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# Connected



Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google+, Foursquare ... the list goes on and on in the cyber world of social media. Making connections, establishing relationships, and sharing information are just a few of the reasons users log on every day.

The College of Agriculture is one of nearly 500 million users on Twitter, and one of 800 million users on Facebook. The college is staying on top of an ever-changing medium.

In fall 2010, the college made social media a priority. Sharon Thielen, assistant dean, was at the forefront of this change. She created a student position in the academic programs office to dedicate 10 hours per week to monitoring and publishing social media content.

Kate Bormann, senior in agricultural communications and journalism and former college social media coordinator, experienced firsthand the dramatic increase in social media connections.

"We saw a sharp increase in outreach, followers, and 'buzz' about the college on the social media outlets," said Bormann.

Social media provide an avenue for all ages and backgrounds to connect with the college.

"Alumni and current and prospective students can stay connected with their K-State family by following and liking our sites," said Thielen.

Since August 2010, the Kansas State University College of Agriculture Facebook page has received 1,823 "likes," for a total of 2,771 subscribers to the college's posts.

The college also has a presence on Twitter, @kstateag, with 1,712 followers. Both social media sites draw current and prospective students, alumni, parents, friends of the college, and agricultural companies.

To connect with these followers, the student coordinator tweets five to six times a day and posts on Facebook once a day. Followers receive college event notifications, updates on student and faculty success, and agricultural news. The

college launched new social media campaigns to develop a stronger brand and relationship with followers.

Each October, the college exhibits at the career show at the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, Ind. A recent addition — a green screen that allows FFA members to select a fun, agricultural backdrop, take a photo in front of the screen, and upload the finished image to Facebook — has been popular. During the 2011 convention, the college's Facebook page received 942 visits, an increase from 132 the week before.

"Social media gives us an opportunity to reach people in many different ways," said Associate Dean Don Boggs. "Not everyone goes to the website or gets a brochure. Not everyone knows an alum. This is another way to reach people and get our message to them."

Each February, students staff the phones during Telefund. Some agricultural companies, including Cargill and General Mills, match donations made by their employees. To thank donors and student callers, K-State Ag tweets during the six, three-hour Telefund sessions. Twitter users who answer College of Agriculture trivia questions win Call Hall ice cream, and alumni often tweet about their donations and engage in conversation via Twitter with K-State Ag.

"Twitter is a simple, fast way to connect with a group we cannot thank enough for their generosity," Boggs said.

Other K-State colleges have noticed agriculture's successful social media track record. In January 2012, the College of Agriculture presented an educational session for the colleges of Engineering and Business Administration on



social media campaigns, the value of social media, and trends.

The college plans to continue its social media efforts. Thielen said the next step is to increase the college's presence on YouTube with videos highlighting its hands-on classes, student diversity, award-winning faculty, vast opportunities, and family atmosphere.

"Staying on top of social media trends and actively participating on the platforms is one more way we can communicate and engage with various audiences," said Bormann. "Keeping in touch with our alums, both current and prospective students, and fans is important."

To stay connected to the college, follow Twitter, @kstateag, or like Kansas State University College of Agriculture on Facebook.

— Nellie Hill



## Sharing Information in Multiple Formats

K-State Research and Extension agents and specialists also are experimenting with social media to communicate with their diverse clientele across the state. Facebook is a popular way to stay in touch with 4-H families.

For example, the River Valley District — which includes the counties of Clay, Cloud, Republic, and Washington — has had a 4-H Facebook page for two years and an Operation Military Kids (OMK) Facebook page for about a year.

"On our 4-H page, we publicize upcoming events, offer information on local and state 4-H opportunities, share district 4-H success stories, and provide 4-H promotional information," said John Forshee (BS '82 agricultural education), River Valley District director. "Our OMK Facebook page was developed to reach military families living off-base in the district."

In addition to Facebook, off-campus units are posting to Twitter and blogs. A number of family and consumer sciences agents tweeted prepared messages from America Saves, a national campaign to encourage people to save.

Bill Reid, at the Pecan Experiment Field in Chetopa, uses photos and short posts to draw pecan growers to his blog *northernpecans.blogspot.com*.

Photos and videos also can be shared online. Some offices make photos available through Flickr, an online photo-sharing site, and more than 100 gardening videos have been posted to <http://www.kansasgreenyards.org> and YouTube.

K-State Research and Extension is finding new and innovative ways to fulfill its mission of sharing research-based information with Kansans.