

MODULE 5: How do you talk to consumers about your locally grown food? – Part 1

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*Understanding communication strategies

*Telling your own story and talking to consumers about your locally grown food

*Talking about local food

It seems like people are less connected to agriculture today, yet in recent years consumers have become more interested in learning about their food and farmers. Producers and consumers do not always speak the same language though and at times, the public and the agricultural industry have struggled to understand each other. This module will equip you to use key communication strategies to improve producer and consumer relations.

At the end of this module, you will be able to:

1. Understand and apply transparent communications techniques.
2. Use two-way communication and know its benefits.
3. Recognize what pro-active risk communication is and how to apply appropriate techniques.

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Pertinent symbols and behaviors



Activity → This symbol denotes the start of an activity.

Italicized and indented text designates instructor material and does not need to be read as a script.

Materials you will need for this module:

- Easel pad or white board for you to record participant objectives for the day or any prevalent issues or questions
- Tape (for Easel pad pages to be posted visible to the class. If you use white boards, you will need to have enough space to keep information visible from previous exercises throughout session before erasing at the end.)
- Markers for white board or easel
- Pencils or pens for participants
- Activity worksheets
- Evaluations

Time for module presentation with activities

1 hour and 15 minutes

Begin Module

Slide 1 – Title

Hello. My name is _____. I work with the _____ and will be your facilitator for this presentation. Today we will discuss how to talk to consumers about the food products that you produce locally.



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Slide 2 – Review

In our last session we covered the advantages and disadvantages of various media channels, the possibility of using existing branding programs for your products, tips on creating your personal brand and marketing strategy, and ways to incorporate these into your promotional plan.

Slide 3 – Agenda

Let's take a look at today's agenda and overview.

Review housekeeping notes such as restroom location and other general information and instructions.

Today we will continue talking about getting your message out. We will specifically cover how to talk to consumers about your locally grown food products.

Consumers are less connected to agriculture today than they were in the past; yet in recent years consumers have become more interested in learning about their food and farmers. Producers and consumers do not always speak the same language though and at times, the public and the agricultural industry have struggled to understand each other. This module will equip you to use key communication strategies to improve producer and consumer relations. At the end of this module, you will understand transparent communication, 2-way communication, and risk communication.

After we have discussed these topics we will summarize what we have learned and complete an evaluation.

Slide 4 – Objectives

1. Understand and apply transparent communications techniques
2. Use two-way communication and know its benefits
3. Recognize what pro-active risk communication is and how to apply appropriate techniques

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Slide 5 – Achieving Transparency

When you communicate with your customers or potential customers, you want to put your best foot forward. Communicating openly and honestly will help present yourself positively. The backbone of communicating with consumers is achieving **transparency**. In its simplest terms, transparency can be defined as sharing all possible information, both positive and negative, with consumers so they can make an informed decision that is best for them.

Rumble, J. (2015). Transparency in agriculture and natural resources: Defining transparent communications (WC225). Retrieved from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc225>

Rawlins, B. (2008a). Give the emperor a mirror: Toward developing a stakeholder measurement of organizational transparency. Journal of Public Relations Research, 21(1), 71-99. doi: 10.1080/10627260802153421

Rawlins, B. (2008b). Measuring the relationship between organizational transparency and employee trust. Public Relations Journal, 2(2), 425-439. Retrieved from <http://www.prsa.org/Intelligence/PRJournal/>

Slide 6 – Benefits of Transparency for the Consumer

Transparency provides many benefits to both the consumer and the producer. Consumers are capable of making informed decisions that are better for them and their families. The customer will also understand the product they are purchasing more thoroughly.

Slide 7 – Benefits of Transparency for the Producer

Transparency allows your business to build consumer trust. This will enhance your capability to overcome loss of trust after a crisis. Providing your customer with transparent communication will aid you in reversing skepticism that other organizations may incite through deceptive practices. Transparency can also lead to enhanced accountability and commitment within the business.

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Slide 8 – Transparent Communications Include

What makes up transparent communication?

Basically, transparent communication provides information that is important to meeting your target audience's needs. In order to effectively draft this type of communication, you must thoroughly understand the needs of your audience.

Asking questions can help you pinpoint what information is relevant. Questions such as:

- Will my target audience feel this is relevant?
- Will my audience understand the information clearly?
- Am I providing complete information?

Slide 9 – Questions to Pinpoint Information

Other questions include:

- Am I providing accurate information?
- How reliable is the information I am providing?
- How timely is the information I am providing?
- Are other sources providing comparable information?

