

Re-connecting Builds Relationships Good for Agriculture

By Dal Grooms

The holidays are a great time to re-connect with friends and distant family members. That's most often done with the annual Christmas letter—and now, emails—that begin “Dear family and friends...” Following that greeting are usually highlights of the sender's year.

Despite how we feel about such missives, we all yearn to see a handwritten note or indication that time was taken from a busy schedule to really acknowledge us. A “Dear Cuz – Good to see you at the family reunion in June. Fishing at the dock was like being 10 again! Loved it, and looking forward to next year's get-together,” makes the sting of a mass-mailed letter melt away.

So why did those few words matter. It's the personal attention. The relationship.

Today, more than ever, farmers, especially those who are direct marketers, are focusing on the relationships they have with consumers.

They are putting their farm's name on their products. They are talking to consumers at farmers' markets, restaurants and grocery stores. They are putting their faces on billboards so consumers can see who's raising the meat, vegetables and rice on their dinner plates.

But that's not enough. While all those activities are good, they are in the traditional camps of building marketing relationships. Many consumers also build relationships through blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Again, farmers who are direct marketers are learning to use and manage these marketing tools.

But most commodity farmers — those who sell their produce, grains and livestock to companies for further processing — often don't have the opportunity to build relationships with the direct consumers of their products. These farmers, who survive with thin margins, devote the majority of their time and attention to farm and ranch work and managing their bottom lines to stay in business.

A growing number of commodity farmers are finding the time to tell their story in today's new media. For example, read the posts at the FBlog (<http://www.fb.org/blog/>) or visit producer-run sites like the Farm2U Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/Farm2U>).

If you farm, you can join this effort to reconnect. And it can start as simply as rekindling relationships. Simply scribble a few words in the next Christmas card or letter. “Dear Cuz – Enjoyed seeing you, too. Next summer, come to the farm. You'll be amazed by the changes here. You won't feel like you're 10 again, but your friends will be astounded by what you learn! See you then.”