

By Arlan Suderman

# Twitter from the tractor

WILL SOCIAL MEDIA CHANGE HOW YOU FARM?

## It's just another fad, or so I thought.

Yet, Twitter exploded on the social media front this year, with significant possibilities for the farm business. Farmers and farm suppliers are jumping onto Twitter on a daily basis to gather and share information or advocate for agriculture, after seeing it as a valuable tool that can boost their bottom line.

Jeffrey Eager ([www.twitter.com/eagerjeffrey](http://www.twitter.com/eagerjeffrey)) of Brown City, Mich., began twittering in March and is now an avid user. Eager farms 1,100 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat and sugarbeets,

while also working as a seed dealer. He sees great value in using the social media as a tool for gaining information for his farm, while also communicating with his customers, using Posterous, YouTube and Twitter.

Facebook is a social media craze that's been around for quite some time, but it's somewhat cumbersome as a tool for farmers. Yet, it can be a valuable venue for setting up a group link to keep your landlords informed about developments on the farm, including pictures and blogs. Posterous is similar to Facebook, but much simpler to use. Eager takes video of field test plots for his customers, which he posts on a special YouTube page. He then e-mails the links to his customers to view. "The average age of my YouTube site viewer is 54 to 65," says Eager.

### BEYOND TEEN FAD

That's indicative of the evolution of the social media says Michele Payn-Knoper ([www.twitter.com/mpaynknoper](http://www.twitter.com/mpaynknoper)), of Cause Matters Corp. in Lebanon, Ind., and creator of Agchat. She notes that 75% of Twitter users are above age 25, with most users over 35.

Payn-Knoper says that the typical Twitter user goes through six stages:

1. You think it's a stupid trend, but someone talks you into it.
2. You find information on Twitter that perks your interest.
3. You start connecting

with others and build community.


4. You start feeling obligated to share information that you have.

5. You realize the tool's power.

6. You're addicted.

Eager started out by setting up an account at [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) and searching for those who "tweet" marketing information, such as *Farm Futures* ([www.twitter.com/ArlanFF101](http://www.twitter.com/ArlanFF101)) and the Chicago Board of Trade ([www.twitter.com/CMEGroup](http://www.twitter.com/CMEGroup)). A "tweet" is a statement of information containing 140 characters or less, so that it can also be directed to your phone as a text message. Check your provider's incoming texting rates. Eager goes further by setting up a Really Simple Syndication, or RSS, feed to a separate Web page to keep those marketing comments separate from the rest he receives. Eager finds that many farmers take advantage of autosteering technology to make their tractor cab an office, allowing them to do business on their smartphones. Twitter fits that scenario well.

Payn-Knoper encourages farmers to consider the advocacy role of the social media. Twitter offers a safe venue to dialogue with social-cause organizations. She notes that "every \$1 spent by our opposition costs production agriculture \$10." Gathering real-time marketing commentary or connecting with suppliers may profit your bottom line near term, but using the social media to put a face on agriculture that erodes the urban perception of the factory farm should boost the farm's bottom line over the long term as well.

Smartphone users can benefit from several new applications now available to facilitate Twitter use. Go to [www.FarmFutures.com](http://www.FarmFutures.com) and click on Farm Futures Now for a special page on Twitter apps. 



For Jeffrey Eager, Twitter works like a bulletin board that he can update on the run.

Photo: John Stormzand