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Slide 10 – Exercise A



Refer to Exercise A worksheets found after the module portion of this document for instructions and materials.

The purpose of this exercise and those that follow is to give participants an opportunity to practice achieving transparency in communication. This exercise should also help participants develop the skills and knowledge necessary to determine if a communication message is transparent.

This exercise will allow you to practice developing transparency in your communication. Using the information we have discussed regarding transparency, write a short paragraph telling potential customers about a favorite crop you produce. Your message should contain information that would persuade consumers to purchase your product, such as the actions you take to make certain your product is safe and a good purchase. Following the completion of your paragraph, you will be asked to share your draft and have the opportunity for feedback from other participants about the transparency of your message. Please emphasize points that promote transparency and make suggestions on how the participant might improve transparency in the paragraph if appropriate.

After participants have had time to create their story (5-7 minutes), give everybody the chance to share what they wrote. After each person shares, open the floor for constructive feedback from all participants. Try to emphasize transparency when leading the discussion by re-emphasizing the questions presented on slides 8 and 9.

Slide 11 – Two-way Communication

Communicating transparently also includes participant feedback, or participating in two-way communication. Audience participation plays an important role in effective communication. Consumers like having the ability to provide feedback through two-way communication. Two-way communication avenues provide methods to start conversations between you and your customers.



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Slide 12 – Questions to Help Build Two-way Communication

Here are some questions you can ask to help build two-way communication:

- Have I invited the audience to be involved in communication?
- Have I invited the audience to give feedback?
- Have I answered audience feedback that required a response?

Slide 13 – Questions to Help Build Two-way Communication (continued)

Other questions include:

- Am I providing enough detail in the information?
- Is the information available and easy to find?
- Have I tried to understand and solicit consumer opinion?

Slide 14 – Exercise B



Refer to Exercise B worksheets found after the module portion of this document for instructions and materials.

The purpose of this exercise is to think about how one might apply some of the communications channels discussed in module 4 to two-way communication. This exercise should also explore how one might utilize the channels to provide two-way communication opportunities in their promotional plan.

In the first column on your worksheet, list communication channels you feel are appropriate to establish two-way communication between your business and customers. You should utilize information we discussed in module 4. The second column provides space for you to record how you would use each channel to provide two-way communication in your promotional plan. After you fill in your worksheets, we will collect group input and create a master list.

After participants have had time to fill in their worksheets (approximately 3-5 minutes), allow individuals to share their answers to the group. Create a master list on a white board or easel pad for all to view.

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Slide 15 – Accountability

Transparency also includes being accountable. An important part of accountability involves your business taking responsibility for communicated information, its actions, and any judgments made.

There are several questions you can ask yourself to help you determine if you are showing accountability in your communications.

- Am I providing material about all sides of a controversial topic?
- Am I providing information that may hurt my business?
- Does the information I am providing match industry standards?
- Have I communicated any mistakes my business has made?

Slide 16 – Important!

When you draft your communications, it isn't necessary to attempt to include each component of transparency in every message. Your transparency will be evaluated based on your overall communication program. Therefore, it is important that all of the transparency components are evident in your overall communication.

Slide 17 – Risk Communication

Earlier we mentioned that transparency in your communication could help you recover from a crisis. In fact, transparency is a major factor in effective risk communication.

The definition of **risk communication** has several major points:

In the case of risk communication, the purpose is to relay information effectively about a situation involving risk. Often, the communication involves information about health or environmental concerns.

A major point of risk communication is to help you manage problems in a way that fosters good will. Effective risk communication can help facilitate practical actions and reduce the anxiety your customers may feel.

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Slide 18 – Risk Communication (continued)

Communicating transparently about risk can improve the effectiveness of your risk communication.

Examples of risk communication include:

- pesticide/herbicide safety
- using genetically modified products
- E. coli/Salmonella contamination prevention

Telg, R. (2015). Risk and crisis communication: When things go wrong. EDIS (WC093). Retrieved from <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc093>

Slide 19 – Three Components to risk communication

There are three parts to risk communication: the message, the medium, and the audience.

Messages are the overall information an organization wants its audience to comprehend, even if the audience forgets the details. The message should inform and persuade. The goal is for the audience to understand the message and take certain action.

The second component involves the medium, or media channel, you decide to use to relay your communication. You could elect to use a pamphlet, signage, radio, television, or other avenues. Knowing your audience and tailoring your message to them is essential for your communication to be effective. One important factor about risk communication is that various populations consider a risk very differently.

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Slide 20 – Two Categories of Risk Perception

Public perception of risk generally falls into two categories.

