

Ag businesses can use free social media tools to connect with hungry customers

Food shortages and panic at the grocery stores in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have begun to change the way average grocery consumers think about sourcing their food.

As small ag producers know, there isn't really a shortage of food, just a disconnect between how a small farm's food reaches the average consumer's table. Here's the crucial question, "How do you let consumers know our thriving ag-businesses can serve their needs where grocery stores fall short?"

To connect with these hungry consumers you must inform them small ag-businesses exist and can fulfill their food demands. You have lots of great tools to do this, with social media being one of the most powerful (and free!) options.

Social media is an important marketing tool all small businesses can use to spread information about their products and mission. Facebook and Instagram are the most useful social media platforms for small businesses. Facebook owns Instagram, and you can link these two platforms so you can post from just one channel to create new posts on both accounts.

ABOUT THE WYOMING SBDC NETWORK

The Wyoming SBDC Network offers no-cost advising and technical assistance to help Wyoming entrepreneurs think about, launch, grow, reinvent, or exit their businesses. In 2019, the Wyoming SBDC Network:

- Helped Wyoming entrepreneurs start 108 new businesses,
- Created or saved 3,402 jobs, and
- Brought a capital impact of more than \$24 million to the state.

The Wyoming SBDC Network is hosted by the University of Wyoming with state funds from the Wyoming Business Council and is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration.

INCLUDE A PHOTO OR VIDEO

Posts with visual components get more attention than just text. You don't need to be a professional photographer to take great photos nor do you need an amazing camera. Use what you have and practice capturing moments. Here are some examples:

- If you are a food producer of any kind, try posting recipes using your product along with an image of that dish.
- If you produce an improved product from your goods like soaps or textiles, post photos of these things in action.
- Experiment with live videos of you performing daily tasks! Take your followers out to feed the chickens with you, give them a virtual tour of your farm, introduce them to your employees. If a live video is too much pressure, explore the stories feature on Facebook and Instagram where you can post lifestyle videos but still have the opportunity to edit it before it goes out to the public.

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Be consistent.** Try making a content schedule for your business to make things easy! For example, commit to posting once a day on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Then plan what kind of posts you'll make so when the day comes, coming up with ideas is easy.
 - Monday — a recipe using your product along with a picture of the dish or someone making the dish
 - Wednesday — a picture of the farm or a task your business is focusing on that day
 - Friday — post about the farmers market you are attending this weekend or about the products you are taking to a retail store
- **Use industry-related hashtags.** Tags help non-customers find your posts if they are interested in the topic you hashtagged.

The best way to organize your tags is to be sure one-third of them relate to a broad audience, one-third relate to a more specific audience, and one-third relate specifically to your business.

- For example, a small producer that sells pasture-raised chicken, eggs, and goat milk to their local community — **Broad audience:** #smallfarm #chickens #goatsmilk. **Specific audience:** #farmfresheggs #nubiangoatmilk #pasturedpoultry. **Relates to you:** #yourbusinessname #thelocalmarketyouusellat #productname.
- **Include a call to action** encouraging customers to engage with your post or your business:
 - Share this post with a friend who would like this product.
 - Find this product at your local food co-op or visit us at the farmers market this Friday.
 - Check out our website for more information about us.

Content is king in the social media world, so take some time to think of how you would like to share your business with your audience. Think about the values you want your customer to know about and decide how much of the process you want to share with your followers.

If you need assistance developing your content strategy or deciphering your mission, contact the Wyoming Small Business Development Center Network for marketing advice and coaching. The Wyoming SBDC Network's team of regional advisers are ready to assist in creating a plan that grows your follower count and, in turn, your sales.

Maureen Johnson is the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) marketing coordinator with the WSBDC and can be contacted at (307) 343-0925 or at mjohn125@uwyo.edu.

Miller moths are back from their summer mountain vacation

As I write this in late August, "miller" moths, or more accurately the adults of the army cutworm, are migrating back to the lower elevations after spending the summer fattening up by feeding on alpine flower nectar.

Miller moths were very abundant this spring as they migrated to the mountains. I had lots of inquiries from citizens and news media asking why the millers were so numerous and such a nuisance this year. Weather conditions favorable for survival of the previous generation of miller moths and their offspring are the main factor that influences army cutworm year-to-year population changes.

We also had a dry spring in 2020 with fewer flowers for them to feed on in the rangelands. This concentrated more of the migrating millers into areas with irrigation, such as the landscapes in our towns where they could find food. During their migration to the mountains, the millers don't hurt plants — they use a soft proboscis to feed on flower nectar.

