



Planning Your Food Check-Out Week Event February 19 – 25, 2012

A variety of information that may be helpful in planning state or local Food Check-Out Week activities is included in this document:

- Pointers on contacting and working with the news media, including interview tips.
- Talking points on the focus of Food Check-Out Week and American agriculture, including animal care.
- Basic event planning information.
- Tips on working with Ronald McDonald House Charities.

Download a print-ready PDF of the logo from Silo, AFBF's intranet website (registration and password required): <http://graphics.fb.org/netpub/server.np?quickfind=Food%20Check-Out%20Week&catalog=catalog&site=fblogos&sorton=Filename&template=results.np>

Order Food Check-Out promotional materials online here: <http://fb-orders.com/afbf/>. Supermarket information kits, recipe cards, reusable grocery bags, nutrition fact cards, shopping lists pads, nutrition education posters, food collection signs, bread bag clips, stickers, announcement posters, place mats and other items are available.

Download print-ready Food Check-Out Week ads (may be customized) from Silo, AFBF's intranet Web site (registration required). Go to <http://silo.fb.org>, Programs, Food Check-Out Week. A draft news release in Microsoft Word format for you to localize and distribute is available in a separate Word file on Silo.

Please talk with your state Farm Bureau information/public relations director and/or Food Check-Out Week coordinator when planning your events.

For additional information, contact the following American Farm Bureau staff members: Marsha Purcell (202-406-3706 or marshap@fb.org) or Cyndie Sirekis (202-406-3649 or cyndies@fb.org).



Working With the News Media

Consumers are the target audience of Farm Bureau's 2012 Food Check-Out Week campaign, Feb. 19-25. With an updated focus on helping consumers stretch their grocery dollars with healthy, nutritious food, the campaign provides an opportunity for positive publicity for America's farmers and ranchers.

How Does it Work?

The core message we want to communicate during Food Check-Out Week is:

Food Check-Out Week is devoted to helping teach Americans how to stretch their grocery dollars with healthy, nutritious food.

Key Messages:

- Farm Bureau is helping consumers find solutions to eating healthy on a stretched budget.
- America's farmers and ranchers are committed to producing safe, abundant and healthy food.
- Through charitable donations to local Ronald McDonald Houses (and other charities) during Food Check-Out Week, we recognize the need everyone has to find solutions to feeding families healthy foods on a tight budget.



Talking Points - for public events or interviews with the news media

Food Check-Out Week:

- With many Americans feeling an economic squeeze, they may be eating out less and preparing more meals at home. So, it's more important than ever to give them tools to grocery shop smart, buying healthy food that fits within a budget.
- Public health experts fear that lean economic times may mean an already-overweight public may resort to cheaper high-calorie foods, which can lack important vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients. However, with smart nutrition and budget knowledge put into action, this doesn't have to happen.
- While America's farmers and ranchers are committed to producing safe, healthy food, they share with consumers the same issues of putting nutritious meals on the table while sticking to a tight budget.
- According to a recent public opinion survey conducted by the American Dietetic Association, 52 percent of consumers are looking for practical tips – just what Food Check-Out Week provides – to help them eat right. More than 70 percent of American adults don't do more to achieve a balanced diet because they are satisfied with how they eat and don't want to give up foods they like.
- Working with a registered dietician, Farm Bureau has developed Food Check-Out Week educational materials for consumers on topics including:
 - ✓ Tips for Better Nutrition on a Tight Budget
 - ✓ How Much Should I Eat?
 - ✓ Understanding Food Labels
 - ✓ Understanding What MyPlate Means
- Knowing your food budget, planning balanced meals, making a list and shopping at competitively priced grocery stores with high-quality produce are just a few strategies to achieve better nutrition with less money.
- Tips for smart food shopping include: plan ahead, make a list and stick to it, read food labels, and don't buy unless it will be eaten. Take time to compare prices for different brands and sizes by using cost-per-unit shelf stickers.
- A healthy diet includes a variety of vegetables and fruits, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, lean meats, fish, beans, eggs and nuts within daily calorie needs.



