

Farmers Joining the Food Conversation in Many Ways*By Cyndie Sirekis*

Little, round stickers that proclaim “I Met a Farmer Today!” and “I Met a Rancher Today!” are among the most popular promotional items available through the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture. Farm Bureau farmer and rancher members hand out the stickers to people as they talk with them about food and agriculture at fairs, festivals, farm tours and community events.

The popularity of these simple stickers points to a hunger among consumers (who are on average, three generations removed from farming) for information about the food they eat, where it comes from and who produces it.

And, America’s farm and ranch families are more interested than ever in reaching out to consumers to talk about the food they grow and the art, science and business of farming. Individual producers do this in person, online or both.

Online, recent posts to AFBF’s *FBlog* by farmers and ranchers explore a variety of food-related topics including, “The Real Story of Ag,” “Food, Inc.,” “Helping Hands and Good Conversation” and “Family Farmers Produce Safe Food.”

Also online, the micro-blogging social media tool Twitter offers a new twist on finding concise consumer-friendly information on just about any subject, including food and farming. If you’re using Twitter, search for #foodfact, #foodandfarmfact and #farm to find 140-character messages sent by all types of farmers, ranchers and growers.

Despite the pervasiveness of electronic communication, when meeting face-to-face, most producers still prefer to offer printed resources that people can hold in their hands to help tell the story of modern farm and ranch production.

One example is the “Food and Farm Facts” book (previously “Farm Facts”) and a smaller pocket guide version produced by the AFBF. These printed materials highlight today’s modern agriculture. Other excellent printed resources with state-specific agricultural information also are available from most state Farm Bureaus.

In 27 states, consumers have the opportunity to learn about 80 potato growers who are featured in a new Frito-Lay campaign that celebrates local people and communities. Local-market events around the country to celebrate the farmers and the local communities that play a role in making Lay’s Potato Chips are planned. Consumers can go also online, type in a product code from a bag of chips and find out where the spuds for their snack were grown.

Producers are geared up and out in full force talking with consumers about how they grow food and take care of their farm animals throughout the year. Examples include dairy farmers celebrating June Dairy Month, rice growers talking up their grain in September during National Rice Month and Farm Bureau’s Food Check-Out Week in February, when farmers and ranchers offer tips to consumers about how they can stretch their grocery dollars.

Of course, growers don’t need a specially designated month or week to put their faces on the many issues affecting their families, businesses and rural communities. A growing number are reaching out to consumers every day of the year, in addition to working hard, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, to produce food for Americans and many other people around the world.