

## Wisconsin co-op builds loyalty using free tools

Sending short, frequent messages with a local connection has proven to be an effective way to communicate with young farmers for CHS Larsen Cooperative, New London, Wis. So has forming a special Facebook community for next-gen farmers interested in working with the co-op to educate others about agriculture.

“Young farmers are a key audience. If they feel a stronger connection to the co-op, they are more likely to do more business with us,” says Anne Moore, marketing communications specialist. “We want our younger farmers to build a relationship with our younger employees, and work closely together with them on things like precision agriculture.”

Toward that end, the co-op formed the CHS Larsen Young Advocates group on Facebook for its younger farmers and employees. The group, which has more than 50 active members, holds meetings to learn ways to advocate for their farms and industry, and also attends community events. The co-op brings in speakers to talk about topics such as addressing GMO misconceptions, and takes advantage of free communication tools from [co-opstory.com](http://co-opstory.com).

“At one of the meetings we showed the ‘You Never Farm Alone’ video (from co-opstory.com). That message fits with what we’re trying to do every day. We want to be their go-to people in the field or with their animals,” says Moore. “We’re all about finding the best ways to serve them so they can be here farming for the future. We know if they are here in the future, we will be, too.”

Recently the group created a ‘Farmer Buzz’ game for a local Breakfast on the Farm event. They shared fun facts about farming and handed out a fact sheet that included information pulled from economic resources available at co-opstory.com.

The co-op sends email blasts to its customers and posts on social media frequently, including brief notices about field conditions, new products or services, and other news — with a link to learn more. “We have good click-throughs and reads, especially when we keep the articles short and demonstrate a local connection,” says Moore, who sometimes uses banners and utilizes the storytelling videos and articles from co-opstory.com. For example, she has used the “As long as you have a local co-op, you never farm alone” banner as the co-op’s cover photo on Twitter and has provided links to the “Stronger Together” special issue of C Magazine that features Kurt and Anna Duxbury, dairy producers who have worked with CHS Larsen Cooperative to expand their farm.

For National Co-op Month last October, the co-op sent an e-blast and posted on social media every single day. “We wanted to teach people what a co-op is and what it means to be a co-op member. We had a good response from patrons. There were a lot of clicks to learn more, and our ‘likes’ on Facebook increased that month,” says Moore.

The Value of the Co-op Tool Kit is available free of charge to all cooperatives. To download resources, visit [co-opstory.com](http://co-opstory.com)