**CHECKLIST Media Tips for Florida 4-H and FFA Supporters on Facebook**

**By the team of Stephanie Farmer, Kelly Davis Strausbaugh and Stacey Warden**

It’s no secret that there are many issues facing Florida’s agriculture industry. Between animal activist groups, misinformed consumers and legislators who don’t understand the importance of programs like 4-H and FFA, it can be hard to make sure that these programs have a voice.

How can you help? It’s simple! Below, we’ve listed a few steps. We have to ensure that we are not only sending out awesome, positive news about our local and statewide (and national!) 4-H and FFA members to ag-related publications, but that we are also sending out to non-agriculture publications!

1. **Briefly describe** what you would like covered. 2 – 3 sentences or less. Reporters are pressed for time; they can’t be held up by long discussions or long email descriptions, and they appreciate those who understand.
2. **Intertwine this statement in your description or during interview as public might accidently think 4-H or FFA are stand-alone programs.** 4-H is a statewide youth development program of UF IFAS Extension; FFA is part of the educational system.Ensure that you always mention the background and mission of the organizations, and give websites for more information.
3. **Point of contact** for the story. Who is **willing** to talk to the media, and who is **approved** to talk to the media? (May need to be someone higher up in the organization, and may need to be approved by your extension agent depending upon the topic.) Make sure the point of contact knows that they need to be **available** at a moment’s notice, which is how reporters typically work. Also, try to find someone **passionate** and excited about the information!

**Point of Contact Phone number ( circle one – call or text) Email Availability**

1. **Do you have photos or videos available to the media? ( circle yes or no) and let media know.**

IF NEWSPAPERS – WOULD THEY LIKE YOU TO WRITE UP A STORY?

1. Reporters are busy and publications tend to be understaffed, but they will often edit and reprint what you send to them. It’s a great idea to have something prepared, ready to send at a moment’s notice.

-**Who in your club or chapter would like to write a story?** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ ( if you need help editing ask your extension agent, ag teacher or email [agnewstoday@outlook.com](mailto:agnewstoday@outlook.com) for help)

**AFTER the story runs**

1. **Share the link!** Share it with your club in an email blast, share it on Facebook, and encourage everyone to watch and share in their own circles! The more “hits,” comments and views a story gets, the more the station will look for similar content!

Who will follow up on a link or coverage? Who will share with the group to make sure everyone

is in the loop? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **Thank the media for coverage.** If interviewing 4-H or FFA is a positive experience they will be more apt to do it again when you call or email.

**Who will send thank you note? Can you do as group project? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**REMEMBER! Don’t let grass grow around your story. Media prefers stories less than 48 hours old, when possible. Details on pages 2-4**

**Detailed Media Tips for Florida 4-H and FFA Supporters on Facebook**

**By the team of Stephanie Farmer, Kelly Davis Strausbaugh and Stacey Warden**

It’s no secret that there are many issues facing Florida’s agriculture industry. Between animal activist groups, misinformed consumers and legislators who don’t understand the importance of programs like 4-H and FFA, it can be hard to make sure that these programs have a voice.

How can you help? It’s simple! Below, we’ve listed a few steps that you can take to make sure Florida 4-H & FFA receive continued valuable funding and support from our lawmakers and budget-deciders! We have to ensure that we are not only sending out awesome, positive news about our local and statewide (and national!) 4-H and FFA members to ag-related publications, but that we are also sending out to non-agriculture publications!

Gone are the days where everyone knew about 4-H and FFA. In today’s world, we MUST get the large scope of what these programs do for youth out into the general public. We must continue to speak out and tell our stories.

Ideas for contacting media to help 4-H and FFA:

1. Be alert for positive stories that show diversity. Not just livestock, but public speaking, community service, award wins and more! Be creative and think like a journalist. What would YOU want to cover?
2. Schedule a visit for your club to go to a local TV, Radio or Newspaper. Build relationships. After you send a release or an email, follow up with a phone call. Emails get easily bogged down, so make sure you’re friendly and approachable. When a reporter does call you back, make sure to respond quickly and be as helpful as possible!

In today’s world, news media is overwhelmed and short staffed. If you can find ways to help make their job easier for coverage, you help show them that you appreciate their time and coverage.

Here’s an example of how to ask for coverage:

If you call or email, send all of the important details. Keep the primary information short, simple and to the point – and at the top. Include secondary details in the later paragraphs. Reporters need to find the most important information first, and they can always call to follow up if they are interested.

Make it easy for them.

Include an interesting title! Get their attention. Words like “youth,” “contest,” “national/local,” etc. If a local team is trying to raise awareness about a national contest, try something like this:

*Catchy, short headline:* “Florida 4-H Youth Association Competes for National Judging Competition”

*City, state – then most important details:* Bradenton, FL. – Five members of the Florida 4-H Association have been selected to represent the state of Florida at the upcoming National 4-H Conference, held on July 15, 2017 in Nebraska.

