

FARMER ENTHUSIASM FOR SOCIAL MEDIA LEADS TO CREATION OF THE AGCHAT FOUNDATION

April 5, 2010 – Twitter. Facebook. YouTube. LinkedIn. More frequently, these are services being accessed from the turnrow, tractor’s seat and barn. Farmers are tapping into social media services more frequently, especially since the weekly streaming conversation called AgChat was founded on Twitter last year. As many offices closed Friday for holidays, farmers launched the [AgChat Foundation](#) online. Hundreds of people talked about the new website and the mission to empower farmers and ranchers to connect communities through social media platforms.

Farmers [Jeff Fowle](#) of California, [Darin Grimm](#) of Kansas, [Mike Haley](#) of Ohio and [Ray Prock](#) of California were strangers a year ago. They built friendships and began doing things that supported each other’s farming segments after meeting in the online AgChat discussion.

“I’d say the effort Ray and I spearheaded to raise awareness in the economic crisis for dairy farms was where we began to realize how well we could do in telling our stories online. It’s also the first time some of us really focused toward a common goal,” Haley explains. “We think AgChat Foundation will help other farmers share their experiences as we learn from each other about how to put the true faces and stories of American agriculture.”

Prock explains, “We’ve had these ideas and after tossing them around for months, all of us agreed, if farmers didn’t take ownership for moving this forward, we couldn’t really expect anyone else to. And as we worked on our ideas, a number of others have offered suggestions and a lot of time of their personal time to help us realize this vision.”

The Foundation has four program areas focused on social media:

- [Agvocracy 2.0 Training](#): Educate farmers through basic, mid-level & expert training to move mindsets up the technology ladder.
- [Strategic Agvocracy Coordination](#): Empower agriculture's voice through coordinated industry-wide efforts.
- [Data Analysis](#): Provide tools to assist agvocates with targeted community efforts.
- [Technology Scholarships](#): Equip farmers with infrastructure to enable full use of social media.

Each of the founding farmers believe in these four areas and social media so deeply, they each have elaborated on them by shooting videos that can be accessed through the Foundation’s new website <http://agchat.org>, by going to <http://youtube.com/agchat> or through the links above.

Fowle points out that the programs are meant to be broad. “It becomes very apparent through social media that there is a great diversity of farm stories. My family runs our ranch one way and

we may have a neighbor across the valley that makes very different choices. The real value of social media comes from farmers telling their own story from their own perspective.”

[Michele Payn-Knoper](#) admits that when she started AgChat a year ago, she had no idea how quickly it would grow. "The talent and dedication the farmers and ranchers who helped bring the AgChat Foundation to fruition is absolutely inspiring. All of them have applied their technology skills and commitment to the betterment of agriculture in ways that set them apart, but we are all confident this is a common thread among farmers who raise our food, fuel, feed and fiber."

Volunteers have been part of [AgChat on twitter](#) for a long time, providing moderation of discussions, etc and adopting more ways to reach out to both members of the ag community and the general public as well.

Even Grimm finds himself amplifying their voice online. “My friends and family would be surprised about how vocal I’ve become online cause I’m somewhat of an introvert, but I’ve seen a lot of power from farmers sharing their stories and am trying to do the same. Most of us think our story is pretty boring but you find that some of the most common things we do on the farm are some of the most interesting to people in cities and suburbs.”

Data shows that almost 300 people sent messages on Twitter Friday and driving more than 1,500 people to access AgChat.org and reaching almost a quarter of a million people in the 1.4 million impressions.

The AgChat Foundation seeks to involve all sectors of agriculture in this effort, encompassing diverse viewpoints such as conventional, organic, small and large operations. Our focus is to bring agriculture together, rather than segment and diminish our industry by focusing on size, region or production differences. The board of directors of farming represents diverse types of family farms across North America.

- Chris Chinn, Farmer
- Jeff Fowle, Rancher
- Mark Gale, Agribusiness Liaison
- Eliz Greene, Consumer & Healthcare
- Darin Grimm, Farmer
- Mike Haley, Farmer
- Shaun Haney, Seedsman
- Michele Payn-Knoper, #AgChat Founder
- Ray Prock, Farmer
- Dr. Chris Raines, Extension
- Dr. Katherine Swift, Veterinarian
- Tricia Braid Terry, Check-off Representative
- Chuck Zimmerman, Agribusiness Liaison

The advisory committee provides perspective from agricultural organizations, farms, consumers and technology experts. The AgChat Foundation is a registered Indiana non-profit seeking 501(c)(3) status. The Board of Directors maintains all fiduciary responsibilities and oversees the programming.

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To arrange an interview with one of the farmers involved in creating the AgChat Foundation, please contact the group via email through media@agchat.org.