

Let's get growing

CONNECT

Communication strategies for supporting a garden



TEXAS FARM FRESH INITIATIVE

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE | COMMISSIONER SID MILLER



At schools and child care centers across Texas, gardens offer fresh produce for meals, snacks and, most importantly, education through experience. To help educators enlist community support for maintaining campus gardens, TDA has developed **CONNECT**, a Farm Fresh Initiative tool that offers a communication plan for growing the network of support for a successful and sustainable garden program.

Let's ^{get} growing



You have completed your planning, growing and harvesting following recommendations in the Let's Get Growing series. The final step is to ensure community engagement through strong communication.



CONNECT is part four of the Let's Get Growing series and is accompanied by a set of online templates for creating flyers, email campaigns, press releases and strategic social media content. CONNECT is a one-stop shop for tools to build a coordinated communication campaign that ensures support for a garden program throughout the year, even during the summer months when harvests peak and volunteers vacation. Any of these tools can be used to build a personalized communication strategy to help keep communities engaged and gardens successful.



ONE-STOP SHOP: GARDEN PROGRAM *support*

Community-Wide Communication

YOUR SUPPORT COMMUNITY CAN BE COMPRISED OF A VARIETY OF STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING

- Parents and parent organizations
- Teachers or other school administrators and leaders
- Community members
- Students
- Nonprofit organizations
- Local, certified master gardeners
- Garden clubs
- Local media outlets

Communicating about a garden program can include reaching each different audience or focusing on a specific group. Consider your strategy and then select the resource(s) best suited for building your support framework.



BUILD YOUR OWN Toolkit



Any of these tools can be used to build a personalized communication strategy to help keep communities engaged and gardens successful.

TAKE-HOME FLIER TEMPLATE

A formatted, tear-away flier will help get a garden message front and center with guardians and offer them a way to respond and indicate their interest. Download TDA's tear-away flier template from SquareMeals.org/Gardens to create your one-of-a kind flier.

Use this tool near the end of the school year to help coordinate support during the summer months or at any time of year to create an ongoing volunteer schedule.

VOLUNTEER CAMPAIGN EXCEL TEMPLATE

Compile all critical information in the Volunteer Campaign Excel template available on SquareMeals.org/Gardens to keep your volunteer efforts organized and coordinated. Track contact information, indicated interests and availability.





AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY IS A *strong community*



Press Release for Local Media Outlets

Spotlighting gardens at schools and child care centers offer media outlets an opportunity to reach a broad audience and show the fantastic ways communities foster nutrition and agriculture at the local level. Newspaper, radio and TV coverage can build valuable community awareness for school gardens while driving support and success. An engaged community is a strong community.



NEWSPAPER



RADIO



TV

Press releases can be sent to local media outlets and posted on an organization's Web portal. All content must be approved by a school district's or child care organization's leadership and communications office prior to release. Use the template press releases available on SquareMeals.org/Gardens to build your own press release. If your district does not have a communications team, make sure the language is approved through the appropriate management and chain of command. Work with your local newspaper editor to ensure they receive the press release in the format they prefer.

Sample press release #1

To be used at a school level:

For immediate release: (Insert release date here)

(Insert organization name here) (Insert release date here)

(Insert City), Texas

Students have taken root all over Texas including (insert organization name here) in the campus garden centers as learning valuable lessons about science, nutrition and more while working for healthier eating plans and promoting healthy living. To ensure the students have a thriving garden when they return after the summer vacation, volunteers are needed to assist them with the summer. The garden's focus is education and expanding it benefits young farm community support. Interested volunteers are encouraged to contact the school to learn more about helping to maintain the school garden through watering, providing resources or financial support, weeding, and assisting in other ways.

Learning about good nutrition and eating food comes from being children. Healthy habits lead to a lifetime. Supporting children can contribute to a healthier future for the community and make an impact on the lives of young children. (Insert organization name here) encourages interested volunteers to contact them about offering the following support: (If in your school's support could be more detailed. If contact if you have the resources to manage a volunteer program or if planning to volunteer yourself, please let us know.)

(Personalized School information: include any information about your school or district you would like in this press release. (For accommodations on inclusion of any information about the type of school that would be most impactful to your garden's (i.e., volunteer time, donation of materials and/or space, financial contributions, the names of school teachers that participate in summer reading programs that have gardens.)

For more information, contact (insert the name and contact information to the point of contact in your organization. If you currently have a garden volunteer coordinator, include their contact information here).

This invitation is an equal opportunity program.

Media Contact: (include best point of contact for any media requests.)

Sample press release #2

To be used during the school year:

For immediate release: (insert release date here)

(Insert organization name here) says Texas Agriculture Month

(Insert City), Texas

What does Farm Fresh mean to you? At (insert organization name here) it means connecting students to agriculture and local farmers and markets. The goal is to increase community collaborations, promote healthy discipline and improve the Texas economy. Because Texas Agriculture Month!

Options on our campuses connect students back to Texas Agriculture with us work hard to teach children where their food comes from. (Use the section to add information about special initiatives or events you have planned that will be covered during Texas Agriculture Month. This may include farm tours, field trips, or meet the farmer days.)