The first category is objective risk. This is based on data such as research or other scientific work.

The second category is subjective risk. This is based on the public perception of the objective risk.

In the case of subjective risk, the objective risk is reduced or made worse based on an individual's or group's knowledge of the risk, level of fear concerning the situation, and the perceived ability to control the threat.

For instance, many people are frightened of spiders. The statistics show that your chance of significant illness or injury from a spider bite is very small. Yet, the subjective risk that one might feel when walking through an inhabited area full of spider webs may cause considerable fear sufficient to alter a person's course of action.

Slide 21 – Rules for Risk Communication

Share the information on the slide. You may wish to include the following supplemental information.

Experts in communications developed Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication for the Environmental Protection Agency. These experts recommend that any business conducting risk communication utilize these tips.

- *Acknowledge the public as a partner and involve them in the situation.*
- *Early involvement of the community fosters a feeling of openness, trust and genuine concern.*
- *Disseminating data to the public and beginning their involvement before making decisions is preferred and demonstrates your trustworthiness.*
- *Failure to share information and gain involvement early may generate feelings that you wish to hide information cause the public to exaggerate the risk and hold negative feelings toward your business.*
- *Carefully design your plan for communications as early as possible.*
- *Develop your objectives and seek the aid of those with skills in presentation and interaction with the public.*

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- *Your specific objectives should include actions such as disseminating information, motivating appropriate action by individuals, or responding to the situation.*
- *Just like achieving transparency, effective risk communications requires two-way communication.*
- *The conversation should begin with you listening to those individuals who may potentially purchase your product.*
- *Listen with an open mind unclouded by your opinion.*
- *Remember that situations requiring risk communication may be emotional for individuals and be prepared to deal with public feelings.*
- *As mentioned before, the public's trust in your business will help you overcome issues requiring risk communication.*
- *Establishing this trust and credibility prior to the need for risk communication strengthens your position when that trust may be threatened.*
- *The trust and goodwill of the public is an essential resource for your business.*
- *Foster trust through sharing information about your expertise, admitting any mistake you may make and honestly discussing risks promptly.*

Covello, V. T. and Allen, F. W. Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication. United States Environmental Protection Agency. National Center for Environmental Innovation, Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation.

http://www.epa.gov/CARE/library/7_cardinal_rules.pdf.

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Slide 22 – Rules for Risk Communication (continued)

Creating strong partnerships can strengthen risk communication. Look for partners that are respected and credible experts. Prior to the need for communicating about a risk, develop a relationship with appropriate organizations that can provide you with expertise and assistance. When the need for risk communication arises, call upon these appropriate collaborators or form new partnerships. Governmental agencies, university experts, respected officials, locally known educators, or even medical personnel may be helpful in various cases.

The media will often become involved during times of risk communication. Dealing with the media can be daunting to many of us. Yet, you can make such a situation less tense by planning ahead and attempting to meet the media's needs. Since the media will be relaying information to the public, help them do this by being accessible and armed with accurate and complete information. You may find it helpful to develop a relationship with the media prior to the development of any risk condition. Building a relationship that shows your goodwill toward the media could help you on future occasions.

When you actually communicate with the public about the risk situation, use clear and simple words. Avoid jargon and technical terms. Show your sincere concern about the issues facing the public being sensitive to the emotions your audience may have. Don't make empty promises. If you say you will do something, make certain it is done.

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Slide 23 – Exercise C



Refer to Exercise C worksheets found after the module portion of this document for instructions and materials.

The purpose of this exercise is to provide an opportunity for participants to develop skills at developing effective risk communication. Participant's should share information that helps establish transparency and fosters consumer trust in the business.

You will find a short scenario about a consumer concern on your worksheet. Using the information we discussed on risk communication, prepare a short paragraph you would use to address the public concerns arising from this scenario. Remember that your communication should foster consumer trust and credibility for your business. Following the completion of your story, you will be asked to share your draft and have the opportunity for feedback from other participants about the transparency of your message.

After participants have had time to write (approximately 5-7 minutes), allow everybody the opportunity to share their paragraph and give time for constructive feedback. Guide the discussion by referring back to the rules of risk communication.

Slide 24 – Summary

Today, we have covered a lot of material. We discussed the need for transparent communication and ways that you can achieve transparency. We also discussed two-way communication and how it can benefit both you and your customers. Finally, we talked about risk communication and ways you can communicate about risks associated with your business.



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Slide 25 – End

I hope you have learned something that may help you get your piece of the multi-billion dollar local food pie. In the final module, we will discuss different ways to create and tell your story about your local products. We hope that you will plan to attend.