- USDA's MyPlate is a tool to guide food choices and quantities within each food group. Visit ChooseMyPlate.gov for more information.
- The price of unprepared readily available fresh fruits and vegetables, such as Iceberg lettuce, bananas, whole carrots, Red Delicious apples, broccoli and tomatoes, has remained stable compared to dessert and snack foods, according to USDA. This suggests that the price of a healthy diet has not changed relative to an unhealthy one, although a healthy diet might not include every fresh fruit or vegetable currently available. (Source: USDA, www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err55.)
- All forms of fruits and vegetables count toward a healthy diet – including fresh, frozen, dried and canned.
- A tip for keeping produce fresh longer is to store produce in a perforated plastic bag. This stops condensation and shriveling. Make holes in a plastic bag with a paper punch, knife or other sharp object about six inches apart all over the bag.
- Look for fresh produce when it's in season or on special, and remember that frozen produce often has the same – or better – nutrition and price than fresh.

Food & the Economy:

- Americans enjoy a food supply that is among the safest, most abundant and most affordable in the world.
- As farmers, our job is to provide consumers with the highest quality, healthy food possible. Growing and raising wholesome, safe food is our top goal. We continue to look for every opportunity to improve quality and safety.
- Recent retail price increases at the grocery store are due primarily to higher energy costs for processing, hauling and refrigerating food products.
- Based on Agriculture Department statistics for 2010, it takes just five weeks for the average American to earn enough disposable income to pay for his or her family's food supply for the entire year. (Source: http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/CPIFoodAndExpenditures/Data/Expenditures_tables/table7.htm)
- U.S. consumers still spend just under 10 percent of their disposable annual income on food, according to the latest (2010) USDA data. Consumers in other countries spend much more: France–13%; South Africa–20%; Indonesia–32%; Philippines–36%; and Jordan–41% (See tables 7 and 97 at the link below for details.) http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/CPIFoodAndExpenditures/Data/Expenditures_tables/



Animal Care :

Healthy animals mean healthy food for you and your family.

- For animals to produce meat, milk and eggs, America's farmers and ranchers must take all possible steps to ensure that animals are well cared for seven days a week, 52 weeks a year.
- As farmers and ranchers, we recognize that superior animal welfare practices lead to the production of high-quality, safe and wholesome meat, poultry, milk and eggs, and we're constantly seeking ways to improve the well-being and comfort of our animals.

Farmers and ranchers care about the health, well-being and safety of our animals, and we ensure this through proper management and shelter.

- Farmers and ranchers provide adequate food, water and medical care to protect our animals' health.
- We also provide appropriate shelter to ensure livestock can exhibit normal behaviors at rest and remain protected from disease, competition, injury and predators.
- Quality Assurance programs at the national and state levels provide guidelines for the production of safe, wholesome animals, including recommendations on necessary animal handling and facilities.

Standards for animal care should be based on the expertise of veterinarians, farmers, ranchers and animal scientists -- the people who work with farm animals daily.

- American farmers and ranchers have been working with veterinarians, animal scientists, agricultural engineers and animal well-being experts to continually develop and support reasonable science-based guidelines and audits.
- As the people who work with livestock 24/7, farmers and ranchers, as well as veterinarians and animal care scientists, provide the voices of experience and reason in addressing animal welfare issues.

Changes to animal well-being guidelines should be based on data, expert analysis and economic feasibility.

- Adding unnecessary costs to U.S. production will increase the amount of food imported from places that have an inferior record on food safety and animal well-being.
- Overzealous standards will increase the price of food, negatively affecting all families trying to make ends meet.

