

Social media bridging the gap between farmers and consumers

- **Eight in ten farmers now active on social media**
- **Three quarters of farmers claim the internet has brought them and consumers closer together**
- **Seven in ten farmers say they have seen an increase in consumers' interest in farming over the past 12 months**
- **Six in ten farmers have increased the time spent on social media over the past year**
- **Nearly half of farmers say people are surprised to find them online**
- **Most popular platforms are: Facebook (70%); Twitter (45%) and LinkedIn (24%)**

As part of their drive to connect with the public, more and more farmers are turning to the internet and with great success. Three quarters of farmers surveyed believe the web has helped them get closer to consumers and many now use Twitter and Facebook to connect with the public, as well as their own websites and blogs.

The survey of farmers was carried out by LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) ahead of this weekend's Open Farm Sunday and revealed that more than eight in ten farmers are active on at least one social media platform. More than 40% of farmers believe that the majority of their online followers are consumers or members of the public, rather than those from within the food and farming industry, with a further 20% claiming an equal split. Consumers' interest in farming is on the rise with seven in ten farmers saying they have seen an increase over the past 12 months. A similar number revealed they get asked questions online with the top topics including questions about farm visits (42%), what food they produce (35%) and how (32%).

More than three quarters of those surveyed have a website for their farm or planned to launch one in the next twelve months. Farms are maximising the opportunity websites offer with a host of information and activities designed to tell their story to consumers. These include blogs, online shops, videos, image galleries, newsletters and testimonials as well as recipes and tips enabling consumers to make the most of their produce. Many websites also have interactive farm maps and, through LEAF, there is also an opportunity to take a virtual farm walk.

Six in ten farmers said they had increased the time they spend on social media over the past year. Of the farmers questioned, six in ten use it to communicate with friends and family (60%), just ahead of the number who use it to communicate with customers (59%), or to get news from within the food and farming industry (55%).

Communicating with customers was the *most important* reason though, with 37% naming this ahead of communicating with family and friends (23%).

Forty-four per cent of farmers questioned use social media to communicate with each other with communities and discussion forums such as #AgriChatUK and #ClubHectare growing in strength. Farmer Charles Tassell, co-founder of #AgriChatUK, said: “Since we launched AgriChatUK last year we’ve seen the number of farmers taking part increasing week by week. This new research shows that farmers are not only talking online amongst themselves though, but are also embracing this relatively new arena as a tool to reach customers too. Anything that brings people closer to those of us who grow and produce their food is a good thing. Nearly half of the farmers surveyed said that people had been surprised to find them online, but the opportunity to explain farming to a non-farming audience should never be missed.”

While one in five farmers believe that social media and the internet is now the best way to communicate with consumers, seven in ten still believe that farm visits are the top choice. This weekend’s Open Farm Sunday will see more than 350 farms open their gates to the public to allow them to discover the story behind their food.

Caroline Drummond, Chief Executive, LEAF, the organisers of Open Farm Sunday, said: “The research showed that farmers are still being asked questions like ‘can you get cows from bulls?’ or ‘do potatoes grow on trees?’. This shows how important it is for farmers to engage with customers. It is great to see that the internet is playing its role, but nothing beats seeing farming up close. Open Farm Sunday has been connecting consumers and farmers for the past eight years and gives visitors the chance to meet the people who are growing their food, find out more, and say thank you too. We hope as many people as possible visit a farm on the 9th June.”

Facebook was the most popular platform, with seventy per cent of farmers either having a profile for themselves or a page for their farm. Other popular platforms included Twitter (45%), LinkedIn (24%) and Google+ (15%).

For more information on Open Farm Sunday visit www.farmsunday.org

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For up to date Open Farm Sunday news please follow [@openfarmsunday](https://twitter.com/openfarmsunday) on Twitter. For further information, images, or to arrange an interview with a local farmer or preview a visit to a participating LEAF farm, contact:

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Notes to editors:

- Online survey of 189 farmers carried out by LEAF May 2013
- LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) www.leafuk.org is the leading organisation delivering sustainable food and farming. (Registered charity no: 1045781)
- The eighth annual Open Farm Sunday on 9th June 2013 provides a great opportunity for the public to truly discover the story behind their food
- Visitors will be able to learn from farmers themselves how natural plant and insect species are encouraged to thrive alongside crops, they will get a close-up look at farm animals and see how the needs of wildlife are balanced with modern food production
- LEAF organises Open Farm Sunday and supports farmers with putting on an event that is not only enjoyable, but gives visitors a really fascinating insight into aspects of the countryside that they would not usually see or experience on an average day out
- LEAF supports both LEAF member and non-LEAF farmers by hosting a number of information events across the country with practical advice and tips for organising successful events. LEAF also provides free promotional support materials and an interactive online event database to register details of farmer events
- Sponsors for Open Farm Sunday 2013 include Asda, Country Life butter, Defra, Frontier Agriculture, John Deere, LEAF Marque, Marks and Spencer, National Farmers Union, Syngenta, The Co-operative and Waitrose, plus BPEX, Dairy Co, EBLEX, HDC, HGCA, Cotswold Seeds, FarmStay UK and Farmers Weekly
- Keep up to date with LEAF's activities via twitter [www.twitter.com/LEAF Farming](https://www.twitter.com/LEAF_Farming) and our regular blogs at leafmarque.wordpress.com.