

HOSTING AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

We are excited to share these resources with you, in an effort to maximize your impact and efficiency as you consider launching an immersive experience. For the purpose of this kit, we consider an immersive experience as an event in which you facilitate an engaging experience between key influencers and the agriculture industry. Depending on the influencers and sector of the industry selected, there is endless opportunity for engagement.

"It was so clear after meeting you (ranchers) that one-on-one time with each other, in order to understand real lives and concerns on both sides, is the only way we'll be able to break down misunderstandings between farmers/ranchers and consumers."
– Participant, On the Farm Author Experience 2016

In this kit you will find concepts to consider, templates to use as you plan and launch your experience, and examples of an immersive experience in action. It is our hope that this kit gives you a place to start as you begin planning your experience. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to reach out. We would love to share our lessons learned!

Sincerely,



Julie Tesch

Executive Director

American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture



AMERICAN FARM BUREAU
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FOR AGRICULTURE®

A contractor to the Beef Checkoff



Funded by the Beef Checkoff.

The Beef Checkoff Program funded development of this training and supporting resources. The Beef Checkoff Program www.MyBeefCheckoff.com was established as part of the 1985 farm bill. The checkoff assesses \$1 per head on the sale of live domestic and imported cattle, in addition to a comparable assessment on imported beef and beef products. In states with qualified beef councils, states retain up to 50 cents of the dollar and forward the other 50 cents per head to the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board, which administers the national checkoff program, subject to USDA approval.

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CONTACT

FOUNDATION@FB.ORG
600 MARYLAND AVE SW, SUITE 1000W
WASHINGTON, DC 20024
800.443.8456
WWW.AGFOUNDATION.ORG



AUTHENTICITY IN ACTION

The “On the Farm Author Experience” was held January 7th – 10th, 2016 in Orlando, FL. Twelve authors participated in the event. Authors toured a beef processing facility, spent time on a cow-calf operation, had a one-on-one lunch with a beef producer and participated in a panel discussion. Key information and misconceptions were addressed through honest and open dialogue, supported by previously developed Beef Checkoff resources.

80% of authors reported that the event exceeded their expectations, with the remaining 20% reporting that the event met their expectations.

The event received significant positive feedback from participating authors, farmers and ranchers. Here are examples of what the authors had to say about the experience:

“I enjoyed the farmer panel very much. The opportunity for dialogue and sharing of views - especially contrasting views - was highly valuable.”

“I am even more appreciative of the safety standards we have in this country and the vigilance in applying them at state of the art facilities, like the one we visited. It was a great privilege to meet with the ranchers on site, during our one on one lunch and the panel discussion. This human connection was invaluable, bringing empathy and human understanding to both sides of the conversation.”

The evaluation also indicated a noticeable attitudinal shift of participants. Prior to the event, only 27% of authors indicated that they **“know someone personally in the beef industry, who I feel comfortable contacting for information”**. Following the event 100% of participants indicated that they agree with this statement, yielding a 73% increase. After participating, participants noted an 11% increase in plans to “eat more beef than I currently consume in the future.”

90% of participants indicated a significant perspective change of the beef industry after the experience. *“(My perspective has changed) quite a bit. It is hard to write it all here quickly, but I had thought ranchers didn’t care so much for their animals - that they were just a number out on the pasture. I learned that the farmers care tremendously for their livestock. Jim, even with 20,000 acres, told me he cries when he loses one. I am humbled by the care and commitment the farmers put into their farms. I have grown to have great compassion for them.”*

The event was incredibly successful, with 90% of authors reporting that they plan to incorporate concepts from this experience within the next year, 50% of which reporting that they will **incorporate information immediately**.

RECOGNIZING THE VALUE

The event received significant positive feedback from participating authors, farmers and ranchers. Here are examples of what those in agriculture had to say about the experience:

Given my experiences on my state's beef council, I think this is a perfect use and investment of Checkoff funds. I can't think of a better opportunity to reach and educate consumers than this project as we were able to establish working relationships and evolving conversations with authors who write the books those consumers' children read. This lunch conversation format facilitates the dialog needed to help address and correct some of the misconceptions between consumers and farmers/ranchers. Thank you again for your efforts.

Amelia Kent, Louisiana
Louisiana Beef Industry Council, member 2014 - present
Cattlemen's Beef Board, incoming member 2016
Louisiana Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Chair 2015 - present

From my perspective, this was a very valuable activity. Consumers need accurate and transparent information about the food they eat. Reaching young people to tell our story is extremely important as they are the next generation of our customers. Thank you for putting together a great activity. It was valuable for the producers involved as well. We learned it is important to tell our story and for influencing authors to have a connection.

Will Frazee, Iowa
Past Chairman, Iowa Beef Industry Council
Past Member, Cattlemen's Beef Board Executive and Operating Committees

I wish to applaud your staff for hosting the AFBF Author Lunch. The event gave producers what our industry is starving for...the opportunity to personally and productively engage with people who have a direct influence on how others perceive the beef industry. I hope that your efforts can be ramped up in the near future to include the chance for producers to be paired with authors of all genres.

Zack Yanta, Texas
Beef Producer & Texas Farm Bureau State Director

This was a great opportunity for cattle producers to have a discussion about our profession with writers. I want to thank the authors for attending and for all that I learned from them. We, the producers and



Mr. and Mrs. Zack Yanta, Texas
Katie Stam Irk, Participant and Former Miss America

PRODUCER TESTAMENTS

the authors have many of the same values, we all work hard to be successful, we do extensive research before we make farming decisions, and they do a lot of research to make sure their books are accurate. All of us are very proud of the work we do, and just as our youth need healthy food, they also need good books to become good citizens.