(Personalized Organization information: include any information about your school or district you would like in this press release. (For accommodations on inclusion of any information about the type of school that would be most impactful to your garden's (i.e., volunteer time, donation of materials and/or space, financial contributions, the names of teachers that participate in summer reading programs that have gardens.)

Our invited help! Contact (insert the name and contact information to the point of contact in your organization. If you currently have a garden volunteer coordinator, include their contact information here).

This invitation is an equal opportunity program.

Media Contact: (include best point of contact for any media requests.)

✉ Email Communication

Emails have become a staple for parents, teachers and school administrators. Emails are the fastest way to reach people and they enable immediate, trackable responses. Provided sample language can help launch your communication campaign and get community volunteers involved in your garden.

Compile all contact information and indicated interests in the Volunteer Campaign Excel template provided on SquareMeals.org/Gardens to track and maintain volunteer engagement.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

You can be a part of a growing enterprise at the [Insert organization name here] garden. All it takes is a desire to connect children to good nutrition and agriculture using a simple garden. Background gardening knowledge is not required.

Produce from the garden will be used in meals, snacks and taste-testing to increase children's willingness to try and eat fruits and vegetables. Please join us in this worthwhile endeavor as we help students build strong, sustainable connections to local food.

Reply directly to this email with your contact information and indicate your interest in the following activities:

- **Watering:** Visit the garden two times each week, on assigned days, to water all plants.
- **Planting:** This is a one-time commitment at the beginning of a new season to help plant the garden.
- **Weeding:** Visit the garden one time per week, on assigned days, removing all plants identified as weeds.
- **Spread mulch:** This is a one-time commitment at the beginning of summer or immediately after planting to help spread mulch over garden beds.
- **Material donation:** Provide mulch, compost, seeds, garden tools or financial support.



COMMUNITY GARDEN activities



WATERING



WEEDING



PLANTING



MULCHING



MATERIALS



CULTIVATING SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES *with consistent messaging*

Social media enables organizations to share content in real time, connect with different audiences, post photos and engage with those who may not already be connected to the organization. Cultivating a social media strategy can take the stress out of daily posts and ensure consistent messaging.

A FEW BEST PRACTICES TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN PLANNING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT:



AUDIENCE

Is the communication for parents, students or the community? Language and content should be tailored to reach the appropriate group. This may mean communicating about a project in several different ways.



PHOTOS AND VIDEOS

- Social media that includes either a photo or video catches readers' attention more than words alone.
- Facebook Video and Facebook Live are fun ways to introduce multimedia into communications.
- Research has shown that video posts offer excellent reach.



CALL TO ACTION

- In marketing, a call to action is defined as an instruction to the audience to provoke an immediate response, usually using an imperative verb such as "find out more" or "click here."
- The sample posts section includes an example of using a call to action.



TAGS

- A social media tag creates a short link to a profile and the post may be added to that person's or group's timeline. This will increase the visibility of the posts beyond an immediate audience.
- Tag TDA on Facebook and Twitter
 - Twitter: @TexasDeptofAg
 - Facebook: TexasDepartmentofAgriculture



POSTS ON MULTIPLE CHANNELS

- There are multiple social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
- Many of the tips from above resonate across all three channels.
- *Quick tip for Twitter:* Character limits on Twitter are currently set at 140. A character is simply a space, letter, or punctuation mark.



GROW WITH A COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

- Work with the organization's communications team to discover additional tools available to social media page managers.
- Explore some of the following options:
 - Fan pages
 - Analytics and insights
 - Polls and contests

SAMPLE posts

BUILD AWARENESS

Have you seen our new garden?
Come check it out! [Include photo]

School gardens have really taken root at
[insert school name]. We're currently growing
[insert list of items planted in the garden].

Growing power! [Insert photo of items recently harvested]

CALL TO ACTION

Have you heard about our
garden supply drive? Find out
more about the supplies we
need – [CLICK HERE](#). [Include
a hyperlink to the supply drive
webpage if you have one]

COORDINATE A GARDEN SUPPLY DRIVE

Our school garden has really taken root.
We are hosting a school garden supply
drive! [Insert details about supplies
needed for the garden]



SHARE YOUR SUCCESS today

Inspire others with your best practices and learning opportunities. Share your garden program successes by emailing LocalProducts.SquareMeals@TexasAgriculture.gov.



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mail:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
fax: (202) 690-7442; or email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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Let's ^{get} growing

CONNECT TODAY!



Let's grow further!

This resource provides ideas for enhancing a garden communication plan. CONNECT provides a stepping stone for growing and engaging your audience through your existing communication channels including menu calendars, posters, parent outreach, websites and newsletters.

Your partners at TDA support your efforts to increase young Texans' connections with local products and agriculture. Learn more about TDA's Farm Fresh Initiative at SquareMeals.org/TexasFarmFresh and access additional resources and training materials. You may also connect with your local education service center office for technical assistance.



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Fraud Hotline: 1-866-5-FRAUD-4 or 1-866-537-2834 | P.O. Box 12847 | Austin, TX 78711
Toll Free: (877) TEX-MEAL | For the hearing impaired: (800) 735-2989 (TTY)



Food and Nutrition Division
Farm Fresh Initiative

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