Next pass out the promotional plan worksheet found in overview document and instruct participants to fill out the section corresponding to Module 5.

Please distribute your evaluation at this point and designate a collection point. If you wish for your participants to complete an electronic evaluation they can complete the evaluation at this link https://ufl.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3Ublu9DBK8Ndx0V. In the electronic evaluation, the participants will be required to enter the name of their instructor as well as the date that they completed the workshop. You can obtain the results of the electronic evaluation by emailing piecenter@ifas.ufl.edu or calling 352-273-2598. For questions contact Dr. Joy Rumble at jnrumble@ufl.edu or calling 352-273-1663.

END MODULE

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Exercise A – Instructor Worksheet

Overview: The purpose of this exercise and those that follow is to give participants an opportunity to practice achieving transparency in communication. This exercise should also help participants develop the skills and knowledge necessary to determine if a communication message is transparent.

Materials:

- A copy of participant worksheet for Exercise A for each participant
- A pen or pencil for each participant

Time:

- 5 - 7 minutes for participants to write their short paragraph
- 3 - 5 minutes per participant to share their paragraph and for constructive audience feedback

Instructions to participants:

- This exercise will allow you to practice developing transparency in your communication. Using the information we have discussed regarding transparency, write a short paragraph telling potential customers about a favorite crop you produce. Your message should contain information that would persuade consumers to purchase your product, such as the actions you take to make certain your product is safe and a good purchase.
- Following the completion of your story, you will be asked to share your draft and have the opportunity for feedback from other participants about the transparency of your message. Please emphasize points that promote transparency and make suggestions on how the participant might improve transparency in the paragraph if appropriate.



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Exercise B – Instructor Worksheet

Overview: The purpose of this exercise is to think about how one might apply some of the communications channels discussed in Module 4 to two-way communication. This exercise should also explore how one might utilize the channels to provide two-way communication opportunities in their promotional plan.

Materials:

- A copy of participant worksheet for Exercise A for each participant
- A pen or pencil for each participant
- Easel pad or white board to record participant input
- Markers for easel pad or white board

Time:

- 3-5 minutes for participants to complete worksheet
- 10 minutes for group discussion

Instructions to participants:

- In the first column on your worksheet, list communication channels you feel are appropriate to establish two-way communication between your business and customers. You should utilize information we discussed in module 4.
- The second column provides space for you to record how you would use each channel to provide two-way communication in your promotional plan.
- After you fill in your worksheets, we will collect group input and create a master list.

Communication Channel

How to establish two-way communication

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



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Exercise C – Instructor Worksheet

Overview: The purpose of this exercise is to provide an opportunity for participants to develop skills for effective risk communication. Participants should share information that helps establish transparency and fosters consumer trust in the business.

Materials:

- A copy of Exercise C participant worksheet for each participant
- A pen or pencil for each participant

Time:

- Approximately 5-7 minutes for participants to write a short paragraph responding to the scenario below.
- Approximately 2-3 minutes per participant for individuals to share their paragraph with the audience and receive constructive feedback. After each participant shares his or her draft, the audience should give any constructive feedback they have.

Instructions to participants:

- You will find a short scenario about a consumer concern on your worksheet. Using the information we discussed on risk communication, prepare a short paragraph you would use to address the public concerns arising from this scenario. Remember that your communication should foster consumer trust and credibility for your business.
- Following the completion of your story, you will be asked to share your draft and will have the opportunity for feedback from other participants about the transparency of your message.

The Scenario

You produce spinach, and make many efforts to ensure that your food products are safe and a good purchase for consumers. You do not produce organic food, but use only chemicals and supplies that are approved by FDA and EPA, while utilizing production methods that meet or exceed industry standards. Unfortunately, a single individual recently reported being ill after eating spinach produced at a competitor's local farm. The report blames the use of an approved chemical that you currently use on your farm. As a result of the report the local public is very concerned about purchasing spinach. Write a short risk communication paragraph to share information addressing the public concerns.

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Evaluation for Module 5

For the following statements, please answer by circling a number where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree.

	Before Workshop					After Workshop						
a. I understand two-way communication.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. I can use two-way communication to help promote my products.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
c. I understand the benefits of transparent communication.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
d. I can apply transparent communication to my promotional materials.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
f. I am comfortable using risk communication.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

What are the three most important things you feel you have learned in this module?

What have you learned from this module that you plan to implement in the next year?

The amount of time spent on this module was: Too Short Just Right Too Long
(Please circle one)

The amount of material covered in this module was: (Please circle one) Too Little Just Right Too Much

