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Tips To Begin Your Own Blog

BY CLAIRE VATH

Historically, farmers and ranchers have been cautious about who they tell their stories to, says Prattville, Ark., farmer-blogger Ryan Goodman. “A lot of people are a bit apprehensive because they’re worried their words will get twisted.” But blogs are an opportunity for thoughtful dialogue straight from the farm. Michele Payn-Knoper, of Cause Matters, Kansas cattle blogger Debbie Lyons-Blythe and Goodman offer the following tips for starting your own blog:

CHOOSE AN AUDIENCE. Is the blog going to be aimed at reaching consumers, other farmers or both?

TAILOR YOUR BLOG FOR THAT AUDIENCE. Lyons-Blythe’s blog is aimed mainly at beef consumers, and she uses language and subjects the consumer will understand—without talking down to them.

KNOW THAT SOCIAL MEDIA ISN’T AN ALL OR NOTHING. “When someone tells me they’re not a good writer,” Goodman says, “I suggest they post pictures from their operation and write a paragraph about it. Or just simply comment on someone else’s blog.”

WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW. “I’m really surprised at the interest people have in some of my everyday chores,” Goodman says. “People seem to really be interested in things like pulling a calf or sitting on a hay baler.”

UNDERSTAND CRITICISM. Many times people who comment negatively on blogs don’t understand something, so it’s up to the blog author to address the comment. “Conversation is the key word,” Lyons-Blythe says. “God gave us two ears and one mouth. We need to listen as much as we talk.”

BE HONEST. Lyons-Blythe had a student come to the farm to do a film project. That particular day, one of Lyons-Blythe’s calves died. “I didn’t want her to see it at first, and then I conceded because this is the reality,” she says. “People need to see that we’re working our butts off to keep all our animals healthy, and sometimes you just can’t save one.”

SET ASIDE TIME. You don’t have to post daily; but aim for weekly to maintain readership. Lyons-Blythe and Payn-Knoper post at least once a week; Goodman writes a blog post most days.

GET THE WORD OUT IN REAL LIFE TOO. It’s not just an, “If I write it, they will come,” Lyons-Blythe says. “You have to take time to find a way to tell people about your blog.” The first thing she did was e-mail her blog to family, and it began to spread that way.

SHOW YOUR FACE. There’s a reluctance to do so, but Lyons-Blythe emphasizes the importance of putting a photo along with her name on her site. “If you can’t get a name or a picture, I don’t feel like you can trust someone,” she says.

“None of my beef product is available direct to consumers, but I promote certified Angus beef because all my steers go to the feedyard, so I put a face on that. That’s a real positive.”

ADDRESS HOT-BUTTON ISSUES. Payn-Knoper lists issues like biotechnology, organic, animal welfare, local, food versus fuel and urban farming.

BUILD A COMMUNITY. If you really want to connect, a Twitter or Facebook presence is helpful. “It’s imperative to offer as many channels to connect with as many people as possible,” Payn-Knoper says. ●

Getting Started



Sites like **Blogger.com**, **Wordpress.com** and **Typepad.com** are popular weblog sites. The sites make it simple to update, whether from a computer or mobile phone.

For additional blogging tips from Payn-Knoper’s Cause Matters, go to www.causematters.com/ag-social-media.