

**C**ommunications Division supports all of WVDA's Divisions and programs with media, graphics and publications services, and is the clearinghouse for WVDA public information. The Division distributes news and information to media throughout the state and beyond, and facilitates educational programs that help our state's citizens appreciate farming, the environment and our fragile food supply. Working cooperatively with other Divisions and the agricultural community at large, Communications promotes public awareness of agriculture and the WVDA through The Market Bulletin, with more than 53,000 subscribers; the Department's website, [www.wvagriculture.org](http://www.wvagriculture.org); Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/West.Virginia.Department.of.Agriculture>; and Twitter feed @WVDeptofAg. The Division maintains relations with state and federal partners, and staff is cross-trained in crisis communications and emergency response.

### **Media and Message**

The Division boosted its social media presence extensively during the past fiscal year. The WVDA Facebook page currently has 2,245 "likes." Thanks in part to a viral video of a calf being born at the State Fair, the WVDA Twitter feed now has 1,728 followers. The WVDA webpage was being revamped during the past year, and will be more attractive and easier to use when completed next year. The current page has no counters to measure page views.

The primary messages the Division has been disseminating is the fact that West Virginians consume more than \$7 billion worth of food, yet produce far less than \$1 billion. There is an enormous financial opportunity for the state to improve its internal food production and keep those food dollars within its borders.

The WVDA has focused much of its attention on developing new farmers and creating better food infrastructure that will make it more economically feasible to be a commercial farmer in the state and communicating those advancements is a critical mission for the Division.

Communications has provided numerous media contacts, releases, posts and tweets to support this effort.

# COMMUNICATIONS



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## Events

The Division was very involved in publicity efforts regarding a number of initiatives. The annual Beef for Fathers' Day promotional event was expanded to five locations throughout the state. The traditional event held at the Governor's Mansion has been well received in the past. Four new locations provided free samples for the public and educated the public about the state's beef industry.

The WVDA Farm To School initiative kicked off with a large event in Preston County. The amount of food purchased has doubled the past two years in a row to \$700,000. While those gains are substantial, producers are only scratching the surface of this \$100 million-a-year market.

An event popular with Charleston residents and media is "Capitol Market at the Capitol," which offers employees at the complex and East End residents the opportunity to pick up fresh fruits and vegetables during lunch hour once a week. Media covered both the opening day of the market, and the free sweet corn roast held later in the season.

Since 2000, the number of farmers' markets across the country has grown 150 percent, from 2,863 markets to 7,175 in 2011.



**The WVDA Communications Division works to encourage and promote Farm to School Programs across the state.**



**Communications staff participated in an outdoor classroom with Sacred Heart Elementary School in FY 2014.**

Now in its fourth year, the Department's "Women in Agriculture" program continues to gain recognition throughout the state. The program honors the contributions of women to West Virginia's agricultural community and its rural heritage.

The Division continued its relationship with The West Virginia Agriculture and Forestry Hall of Fame (WVAFHF), providing publicity and other assistance for the organization.

## Consumer alerts

Economics is not the only issue that requires Communications Divisions efforts. Food recalls remain an important public service. During the past year, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported nearly 300 people in 18 states contracted Salmonella from chicken produced at California-based Foster Farms. At least seven different strains of Salmonella Heidelberg were tied to the outbreak. Compounding the outbreak was the fact that many of the cases appeared resistant to antibiotic treatments. About 42 percent of documented patients have been hospitalized, about double the typical Salmonella outbreak.

Crunch Pak® of Cashmere, Wash., recalled 5,471 cases of some apple slices due to a possible health risk from Listeria monocytogenes. The apples were very widely distributed in retail stores and restaurants. Another recall involved ready-to-eat salad products manufactured by Reser's Fine Foods that were incorporated into other products nationwide.

Two pet food recalls affected the state on fears of Salmonella contamination. PMI Nutrition recalled 20-lb. bags of Red Flannel® Cat Formula cat food and Pro-Pet LLC of St. Marys, Ohio, recalled a limited number of Dry Dog and Cat Foods.

## Educational Outreach

Along with staff from other divisions in the Department, Communications continued its educational outreach at elementary schools throughout the state to improve the "agricultural literacy" of young people who, with each passing generation, grow further disconnected from the sources of the food they eat. Activities included "Ag Jeopardy," a session about honeybees and their importance, and a session on germs and how to prevent getting sick. Students also enjoyed the WVDA's highly popular "Bug Safari," which teaches the important role insects play in our environment, and gives them a chance to see and touch real, live bugs.

The Division also provided valuable and economical printing services to the Department and related state agencies. Besides printing and distributing 56,000 copies of the Market Bulletin each month, the Division prints numerous brochures, booklets and flyers that are designed in-house. The Division also has the capability to produce signs, posters and banners in a very cost-effective manner.