

The development of communication strategies through partnerships between community groups
and the Department of Agricultural Education

*Kyle P. Sharp
John "Jack" Elliot
Billye Foster
The University of Arizona*

Introduction

The population of Pima County, Arizona is concentrated primarily in the city of Tucson and other urban municipalities. In the outlying areas there is still an abundance of agricultural production. In order to build community awareness of the value of agricultural production, local producers have reactivated the Pima County division of the Arizona Farm Bureau. As a grass roots organization, Pima County Farm Bureau slowly built a solid active member base over a period of about 3 years. After building this solid base, the leadership decided to build an effective strategy to communicate their views with the community and active members. This lead to a partnership with the Department of Agricultural Education at the University of Arizona.

Objective

The purpose of this conceptual development process has been to build greater community awareness of agricultural education through partnerships with community organizations. To carry out this process an agricultural education graduate student was selected to work with Pima County Farm Bureau in developing a public awareness and education campaign. The graduate student selected, came with a strong background in communication. The program helped build relationships with community members and raise awareness of the power agricultural education can have for informing the public.

Methodology

The graduate student was experienced in using participants as an observers method of gathering information (Frankel 2006). The method was implemented to gather information about the goals for the communications plan as well as receive feedback on the plan as it was presented in stages. First a meeting was held with the president of Pima County Farm Bureau, to determine the needs of both organizations. The main goal was determined to be informing the public about key issues facing agriculturalists in Arizona. In this meeting it was decided the graduate student would attend all meetings of the board of directors to give progress reports, receive input on projects, and asses the goals that had been set.

Through this process it was determined a newsletter would be produced quarterly to keep current members informed and offer opportunity to participate in upcoming events. The process of producing the newsletter began with developing a general template and story ideas for the first issue. After approval by the board of directors the newsletter was produced and given to professors in the Department of Agricultural Education for approval then sent to the board of

directors for final approval. The newsletter was printed and sent to members with an offer for receiving the publication electronically.

Displays were developed using information gathered from members of the Pima County Board of Directors. The displays were created for use at public events with audiences including politicians, other agriculturalists, and the community at large. Many options were presented for possible ways to present information and educate the public. The Displays were designed in power point then printed; this method was chosen to give maximum flexibility and greater options for display panels to be used. The panels were then hung on a three panel display board purchased by the Board of Directors for this purpose. Final approval of the design was given the Department Head of Agricultural Education, and the president of Pima County Farm Bureau.

Results and Conclusions

As a result of the overwhelming acceptance of the overall campaign, the Pima County Farm Bureau Board of Directors has also undertaken community partnerships by sponsoring events such as the National Agricultural Ambassador Conference, meeting with the Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow, and working to raise money and awareness of the Ronald McDonald House project to build a bigger facility in Tucson.

The graduate student is now the editor of the newsletter which is sent to approximately 900 households in Pima County. This newsletter has also been used by other departments in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at meetings and seminars to share information with members inside and outside of academic professions. An opportunity for this newsletter to be more effective would be the creation of a list serve or other means of distributing the newsletter electronically as a means of saving money for Pima County Farm Bureau and give students the experience of working with web publishing.

The displays have been used at public events including Arizona's Legislative Ag. Fest, an event to inform newly elected Arizona legislators about the issues important to all of Arizona's agricultural industry. Other events the displays have been used at included the University of Arizona, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences homecoming AgCat Open, an alumni golf tournament, where Pima County Farm Bureau was the sponsor of the lunch after the tournament. The displays were also used for public education about agriculture at Food Checkout Day an event partnered with a local grocery chain to help highlight the source of affordable food. As time passes the display panels will need to be updated regularly and more panels can be created for specific audiences.

Future plans in the partnership include other forms of advertising such as a roadside billboard or newspaper advertising. These options are under consideration by the board of directors with regard to cost effectiveness or future partnership opportunities in the community. The Department of Agricultural Education will continue to benefit through partnerships and informing students about opportunities in agriculture.

References

Frankel, J., Wallen, N. (2006). Validity and Reliability. In *How to design and evaluate research in education* (6th ed., pp. 151, 155-156), Boston, McGraw Hill