

River Valley Cooperative uses tools to share values

The communications team for River Valley Cooperative, Eldridge, Iowa, is always looking for new ways to connect with customers about its products and services. That's why communications specialist Jayne Carstensen has downloaded nearly every resource available to her co-op through co-opstory.com.

"A lot of people don't really understand what the co-op system is," says Carstensen. "It can be hard to articulate our values and way of doing business. These tools do a very good job of explaining what's unique about cooperatives, and how important those things are for farmers and communities."

Co-opstory.com offers a wide range of free, customizable tools – such as newspaper ads, billboards, website banners, and more – that are turnkey and ready to use. Carstensen says she also finds that having the tools downloaded and at her fingertips gives her "a creative spark" and provides powerful, relevant phrases that she can incorporate into other newsletter articles, social media posts or radio scripts she creates for River Valley Cooperative.

"One of our core values is customer success and working together," she says. "The tools include headlines and statements that convey how we're 'stronger together' and how 'you never farm alone,' which are right on point with the messages that we convey daily to our customers."

CHS recently added new tools to the website, including several videos that feature Neal Keppy, an Iowa grower who serves on the River Valley Cooperative board of directors. River Valley Cooperative has used the "You never farm alone" videos in multiple ways, including at meetings with board members and employees. "Neal talks about the value of receiving patronage and sharing in the profits of the co-op system, and that's an important message for farmers of all ages to hear," says Carstensen.

"It can be harder to get the younger generation to commit to attending farmer meetings, so we are communicating with them in the ways that they want to receive their information. That means we're using more social media," according to Carstensen, who says it's helpful to have fresh videos available to share in posts. "We are having great success in engaging the next generation. They are receptive to new technology and really count on our experts to help them," she says.

"It's worthwhile for every co-op to look over the tools. You will find at least a few things you can use to strengthen how you are telling your story," says Carstensen.

The Value of the Co-op Tool Kit is available free of charge to all cooperatives. To download resources, visit co-opstory.com