During the fall migration, the millers will deposit eggs on bare soil associated with potential host

plants for their caterpillars to feed on in late winter and early spring. Along her flight path, a single miller moth can potentially produce up to 3,000 eggs before she eventually dies. The eggs don't immediately hatch but will after being stimulated by fall precipitation.

After hatching, the tiny caterpillars feed on green vegetation for as long as temperatures at soil level are at least 45 F. When it gets too cold, the still-small caterpillars will enter the soil to spend the winter insulated from extreme air temperatures. The caterpillars, now called army cutworms, can feed on a wide variety of plant species and inflict crop damage on alfalfa, small grains, sugarbeets, and pulse crop seedlings when they resume feeding in the spring.

Army cutworms have also been documented damaging rangeland. In the spring of 2008, approximately 10 square miles of rangeland north of Morrill, Nebraska, was infested with army cutworms.



The insects left behind only plants they couldn't eat, such as thread leaf sedge.

Army cutworms feed at night or on heavily overcast days and hide during the day under plant debris, dirt clods, and in soil cracks making them hard to detect. If a population of army cutworms eats all the available food in an area, they live up to their common name and stage a mass migration, "marching" together like an army of insect soldiers.

Pasture, Rangeland, Forage Insurance protects against sparse precipitation

Pasture, Rangeland, Forage Insurance Rainfall Index (RI-PRF) offers protection against revenue losses due to decreased forage production, based on a rainfall index.

The policy uses grid areas approximately 17x17 miles as part of the rainfall index determined by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and divided into eleven, 2-month index intervals. Rainfall over the intervals is estimated using NOAA data.

Note that actual precipitation received at a specific location within the grid area does not influence coverage.

Production intervals selected must be non-consecutive with no more than 70 percent of the resulting coverage in any one interval. For instance, where the April–May interval is selected, the next closest interval available would be June–July. Coverage levels range from 70–90 percent of the county base value. Producers can select a productivity factor of up to 150 percent of the county base value as well. This feature allows individuals to better-tailor coverage based on forage productivity and other factors.

Indemnities are paid where the insured value falls below the actual index value for the insured interval.

ESTABLISHING RI-PRF COVERAGE

Several resources provided by the Risk Management Agency (RMA) can assist producers to explore RI-PRF coverage and determine how it may fit an individual operation. PRF support tools are at prodwebnlb.rma.usda.gov/apps/prf#. The tool is divided into four sections: Grid Locator, Historical

Indexes, Decision Support Tool, and Estimated Indemnities.

The **Grid Locator** allows the user to identify locations and subsequent grid ID numbers on a map or to look up locations by coordinates. Once the grid number is identified, users can select the **Historical Index** tab to display index values for each year back to 1948, as well as for each interval period. This offers historical trends for past precipitation and allows producers to compare their own historical data for similar time/interval periods.

The **Decision Support Tool** allows producers to select their production intervals and the desired level of coverage for an interval, keeping in mind intervals cannot be consecutive and total no more than 70 percent of the total value. The tool generates the estimated overall coverage along with producer premium costs, and allows comparison of different levels of coverage with that of previous years.

Consider Platte County producer Ben Burwell* who is seeking RI-PRF coverage on 1,200 acres of non-irrigated rangeland. Ben's land falls in grid ID number 26500, with the historical index values back to 2009 (see image lower left).

These values are expressed as a percentage of normal; less than 100 equates less than average precipitation. April–May and June–July are the interval periods when moisture is crucial to Ben's forage production. Remember that intervals cannot be consecutive. With the earlier spring moisture being most crucial, they choose the maximum coverage level for this interval, 70 percent, and the remaining 30 percent in the June–July interval.

Moving to the Decision Support Tool, we enter this interval selection, and the tool generates a county base value of \$8.30/acre. For comparison purposes, Ben considers 2012 a dry year for comparison, so we enter 2012 for the sample year and maximum coverage (90 percent with a productivity factor of 150 percent). The resulting coverage totals \$13,446 or \$11.21 per acre, with a premium cost of \$991 or \$0.83 per acre, including subsidies. Using 2012 data gives in an estimated indemnity of \$6,829 (or \$5.69/acre).

