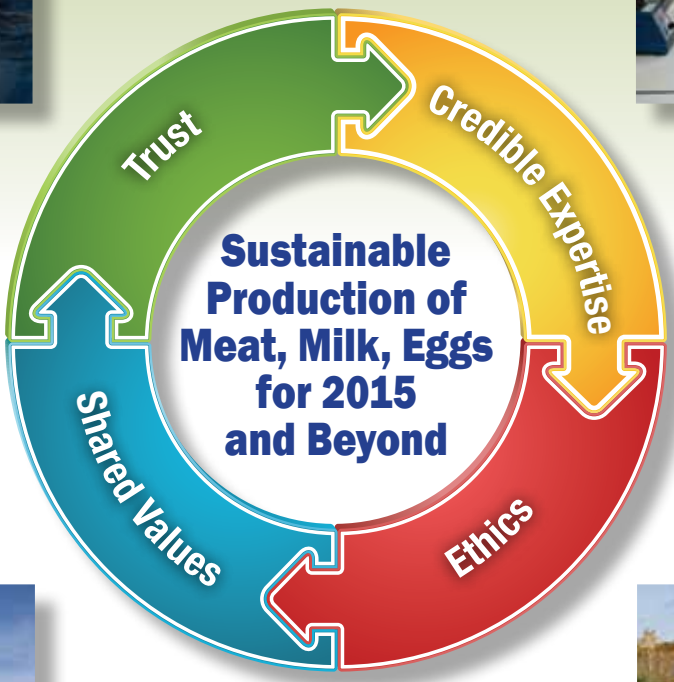
SNACK AND FACT:

Communicating the Animal Sciences Effectively

Public

Animal Scientists



Public Policy Makers

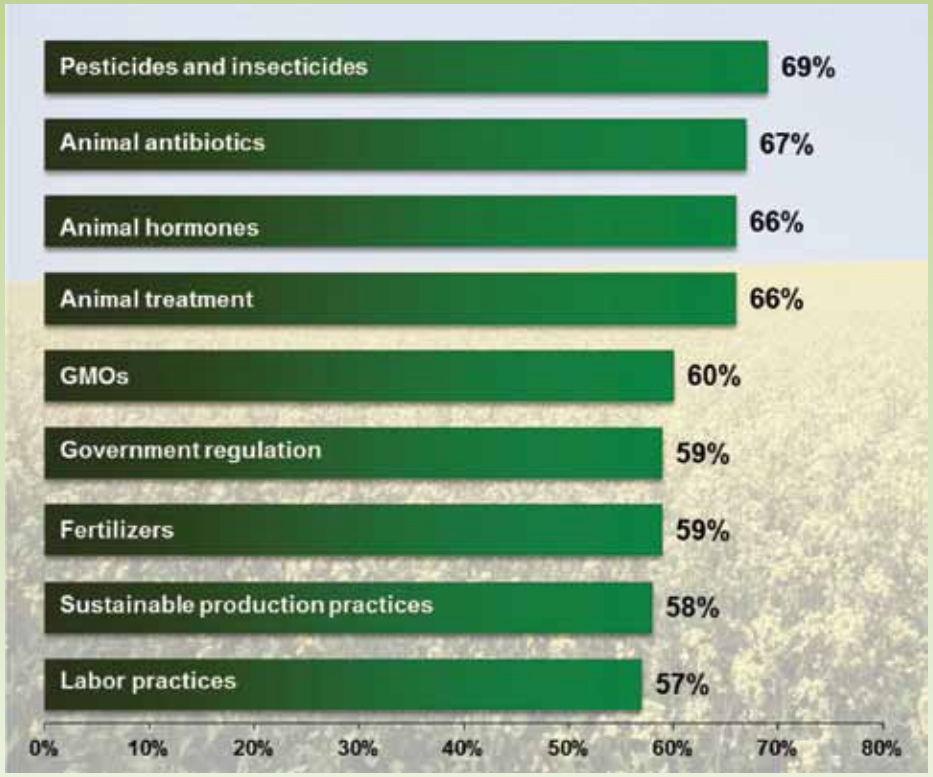
Farmers and Ranchers

December 14, 2015 • 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm

1300 Longworth House Office Building / Washington, DC

Hosted by the American Society of Animal Science

Effective communication about important topics that involve science, emotions, values, and ethics can be challenging. This is especially true within the broad field of agriculture and within the specific area of production of meat, milk, and eggs. The July 2015 issue of *Animal Frontiers* (Volume 5, Number 3) focuses on the challenges associated with communicating animal science information with the public, news media, policy makers, and students. These stakeholder groups are critical to the future of the livestock and poultry industries; thus, open and transparent sharing of information is essential.

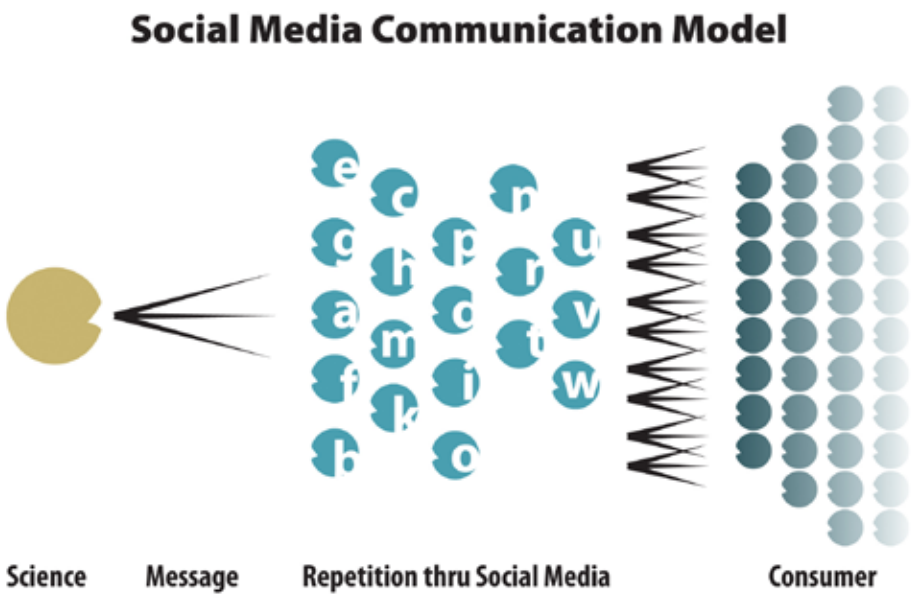


Percentage of consumers who are very/somewhat concerned about specific topics (data from SHS FoodThink, 2014).

Why is it a challenge to communicate to consumers where their food comes from? In the United States, the average consumer is now at least three generations removed from the farm or ranch. This disconnect has led to a decrease in general knowledge and understanding of how meat, milk and eggs are produced or where animal-sourced foods come from.

With the development of many new social media outlets to share information, the general public now gets most of its information related to food systems from the Internet, family, or friends. However, these sources often contain inaccurate and conflicting information.

Scientists usually try to educate the public with the hope that a better understanding of scientific and technical facts will enable the public to view controversial issues from the same perspective as a scientist. The public is interested in social, ethical, and economic aspects of issues while ideology, social identity, and trust often have a stronger impact on how the public makes decisions on controversial issues.