Carlton Kjos, Iowa
Iowa Farm Bureau Board of Directors

It was a great event. It is great to see the beef check-off dollars used for education programs. I feel the time we the beef producers spent with the child book authors will benefit our industry for years to come. I think the authors saw the farmers/ranchers passion for producing quality beef and left with a better understanding of what we do. Thanks for helping me have the chance to be a part of it.

Dennis Martin, North Carolina
Beef Producer

I thought the “On the Farm Author Experience” was very worthwhile. The author I was paired with for lunch, Lizzy Rockwell from CT, was very interested in learning anything she could about life on a western ranch and seeking my input on the issues which we deal with. She seemed very concerned that the information she presented to children was factual and based on truth and science and not emotion, and presented in a way to educate children about where their food came from and focusing on proper nutrition in a balanced diet.

Carlyle Currier, Colorado
Vice President, Colorado Farm Bureau
Former member, Cattlemen’s Beef Board



CREATING YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE

OVERVIEW

If you are considering launching an immersive experience, it may be helpful to review the following considerations.

Use this section as a discussion tool with your planning team as you begin crafting your experience.

CONSIDERATIONS

Know Your Target: Who is your ideal participant in this event? This may seem obvious at first, but investing time in consideration of this question will drive development of your entire event. Consider the key influencers you work with. A key influencer is someone who has an opportunity, - through their work, status, recognition, authority or established relationships, to reach and influence a specific population. As you clarify your target audience, consider the following questions:

- How much should they know about agriculture?
- What value would this event bring to the participant?
- Why would they want to attend?
- Who do they have the potential to reach? How many?

After you have selected your target audience, spend some time getting to know their world.

- What is the business structure in which they operate?
- To whom do they report?
- How do they make decisions?
- Where do they go for professional development?

Engage a Team: Creating an immersive experience is largely dependent upon engaging a team of collaborative agriculture industry leaders. Consider the leadership and commodity organizations who could lend expertise to your participants. Engage the team early and keep them updated as you progress in your planning. The team may be able to help you with the following:

- Securing tours
- Contacting speakers/facilitators
- Accessing resources for demonstration or distribution
- Reviewing information for industry accuracy

The Goal is Authenticity – Not Information Overload: Living and working in an agricultural literacy role, this one can be challenging for us. But keep this thought in mind as you develop your immersive experience. The ultimate goal is for participants to have a positive experience with agriculture and discover that communication is welcome. How can we do this? Here are a few starter ideas:

- Give the participants a chance to share their passion. If they are authors, invite them to share their work. If they are teachers, invite them to share their best lesson.
- Have an open conversation about our “food lenses”, as Michelle Payn-Knoper says in *No More Food Fights*. Ask participants to consider what events, circumstances or interests shape how they look at food and farming.
- Let participants know that all questions are welcome – no topics are off the table. Remind participants on both sides that the expectation is for courteous and respectful dialogue.
- Create one-on-one time with participants and those involved in the industry. This can be done through personal lunches, coffees or other scheduled time.

Create Intentional Industry Experiences: The key word is “intentional”. Securing a visit that is engaging and addresses the key information you and your participants desire can be challenging, but it is worth your time to invest this effort up front.

- Thoroughly vet tour locations and visit if possible.
- Let participants know what to expect, and allow them to opt out if they prefer not to see a location (such as a processing facility).
- Clarify who will be giving the tour and ask to meet with them if possible.
- Ask if it is acceptable to take pictures
- Clarify what participants should wear.
- Openly discuss key messages/concepts you hope the tour will address (i.e. food safety, nutrition, environmental stewardship).
- Share any information you have about the participants with the tour location ahead of time.
- Bring a gift for the tour location to leave with the host.

Leverage Social Media: Engage participants from the time they are selected with a designated hashtag for your event, and encourage participants to share their thoughts, discoveries and journey through social media.

- Create a hashtag early and share with participants. If you plan to repeat the experience annually, you may want to include the year within the hashtag to better track data.
- Invite participants to blog about their experience during or after the event. Ask participants to send you a link to their blog, and in return, offer to cross promote their blog by sharing it with your followers.
- If you pay participants a stipend specifically to write a blog, keep in mind that they must include a disclaimer within the actual post, as well as include the hashtag #sponsored with any social media shares.
- Track your social media impact through your hashtag use and report this reach to supporting partners.

Measure Impact: As you plan your immersive experience, design with the idea that you hope to expand the opportunity in the future. In order to support this endeavor, collect as much data as possible to

measure the impact of your efforts. You may wish to use an online tool, such as a survey, to conduct a pre and post assessment with participants. This survey can also be a great tool for capturing what participants are curious about prior to the event. As you develop your assessment, consider what you want to measure. Here are a few suggestions:

- Specific industry knowledge
- Perception (A Likert-type scale using response selections such as Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree is a great tool to measure perception of key statements.)
- Intent to apply knowledge
- Feedback on event logistics

Capture the Experience: A photographer or videographer is a great way to capture key moments of the immersive experience. You may want to consider hiring a professional if it aligns with your event goals and your budget allows. Participants will likely want pictures to share with their peers, and you will have documentation of the great experience you created. If time allows, invite participants to share their discoveries and “a-ha” moments with brief recorded video interviews.

Start a Relationship that Grows: View the immersive experience as the start of a new relationship. Provide participants with relevant agriculture contacts in their local area, if applicable. As a facilitator, follow up with participants shortly after the event with a written thank you note and reminder that the door is open for conversation.

RESOURCES

We've developed templates to help make your job easier. Check out the following templates, provided with this resource:

1. Facilitator Agenda Template
2. Participant Agenda Template
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