

**THE MANAGER****ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES**

By Julie Berry

Use of  
newsletter  
templates  
for neighbor  
outreach

# Telling a Farm's Story

Connecting with consumers is increasingly important as the gap between those who eat and those who farm widens.

The New York Animal Agriculture Coalition (NYAAC) has developed a tool for farmers to do that. Jessica Ziehm, NYAAC Executive Director, developed newsletter templates and sample articles, and researched paper, printers and bulk mailing routes in New York State. "It's an opportunity to educate and make advocates out of our neighbors and make relationships with them," Ziehm said.

Lou Anne King, co-owner of the 2,000-cow Maplevue Dairy in Madrid, NY is writing the farm's second newsletter, which will be mailed this fall. Her brother, David Fisher, worked with Ziehm last winter to create a 2013 spring newsletter.

"It's just a matter of getting started and then you have to hold yourself accountable," King said. "It's very difficult to do because it's not something we're comfortable doing, just like media training. That's why the template made it so easy to get started."

The first newsletter, which they mailed to 500 residents in Madrid, included a general introduction written by Ziehm, who also helped with layout. It featured an introduc-

tion to the farm and focused on family history.

Response was small, but positive, King said. They also had a bump in interest on a newly created Facebook page. And, the newsletter led to conversations in the grocery store. "That was nice," she said. "People said they appreciated the newsletter."

Neighbors were most interested in stories about the farm family and their history, King said. NYAAC state benchmarking research also found this was true. Messages about family tradition resonate most strongly because it builds trust that farmers will make choices to serve as stewards of the land.

"They want to know about the people, not necessarily the process. About our grandparents, our parents and ourselves," King said.

The fall newsletter issue will include cover the farm's history, road safety during harvest, and use of technology on the farm dating back to a 1957 news article about her grandfather's use of tile drainage.

Crystal Grimaldi, human resource and office manager, at the 975-cow Ideal Dairy Farms in Hudson Falls, NY likes to write, which has made outreach through newsletters easier. She uses the template, but writes her own articles. She sends the newsletter quarterly to 1,100 people on two postal routes near the farm. Each issue takes about four hours. The farm is located one mile from the village border, which makes this outreach especially important.

"We're interested in trying to educate the public on agriculture. This is important because in many households there seems to be a disjoint in awareness between the process of food production and the consumer's table," Grimaldi said. "It's a great opportunity to ward off misconceptions that could hinder the environment in which we operate our business. It's important our neighbors have an understanding of what we do and who we are to foster relationships and a positive context to dairy in for the future."

The most positive feedback came from farm neighbors. The newsletter has also driven traffic to their social media and Web site. And, one neighbor called to discuss a concern, which Grimaldi diffused.

"It brings awareness to our farm practices. It gives people an answer to some of the questions they might have, and gives people an opportunity to contact you," she said. "The most important thing is to get our story to our neighbors and consumers." □