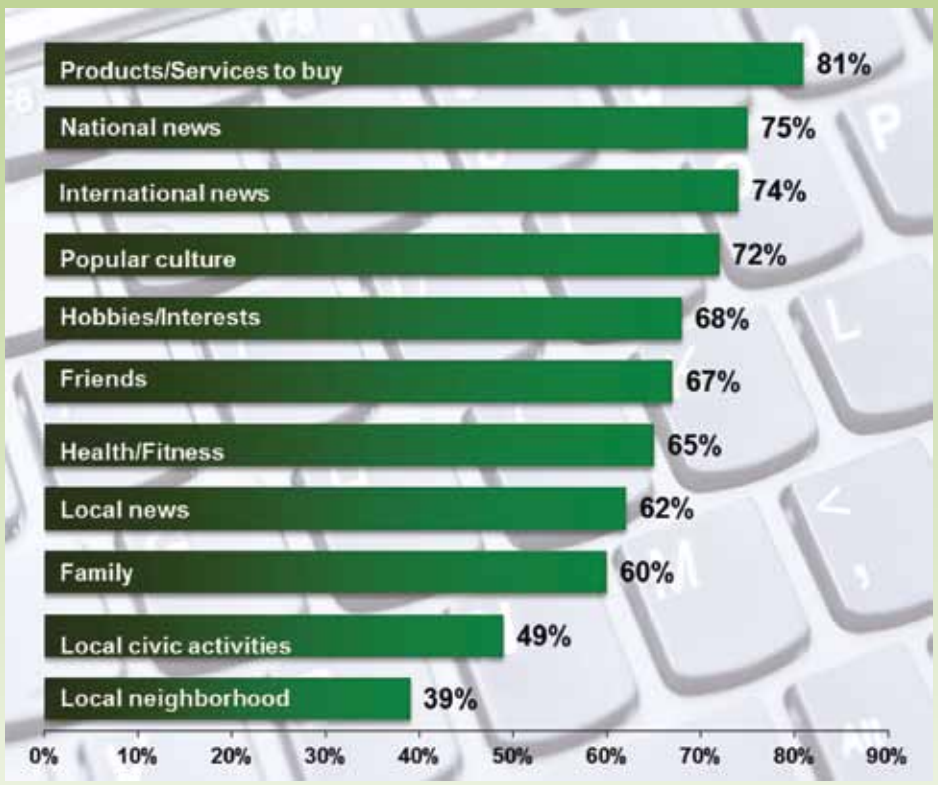


Effective communication on issues related to the management of livestock and poultry will require a commitment to building trust, shared values, ethics, and credible expertise. Social media, the Internet, and conversations with the public provide many new opportunities for farmers and ranchers to introduce science and technology in a way that encourages the public to make

informed decisions regarding animal welfare, housing, and the environmental impacts of animals.

Individual farmers and ranchers have launched their own blogs to show the public how animals are raised on their farms and ranches such as Dairy Carrie (www.dairycarrie.com), Anne Burkholder (www.feedyardfoodie.wordpress.com) and the Peterson Farm Brothers (www.petersonfarmblog.wordpress.com). Some have also used Twitter campaigns (e.g., @DairyCarrie, @MalTheBeefGal, @AgProudRyan) to share information and refute misinformed communications that go viral on the Internet. The US Farmers and Ranchers Alliance hosts the Food Dialogues website (www.fooddialogues.com/farmers-ranchers) to share stories, photos, and videos and answer questions from the public regarding animal welfare, food safety, antibiotics, water quality, etc.

Communicating to undergraduate students in departments of animal science at land grant universities in the United States is also challenging. Today, more than half of the undergraduate students come from urban settings and do not have experience with livestock. For these students to understand the context for raising livestock, they must first have opportunities to work with cattle, sheep, pigs, or poultry in a supervised setting. These experiential learning opportunities often change the way that students view livestock and how they communicate these views to the public.



Percentage of Internet users who say that the Internet and cell phones help them be better informed about specific topics (data from Pew Research Center, 2014).

While effective communication of information about animal science is challenging, social media provides new opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and animal scientists to discuss the production of meat, milk, and eggs with a broad audience. Effective communication will also require a commitment to building trust, shared values, ethics and credible expertise. All individuals associated with the production of animal-sourced foods have the responsibility to communicate effectively with the public, news media, policy makers, and students.

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