level programme, it includes a focus on UK industry leaders and policies, EU and international affairs, management and communication skills and personal development.

<https://www.iagrm.com/events/leadership-course/>

Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust – scholarships

NFST aims to inspire passion in people and develop their potential to lead positive change in farming and food. It awards about 25 life-changing scholarships each year that unlock individual potential and broaden horizons through study and travel overseas, with a view to developing the farming and agricultural industries. More than 1,000 Nuffield Farming Scholars have completed their studies and travel.

<https://www.nuffieldscholar.org/>

Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust – Next-Gen Scholars

The Next-Gen Scholarships are focussed on young people aged 18-24 as part of Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust’s initiative to develop young talent. They aim to help young people establish themselves in agriculture, using the Nuffield Farming network to link successful applicants directly to farmers. The initiative is currently a pilot scheme and has expanded across the UK in its second year.

<https://www.nuffieldscholar.org/scholarships/nuffield-farming-next-gen-scholarship>

Other sources of social media and communications training

A wide range of organisations offer training in communications and social media. These can be found on websites such as www.findcourses.co.uk, www.skillshare.com, www.udemy.com, www.futurelearn.com and www.linkedin.com/learning. It’s also worth seeing what your local FE and HE colleges offer, and keeping an eye on courses being offered by local business networks and your local business enterprise initiative.



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Farmer Time

Farmer Time is based on fortnightly video calls between farmers and classrooms, bringing the countryside to life. Children regularly chat live with their matched farmer from their classrooms through a video interface such as Zoom to discuss ideas, ask questions, share knowledge and gain a 'real-time' understanding of the daily issues farmers face.

<https://www.farmertime.uk/>

Twig Engage – agriculture communications training

Developed by the Center for Food Integrity in the US and delivered in the UK and Ireland by Twig after Kendra Hall's Nuffield scholarship, the Engage Training workshop teaches practical tools for connecting with the public through shared values. Participants learn to communicate while fostering understanding, confidence and meaningful dialogue about food and farming.

<https://wearetwig.com/services/engage-reputation-management>

SPONSORS



Central Region Farmers Trust

Central Region Farmers Trust's mission is to provide funding for education that benefits agriculture and horticulture in the central region. It strives to support farmers in adopting sustainable farming practices and enhancing their skills for a thriving agricultural sector.

www.centralregionfarmerstrust.org



Gloucestershire Agricultural House Foundation

Helping Agriculture in Gloucestershire by supporting the education, development and needs of people in the industry.



Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust

The Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust is a grant giving body that invests in people who will advance healthy, fair and sustainable UK food production. Grants finance projects that help farmers innovate to survive and thrive while scholarships support and encourage individuals to innovate sustainable practices in farming.

www.elizabethcreak.co.uk



Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE)

The Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) is an independent charity and membership organisation dedicated to supporting the progression of knowledge and innovation within the agricultural community.

www.rase.org.uk

IN SUMMARY

This Bitesize Guide, from the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust and RASE, provides a snapshot of the breadth and depth of reports available at



<https://www.nuffieldscholar.org/reports>



The website also features reports from global Nuffield Farming Scholars, including Australia, New Zealand, USA and Brazil. The reports are a rich source of inspiration, case studies and thought-provoking recommendations for farming, food, horticulture, forestry and ancillary industries.

Please get in touch at info@rase.org.uk if you have questions, comments or feedback.



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Farming Scholarships