*Add additional details, and 1 – 2 quotes by someone in the organization. Write without using objective words like awesome, amazing, special, unless it’s in the title of an award. You can use those words in a quote, but not in the body of the release.*

Of course, you can tell that these details are adlibbed. But hopefully, you get the message! You want to include the most important information. Dates, times, locations and topics. Who, what, when, where – the why and how can follow.

Before you call or email your local media contacts, **be prepared**. We’ve created a checklist for you, just to ensure that the process is smooth and rewarding for all involved!

Tip: Don’t limit yourself to livestock or competition stories. Talk about workshops, scholarships, club “open houses” – make a list of everything that you find exciting and run it by your fellow club leaders, members or even your extension agents. Find something that makes you excited; if you’re passionate about it, you’ll find it much easier to write or talk about.

Reporters and media members like to have the first scoop, so it’s a good idea to choose one outlet at a time, especially when pitching a great story. If they aren’t interested, move to the next one. We recommend starting with TV stations, then newspaper and radio outlets. Make a list of your local contacts and update as needed.

1. **Briefly describe** what you would like covered. 2 – 3 sentences or less.
2. Determine the **point of contact** for the story. Who is **willing** to talk to the media, and who is **approved** to talk to the media? (May need to be someone higher up in the organization, and may need to be approved by your extension agent.) Make sure the point of contact knows that they need to be **available** at a moment’s notice, which is how reporters typically work. Also, try to find someone **passionate** and excited about the information!
   1. List point of contact: (Name & title)
   2. Phone number & email address.
   3. Include how soon contact is available for an interview, and where they are located. Some reporters will require someone local. (Call anytime, email when ready, etc. It also helps to include a range of time to meet up, this way you help encourage them to schedule.)
3. Ask if you can send them **a press release**. If you have one ready, it never hurts to follow up so they have all of the information in a succinct format. Many times, if they can’t run the story, they WILL edit your release and run it. Reporters are busy and publications tend to be understaffed, so they will often reprint your work.
4. **Include photos and videos!** Make sure to have them ready. As mentioned above, many reporters do not have time to go and take their own footage. Be sure to have **high-resolution** photos and videos on hand and ready to send. Again, please ensure that photos are high quality. **Include all names and titles of people in the photos** – first and last names, and ages of children. Many news outlets will NOT print without names (unless the photo has more than 12 – 15 people). It’s never a bad idea to use a print release for your club members or anyone in the photo – always check to make sure people are aware that their photo may show up in the media. **Ask for permission before you take the photo or video**, to be on the safe side. We’d also recommend emailing and having permission in writing.
5. **Share the information** with parents, youth and anyone the media may interview. Make sure your information is **correct** and **consistent**. Everyone has their own version but it’s important that the main details are the same, and that everyone is on the same page! This will help you avoid any unwanted surprises.
6. Be ready for questions and have an answer ready that satisfies both parties. We recommend having a list handy of people at the organization, at a higher level. Instead of trying to guess at something you don’t know – say, “I don’t have the answer to that at the moment, but I’d love to share the contact information for (name and title of contact) who may be able to point us towards the right answer!” This way, you remain helpful while avoiding ruining your reputation as a solid source for your new media contact.
7. Watch your explanations and terminology. If you feel uncomfortable, bridge to a topic you are familiar with. If they ask about how we get our beef, say – well, farmers and ranchers today are always working to ensure that their cattle are cared for, this includes their time on the form and how they feed America, but we could also talk about how many industries use beef by-products! Did you know that insulin is made from a beef by-product? What about marshmallows? This is just one example of how you can turn an uncomfortable situation into a positive, educational one. It’s also never a wrong time to reinforce how highly-regulated our industry today is, how much we believe that animals are to be respected, and how 90% of farms in America are family owned and operated!
8. If any questions arise that you don’t know, make sure to **write them down** or have someone help you find the answer. **Always follow up** with a thank you note to ensure that the reporter knows how to reach you, and that you’ll respond! If you’re working with a club, have the club members sign a thank you note – a **handwritten** thank you note. We recommend an email thank you after the encounter, but definitely be sure to send something handwritten.
9. When the story is posted, **share the link**! Share it with your club in an email blast, share it on Facebook, and encourage everyone to watch and share in their own circles! The more “hits” and views a story gets, the more the station will look for similar content! If you go viral, expect another visit!
10. **Don’t get discouraged**! If the media members seem reluctant to run your story, move to the next one! Be a squeaky wheel. Eventually, you’ll find a reporter or editor who is inspired by your passion. Send the kids! If you’re feeling overlooked, have a child in your club make a call. Active, involved youth are always a newsworthy subject! Show them how great your kids are!

Remember, don’t just stop after you contact your local ag news media. Contact your general media outlets, too! If you need any assistance, reach out. Ask your FFA advisor, 4-H Agent or message us at Florida 4-H and FFA Supporters. We are here to work together to keep 4-H and FFA strong!