



Producer Toolkit



How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to help organic producers work more effectively with the media by providing practical tips for building your reputation, telling your story, and educating the public about organic farming. Whether a reporter has requested to interview you or is looking for images to run with a story, the messaging and photos you share should reinforce the public's perception of organic food — clean, fresh, and thoughtfully grown. Use this guide as a quick reference to prepare for media engagements and ensure your story presents your farm and organic agriculture in the best possible light.



Best Practices for Working with Local Media



Why This Matters

Local media can be a powerful ally in building your reputation, telling your story, and educating the public about organic farming. But a careless comment or unprepared interview can do the opposite. This guide will help you confidently engage with reporters, whether it's for a positive feature or tough questions.

1. Know Before You Speak

Before doing any interview or speaking to a reporter:

- Ask yourself: Why am I doing this?
- Be clear on your objective: is it to promote your farm, correct misinformation, or share expertise?
- If you aren't the right person to speak to, politely direct them to someone else.

If you're not ready, don't do it.

2. Prepare Your Message

Reporters often have limited time, so make your message:

- Clear: Easy to understand
- Credible: Based on facts
- Persuasive: Shows why your work matters
- Actionable: Inspires support or understanding

Tip: *Think about what you want the public to take away. What headline do you hope they print?*

3. Prepare Your Message

Interviews are not casual conversations; they're opportunities to share your story.

- Keep answers short and focused
- Use simple, relatable language: avoid technical jargon
- Repeat key points to ensure they stick
- Don't feel pressured to answer every question directly. Instead, "bridge" to your message.

Example Bridging Phrases:

- "That's a good question, but what's really important is..."
- "Let me put that in perspective..."
- "What this means for our local community is..."



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4. Understand the Ground Rules

- Assume everything you say is on the record, even before or after the formal interview
- Avoid saying “off the record,” it’s rarely respected
- If you don’t know something, say so: never speculate or guess
- If you’re uncomfortable, it’s okay to pause or ask for clarification

5. Build Positive Relationships

- Treat reporters respectfully, even if they ask tough or uninformed questions
- Provide useful, honest information
- If they get something wrong, politely follow up with the correct facts
- Remember: Reporters are the conduit, the public is your real audience

6. Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- Don’t ramble: keep answers focused
- Don’t speculate or predict the future
- Don’t speak for other farms, businesses, or CCOF
- Don’t lose your temper, even if pressed
- Don’t say “no comment.” Instead, say, “I’m not the right person to answer that” or “I’d be happy to get back to you with more information” (even if you don’t intend to).

7. Helpful Talking Points for Organic Producers

- How organic farming supports local economies
- The environmental benefits of organic practices
- The care and integrity that goes into certification
- How consumers can support local organic producers

Remember: Positive, fact-based stories build trust and community support. How to get here? Try this: “That’s a great question, but first let me touch for a minute on what goes into our farm being CCOF certified.”

8. Be a Resource, Not Just a Story

- Don’t only reach out when you want coverage; offer to help year-round
- Let reporters know you’re available to:
 - Explain how organic farming works
 - Provide perspective on agriculture-related news
 - Connect them with other experts or farmers in your network

When you’re helpful, you become their first call, not their last resort.



A Practical Checklist for Farmers to Decide: Should I Do This Interview?



Step 1: Understand the Request

Before saying yes, gather the facts:

- ☐ Who is the reporter?
- ☐ What outlet do they work for?
- ☐ What is the story about?
- ☐ Are they looking for a quick quote, a full interview, or something else?
- ☐ Is the story positive, neutral, or potentially critical?
- ☐ Are they on a tight deadline?

If you don't have these details, ask for them before deciding.

Step 2: Know Your Objective

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Do I want to educate the public about organic farming?
- ☐ Is this a good opportunity to promote my farm or the organic movement?
- ☐ Can I offer helpful, factual insight on this topic?
- ☐ Do I have time to prepare properly?
- ☐ Am I the right person to speak, or should I refer them to someone else (another farmer, CCOF, etc.)?

If you answer no to these, decline the interview.

Step 3: Consider the Risks

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Could this interview be taken out of context?
- ☐ Is the topic highly controversial or political?
- ☐ Am I being asked to speculate, criticize others, or speak beyond my expertise?
- ☐ Am I feeling pressured, unprepared, or unsure?

If you answer yes to these, decline the interview.



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Step 4: Evaluate the Value

- ☐ Will this story help build public understanding of organic farming?
- ☐ Does it offer positive exposure for my farm or the local agriculture community?
- ☐ Will participating strengthen my relationship with this reporter or outlet?

If it adds value with manageable risk, it's worth considering.

Step 5: Make Your Decision

DO the interview if:

- ☐ You understand the topic and can contribute confidently
- ☐ It aligns with your goals and promotes your work or the organic industry
- ☐ You have time to prepare and stay on message

Politely **DECLINE** if:

- ☐ You feel unprepared or uncomfortable
- ☐ The topic is outside your expertise
- ☐ It feels like a setup or could damage your reputation
- ☐ You simply don't have time to do it well



Photo Guide: What Makes a Good Picture for Marketing & Media



Why Photos Matter

A strong photo can:

- Get your farm featured in news stories
- Boost attention on social media
- Show customers the care behind your products
- Make the organic movement more relatable

1. People Make It Personal

- Show people working on your farm, not just crops or products
- Action shots are best: planting, harvesting, feeding animals, etc.
- Smiles are great, but authentic moments matter more
- Avoid posed, stiff group photos unless it's for an award or special occasion
- Photos of real people doing real work always stand out.

2. Show Your Products, Naturally

- Highlight fresh produce, products, or farm goods in their natural setting
- Use clean, simple backgrounds (barn walls, fields, tables)
- Avoid cluttered or distracting surroundings
- Natural light works best: early morning or late afternoon is ideal

Pro tip: A basket of fresh produce looks better on a clean table than on the back of a dusty truck.

3. The Farm in Focus

- Show wide shots of your fields, greenhouses, or animals
- Include elements that show it's an organic operation: cover crops, compost piles, signage
- Capture the beauty of the land: sunrise, rows of crops, bees on flowers
- Keep equipment clean and presentable if it's in the shot

4. Think Like a Journalist or Customer

- Would this photo make someone want to visit your farm or buy your products?
- Would it work well with a news article or on your website?
- Is it clear, bright, and positive?
- Photos that feel authentic and inviting help build trust and interest.



Photo Guide: What Makes a Good Picture for Marketing & Media



5. Avoid These Common Mistakes

- Blurry or dark photos
- Distracting clutter (garbage, hoses, messy work areas)
- People looking away or caught off guard
- Overly staged or fake-looking setups
- Low-quality, pixelated images (especially from old phones)
- Mud or animal waste

6. Bonus Tips for Social Media

- Vertical photos work well for Instagram & Facebook Stories
- Mix close-ups and wide shots to keep your feed interesting

7. File Size & Quality for Journalists

- Send the original file; do not send screenshots or compressed versions
- High resolution (at least 1MB) is preferred

CCOF Member Benefit

CCOF members receive a 20 percent discount on public relations services offered through CCOF's agency of record, Comsint Communications. This exclusive benefit includes support in media relations, brand development, video production, crisis communication, social media management, and advocacy communications. It is designed to help members elevate their stories and strengthen visibility across audiences and platforms.

For more information, email Nick Puleo at npuleo@comsint.com.