FURTHER ANALYSIS

Thus far, we know Mr. Burwell can purchase \$13,446 in RI-PRF coverage for \$0.83/acre. This seems like a reasonable cost for coverage of losses associated with decreased precipitation. The next question to consider is how effective would this coverage be and what is the likelihood an indemnity will be paid?

Normal partial budgeting analysis, accounting for revenues and expenses, may not adequately answer these questions. The Risk Scenario Planning Tool from RightRisk.org allows decision makers to account for the inherent variability in the budgeting process. In the next installment,

we will demonstrate how the RSP tool can help further evaluate RI-PRF coverage and corresponding indemnity payments.

* *The Burwell operation is a case study example created to demonstrate RightRisk tools and their application. No identification with actual persons (living or deceased), places, or agricultural operation is intended nor should be inferred.*

James Sedman is a consultant to the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics in the University of Wyoming College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and **John Hewlett** is a farm and ranch management specialist in the department. Hewlett may be reached at (307) 766-2166 or hewlett@uwyo.edu.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

RI-PRF is one of the most-utilized crop insurance policies in Wyoming, with over \$54,000,000 in coverage in the state in 2019. It can be an important part of an operation's risk management plan, covering losses due to drought. Visit your local crop insurance agent or www.rma.usda.gov for more information on RI-PRF coverage. Visit RightRisk.org for further risk management educational resources on this and other subjects.

RI-PRF SUPPORT TOOL AVAILABLE

- Available at: <https://prodwebnlb.rma.usda.gov/apps/prf#>
- Allows users to locate their grid area using satellite maps
- Users can compare various coverage levels and historical rainfall data as far back as 1948 in chart or graphical view
- Users can view estimated indemnities and coverage

IMPORTANT DATES AND REMINDERS:

- RI-PRF sign-up for 2021 coverage deadline is Nov. 15
- Sign-Up for CFAP program has been extended to Sept. 11
- Planting deadline for fall planted crops is approaching (check with your agent for exact date)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

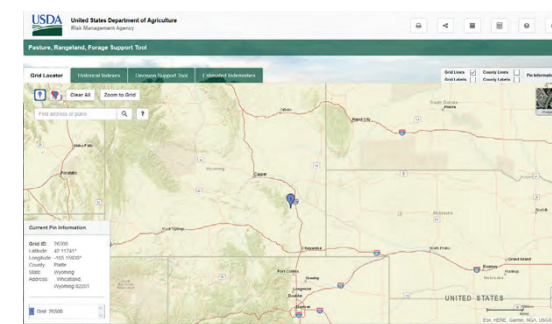
The Risk Scenario Planner (RSP) tool, from RightRisk.org and part of the RightRisk Analytics Toolbox, allows producers to use a partial budget format to examine potential risks and returns of a change in business strategy and assess the associated uncertainty of that strategy.

Simply point your browser to RightRisk.org and click the Resources tab to select Risk Management Tools to begin.

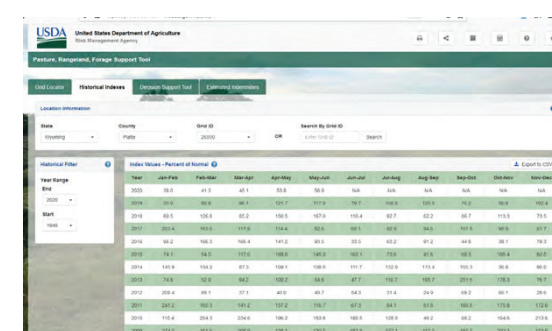
RightRisk.org also offers the Risk Scenario Planning Course available under the Courses tab. This course offers users an in-depth explanation of the RSP tool and its application in evaluating several risk decisions.

<https://wiki.bugwood.org/HPIPM:Crops>. From the crop directory, pick those you are growing to find out more information about army cutworm or related cutworm species management.

Scott Schell is the University of Wyoming Extension entomologist and can be reached at (307) 766-2508 or at sschell@uwyo.edu.



Grid Locator



Historical Indexes

Because army cutworms are sporadically occurring pests, producers may not think about scouting fields for them every year, starting in March or April when we are still getting frosts. With so many miller moths migrating this year, even if they have poor egg survival, their army cutworm offspring may still be at economically damaging densities next spring.

As few as two army cutworms per square foot in some crops can be economically damaging. Please mark your 2021 calendar with a reminder to scout crop fields and rangelands for this pest starting in March.

Detailed information for the management of army cutworms on the numerous crops they damage is at the High Plains Integrated Pest Management website