

The Day Twitter Said ‘Moo’

By Will Gilmer

For roughly eight hours on a recent Sunday afternoon, “moo” was a trending topic on Twitter. For the non-tweeting among us, that means the phrase “moo” was repeated so often in people’s posts on www.Twitter.com, the popular micro-blogging Web site, that the system took notice. That’s a huge deal.

The term itself was intended as a show of support for America’s dairy farm families while they try to survive this current, prolonged cycle of painfully low milk prices. Thanks to the coordinated efforts of many within the online agricultural community, with Ohio grain and cattle farmer Mike Haley (@FarmerHaley on Twitter) and California dairyman Ray Prock (@RayLinDairy on Twitter) leading the charge, “moo” began to catch the interest of Twitter users from all walks of life. In fact, it all started as Mike’s birthday wish.

Over the next several hours, the momentum built and “moo” was popping up all over the system. By that Sunday evening, more than 3,000 different people had used the term more than 6,000 times, with “moo” climbing as high as the fourth-most-talked-about topic on Twitter at one point.

So what does this mean? I wish I could say it was going to trigger a significant spike in sales of dairy products, but that’s not likely to happen. That really wasn’t the point, anyway. From my vantage point, I see two big positives that came from “moo’s” big day.

First and foremost, people who may have never given a passing thought to where their dairy products come from were given the invitation to learn more. The term’s popularity on Twitter was sustained in large part because people asked what it meant, and many ag-types were quick to tell the story behind “moo.” In fact, Ray Prock posted a little item at his blog (<http://raylindairy.wordpress.com/>) to which he drew many of the people curious about “moo’s” Twitter appearance. In essence, consumers were invited to engage in conversation about food production directly with the people who produce it. How many will take advantage of this is yet to be seen, but I dare say a couple of thousand people now know for the first time that there are producers willing and available to talk with them about food and agriculture via this social media format.

The second big accomplishment in my mind is really an extension of the first; the success of “moo” validates the use of social media by agriculturalists. While Web sites such as Twitter and Facebook can never match the effectiveness of our proactive, personal engagement of people in conversations about our operations and values, they do give us a forum in which we can reach a wide and culturally varied audience. Social media and blogs give us the opportunity to quickly talk about our farms and ranches between chores or from the comfort of our home office, and they also give us access to people who live in places we may never have the time or means to visit.

Thanks to “moo’s” big day on Twitter, I know that there are a lot more people aware of what I do today as opposed to last month. That gives me more of an opportunity, or maybe even more of a responsibility, to continue to speak about life on the farm and our commitment to care for our cows, our land and our consumers. I do that on The Dairyman’s Blog (<http://gilmerdairy.blogspot.com/mydairy>), as well as Farm Bureau’s FB Blog (<http://www.fb.org/blog/>). You can also follow me on Twitter @GilmerDairy.

I encourage everyone in agriculture to stand up and speak out, both in the real world and the online world, because we each have a great story to tell. And who knows, maybe one day soon the Twitterverse will be oinking or clucking!