

APHIS and Social Media

Why Social Media Matters

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, people are finding new ways of sending and receiving information. Social media has become a popular and effective way to connect with people across the globe quickly and easily. To reach our partners, stakeholders, and the general public, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has begun to utilize these new communication methods.

Social media includes a broad range of Web-based tools and technologies that evolved from print and broadcast news media. In the new social media arena, the public are active participants and users instead of passive readers or viewers.

APHIS uses social media tools to distribute information about our programs, policies, regulations, and activities. Unlike traditional media tools, which support one-way communication, social media serves to encourage discussion and participation in the online community. APHIS now regularly participates in social media discussions through our blog posts, Twitter postings, and Facebook pages. In this regard, social media gives APHIS a tremendous opportunity to expand our public outreach and engagement activities. It allows us to connect with the public directly and offers new, more immediate ways to tell our audiences about APHIS' work. In turn, social media gives our customers and stakeholders a variety of avenues to access information about APHIS and the services we provide.

APHIS' Online Presence

APHIS uses many popular social media channels to inform and engage the public. By promoting our policies and programs on multiple sites, APHIS reaches a larger audience and increases the chance that online users will return to our sites for news and updates. The benefit for APHIS customers who use our social media platforms is access to a consistent flow of information about our work, timely notice of important decisions and activities, and the chance to engage with APHIS in new and different ways. And when our partners and stakeholders further share information offered by APHIS through their own social media platforms, we all benefit from the dialogue created.

APHIS' Legislative and Public Affairs program manages the agency's social media presence, working closely with the USDA's Office of Communications. The numerous social media tools we currently use are described below.

- **Twitter**

http://twitter.com/USDA_APHIS

Twitter is a tool for promoting APHIS, keeping users informed of noteworthy happenings in APHIS and in the areas of animal and plant health. A short "tweet" (the Twitter name for messages) must be 140 characters or less and may contain a description of a new blog post or Web page, as well as a link to view the page or post. Any Twitter users who follow APHIS, or choose to receive our tweets, will see this post. This online synergy increases user traffic on APHIS' Twitter, Web, and blog sites. We urge our stakeholders to follow us on Twitter and share our messages with their Twitter followers.

- **Facebook**

www.facebook.com/USDA

APHIS contributes to the USDA's Facebook page and also has several individual pages associated with our outreach efforts. Users on Facebook click the "like" button on pages they are interested in, and updates from those pages appear in the user's news feed. Facebook works much like Twitter, but it is more conversational while Twitter is more news-oriented. The benefit of Facebook messaging is that you can share information unconstrained by the character limits associated with Twitter messaging.

- **USDA Blog**

<http://blogs.usda.gov/tag/aphis>

As a widespread and varied agency, APHIS has many stories to tell that could easily go unnoticed. The USDA blog allows APHIS to publish stories, called "posts," about the many accomplishments within the agency. These blogs are our voice in the online journalism world and our opportunity to inform and entertain. Blogs can contain pictures, videos, and links to other stories to better engage our audience. Users have the opportunity to comment on each post, creating a unique dialogue between APHIS and the general public.

- **YouTube**

www.youtube.com/usdaaphis

With more than 4 billion videos viewed each day, YouTube is the top site for sharing online videos. This site allows users to post, view, and comment on videos, giving APHIS the opportunity to reach large audiences and create an online discourse about what we do. Our YouTube channel features informational videos and public service announcements we have created for APHIS' many programs and outreach efforts.

- **Flickr**

www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov

Flickr is an online photo-sharing site that allows users to post photos and albums for others to view and comment on. APHIS posts photos to the USDA's Flickr account, called a "photostream." Flickr can be a helpful tool when sharing photos of a particular event mentioned in a blog post or on Twitter. An accompanying blog post on the USDA blog might include a photo and story about the event, with a link to more pictures posted on Flickr.

- **RSS Feed**

<http://rss.aphis.usda.gov/proxy?ID=APHIS>

RSS feeds subscribe a user to automatic news updates within a certain topic by downloading all updates in that feed to the user's Internet browser. The APHIS RSS feed includes stories published in APHIS' online Newsroom. Users who subscribe to this feed will have access in their Internet browser to all APHIS Newsroom stories with just one click, rather than having to navigate individually to each story on the APHIS Web site.

- **GovDelivery**

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAAPHIS/subscriber/new>

Similar to an RSS Feed, GovDelivery lets users sign up to receive news updates related to a certain topic. Users enter their email addresses into the system and register for any topics they choose. Updates are sent to the email address provided.

Get Connected

To access APHIS social media, please visit the links provided above. These links are also available on the APHIS homepage at www.aphis.usda.gov.

For more information on APHIS social media, go to www.aphis.usda.gov or contact Jim Barrett at (301) 851-4092 or jim.barrett@aphis.usda.gov.

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