

HOW TO WORK WITH THE MEDIA

IT'S THE MEDIA'S RESPONSIBILITY TO DELIVER THE STORY. IT'S AGRICULTURE'S RESPONSIBILITY TO TELL IT.

The media is our most powerful ally in getting the facts about farming and food production out to the public. If we work with the media properly we will be much more effective in getting our message out.

Understanding Your Relationship with the Media

If you are interviewed, your side of the story will be part of the news report. If you decline an interview, you lose the opportunity to get your story across.

Journalists have deadlines. Respect them – a missed deadline is a missed opportunity.

You don't determine what the news is – the media does.

Media are generally more concerned with serving their audience than promoting any one interest. You should expect to get a fair hearing of your point-of-view but don't expect the media to take your side. There is no such thing as "off the record" so assume that everything you say may be used. Remember, if you choose to say "no comment" it can reflect badly on you.

A journalist's boss is the editor or producer. They, not the journalist, usually decide what appears and how it appears

Prepare for the Media Interview

Avoid going into a media interview 'cold' – prepare yourself.

If possible, avoid doing an interview immediately. Returning the call or setting an appointment to do the interview is the best strategy. It allows you to collect your information and your thoughts.



Before an interview: ask what subjects the journalist wants to cover; who he or she is reporting for and when the story will appear; what other sources of information they will be using and who else is being interviewed.

Develop your own strategy for the story: decide on the key points you want to get across and how you can work them into the interview. Think about the types of questions that could be asked and have your answers ready.

Be sure of your facts: Keep up to date on the current issues and happenings in your industry and know the accurate and up-to-date facts and figures. Know the case for the opposing point-of-view and what stories have recently been reported. Be ready to present your side without appearing defensive. Contact your provincial organization or Farm & Food Care Ontario to obtain any additional information or guidance you might require.

Plan the points you want to make before the interview begins (2-3 key points) and know what you want to say before going into an interview.

Speak in a language everyone understands. Don't use industry jargon and always define industry terms. For example, a pork producer knows what a farrowing pen is but the people we're trying to reach don't. Remember, effective communications means being understood.

When visuals are part of the interview (i.e. TV and photos) remember your appearance. Dress for the occasion and location.

Doing the Media Interview

Be friendly – a journalist is helping you to reach the public.

Make positive statements about your sector or area of expertise.

Be honest and direct. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Journalists know when you're trying to hide something and will do their best to get it out of you. Never make quotes unless you can substantiate them and only talk about things you know.

Be brief and concise. Put your most important point first and learn to talk in statements. Avoid run-on-sentences. This is especially important for radio and TV (electronic) interviews which want short (6 second) clips not long explanations.



Take control. Don't be afraid to steer the interview to your key points and make your points often. When you've answered the question or made your points, stop talking. Resist the urge to fill 'dead space'.

Illustrate your point with personal examples or analogies that others unfamiliar with the topic can relate to. Not only does this help to make you understood, but it adds interest to the story.

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Don't repeat a journalist's buzz words – unless they are your own and are positive. If a reporter asks questions using loaded or negative buzz words, do not give credence to them by using them. You can also provide a service by explaining why such words or phrases are incorrect.

Try to avoid answering hypothetical "what if" questions. Make your own statement. If you don't understand a question, ask the reporter to re-phrase it.

If a statement is made that is not true, refute it immediately and politely. Make sure to correct it in an informative and helpful manner.

If you don't like the question, you don't have to respond to it directly. Either rephrase the general message on the topic using your key point, or refer the journalist to someone better qualified to answer.

Rephrase your key points in a response.

Repeat key points for clarity and emphasis.

Keep your cool. Journalists may try to bait you and put you on the defensive. In these situations, remain calm and take your time explaining your point-of-view. Even if your explanations don't end up in the news story it will help the journalist's understanding.

Offer the names of other qualified spokespeople within the industry that the journalist might be interested in interviewing.

Make literature available to the media and always offer to send them additional information that they can use for this or future news stories.



Keep a record of media contacts. This will help you remember which journalists are fair and balanced and who you can call on when you have something to say.

Be confident, concise and enthusiastic.

Be Proactive: Some Things You Can Do:

Keep the media informed and in-touch by adding them to mailing lists, inviting them to meetings and contacting them with the story ideas.

Write a "letter-to-the-editor" when you feel it is required.

Show your appreciation for well-done stories. Take the time to contact journalists and/or management who do accurate and balanced stories. They'll appreciate the feedback and you'll make a valuable contact. You can also follow-up by way of a letter-to-the-editor or viewer/listener mail.

Although no one likes to admit their mistakes, both interviewees and journalists can make them. If the facts that appear in a story are incorrect contact the journalist or the editor/producer and politely point out the error. If the error was yours, point that out too. You can also follow-up with a letter-to-the-editor.

If an article or story is misleading or unbalanced contact the journalist directly. Be firm but reasonable in suggesting that, in the interest of fair reporting, he or she cover your side of the story too.

If you are aware of a TV program or advertisement that will be airing that is clearly anti-agriculture, begin a letter-writing campaign to the station's management demanding the show or ad not be aired. (This has proven to work in the past.)

If you are aware of a phone-in show dealing with agriculture, let other producers know and encourage them to call in with their points-of view.

If you see inaccurate or antiquated footage or photos accompanying stories about agriculture, contact Farm & Food Care Ontario so we can pursue it.

If you would like more information on communicating with the media, please contact us

