

# Healthy Farmer

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## Making Connections Through Facebook and Twitter

Along with weather and economic uncertainties, farmers have always had to cope with spending long hours, often alone, whether in their tractor or truck cabs, or animal barns. For some, the constant isolation can be difficult to deal with.

For those farmers, the advances in cell phone and internet technology can be very helpful. Advanced cell phones with internet capabilities (called smartphones) can be used to access the internet, including real time weather reports and other resources. Farmers can also use their smartphones to communicate with one another through popular social networking sites like Facebook and microblogging sites like Twitter.

A July 2009 article on CNN.com talks about the increased use of wireless technology and networking sites by farmers. In the article, Chuck Zimmerman, publisher of an agricultural news blog called agwired.com, says “the biggest draw of smartphones and online social

**Smartphone: a cellphone that has internet capability and other web-based capabilities.**

**Facebook: A social networking site open to anyone over age 13. Users can create their own profile page and connect with friends and join groups.**

**Twitter: a website and service where the user can send 140 character text messages (called “tweets”) to other users. Also called “microblogging” because Twitter is often used to provide brief updates of one’s activities in real time.**

networks is that they provide human connections to people for whom farm life can be lonely.” He has also commented on his blog that he is amazed at the number of farmers who follow him on Twitter.

Steve Tucker, a farmer from Brandon, NE comments in the article that “I can be in the most remote place and just with the power of having a Blackberry...I can communicate with anybody at anytime about anything.”

For Tucker, another upside to communicating via Twitter is that he can educate city dwellers about rural and farming life. This education can help urban residents to

feel more connected to where their food comes from and what it takes for a farmer to grow or raise it.

Twitter is popular because it allows a person to text a message from their cell phone and then send it to any number of their “followers” who have signed up to follow them on Twitter. The message (called a “tweet”) is limited to 140 characters. The followers receive the tweet in real time so they know what is going on immediately.

A quick look at some of the recent Twitter posts shows how this sort of communication can help farmers by putting a face on the work that farmers do. These are actual tweets followed by the Twitter user name of the farmer who posted them:

“The sun is out this morning—oh, I just hope it shines all week so that we can get out the food, feed, fuel and fiber for our country” (iamafarmer2)

“Shutting down corn harvest b/c [because] of high moisture levels. Switching other combine over to popcorn” (cornfedfarmer)

“Trying to make ditches in my horses pen tonight—trying to get the water moving better—can we MUD, MUD, MUD and no sun in sight.” (iamafarmer2)

“Harvesting again by moonlight...not as productive as we had hoped” (iamafarmer2)

“Daughter asked me if some people work on Christmas. Yes I said. She asked if I did. Told her this year we may be harvesting on Christmas.” (cornfedfarmer)

Twitter also features a number of feeds that focus on farm life, including one called Agchat that occurs every Tuesday, 7-9:00 p.m. Central time. Anyone who is registered on the free Twitter site can join in and read the conversation. Agchat is a guided conversation time for anyone involved in agriculture.

Facebook is a social networking site on the internet that has grown in popularity. Anyone can register for Facebook and there is no cost to sign up. Once a person is on Facebook, then it is possible to locate other friends, family and, in this case, other farmers. There are many Facebook groups devoted to farming. Most of the groups have only a few members but there is one group that has over 500 members and another that has over 60. In addition, a number of farmer resources also maintain Facebook pages and groups, such as Agchat and most farmer insurance companies.

These internet sites can help farmers locate parts when machinery is broken down and even help them if they are in danger. If you would like to sign up for either of these free services on the internet, please visit:

[www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com). Once registered, you may “follow” the farmers in the article or others by typing in their user names under “find people” and clicking “follow”.

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

For the CNN article please click:

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/07/02/twitter.farmer/index.html>

*Thank you to the farmers who gave permission for AgriWellness to reprint their tweets.*