Additional Background Information:



Food Safety

- As farmers, our job is to provide consumers with the highest quality food possible. Growing and raising wholesome, safe food is our top goal. We've done a good job; and we're going to continue to look for every opportunity to improve quality and safety.
- Federal and state governments are responsible for safeguarding the food supply, but farmers are responsible for growing food safely. We make sure we use crop protectants effectively and safely, in amounts that are no more than what is necessary to combat pests and diseases.
- We work hard to gain the knowledge, training and skill to use chemicals safely and responsibly. Many farmers learned from their parents and have a lot of experience. But like other professionals, we also go to college, attend seminars and work with consultants. We are professionals in what we do.
- Food-borne illnesses can occur anytime food is involved. So basic, sound food practices should always be followed, whether the food is being prepared at a restaurant, at home or at a church picnic.
- Proper food storage, processing and handling eliminates most, if not all, food-borne risks. Thorough cooking has proved an adequate safeguard. Food should always be promptly refrigerated. Raw meat products should be segregated from cooked products. Perhaps most important, when in doubt, throw it out.
- The basic products farmers produce are not usually the source of bacterial diseases. After the products leave the farm, however, meat, milk and other high-protein foods, on occasion, can be subject to contamination during processing, handling, storing and the actual preparation of the food.
- Food safety standards are in place by the federal government to further ensure the food we eat is safe.

Biotechnology

- The agricultural community has long supported new technologies that improve production and help make food even more affordable for consumers. For example, we've been selectively breeding animals and crops for centuries to improve disease resistance and to produce bigger yields. Biotechnology simply gives us the tools to speed up this process, and complete it with much greater precision.
- Consumers and the environment are the end beneficiaries of new advances in biotechnology. Biotech advances that come into use on the farm will further ensure that American food and fiber products can remain cost-competitive both here and abroad.



- Biotechnology research is closely monitored by federal and state agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Agriculture Department and the Food and Drug Administration. While it can be an effective tool, biotechnology as used on farms -- such as new corn and soybean varieties -- will not “run rampant” and produce the mutants that populate nightmares and science-fiction movies. During a biotech research project, perhaps one gene in 10,000 is manipulated to achieve a small, but desired result.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

- American farmers fully support practices that enable us to reduce pesticide use. We’ve been using IPM tactics such as field scouting and even crop rotation for years. IPM is a management practice that uses cultural practices and natural pest enemies to reduce the use of crop protectants. We’ll continue to expand IPM use whenever possible.
- As business people, we’re interested in lowering costs associated with using crop protectants. IPM can help us do that. IPM, however, does not mean totally eliminating the use of crop protectants. Some are even used in conjunction with modern IPM techniques.
- Farmers will continue to work with universities and researchers to develop new techniques that lessen the use and expense of crop protectants.

Pesticides

- Farmers are strongly motivated to use crop protectants responsibly. We have, first, a respect for the laws and regulations governing crop protectant use; second, a personal commitment to protect consumers, their families and the environment from reckless chemical use; and, third, an economic interest in reducing chemical costs.
- Farmers’ foremost goals are to make a living growing safe, nutritious and affordable food. Growers and marketers of fresh food products are especially concerned about produce safety and consumer health.
- Federal and state agencies closely monitor levels of pesticide residues in food. Allowable limits are set hundreds, even thousands, of times lower than levels that would pose any potential health risk. The Food and Drug Administration prosecutes violations of these standards.
- Farmers are responsible pesticide managers. Crop protectants are expensive and farmers don’t benefit from over-applying them or exceeding state and federal application guidelines.



The Environment

The 2010 National Resources Inventory (NRI), a report released by the Agriculture Department's Natural Resources Conservation Service, shows that farmers and ranchers are careful and caring stewards of our nation's natural resources. The study reveals:

- Today's farmers produce more food with fewer resources than ever before.
- In 2008, farmers produced 262 percent more food with 2 percent fewer inputs, compared with 1950.
- America's dairy farmers are producing more milk with less feed. It takes 40 percent less feed for a cow to produce 100 pounds of milk today than it did 30 years ago.
- Total U.S. crop yield has increased more than 360 percent since 1950, which helps us do our part to feed a growing world.
- U.S. farm land use for crops has declined by 70 million acres or 15 percent, since 1982.
- Careful stewardship by America's food producers spurred a 50 percent decline in erosion of cropland by wind and water since 1982.

Also of interest—

- Today's farmers and ranchers use precise plant nutrition management plans to increase food production while producing less waste. This translates into cleaner rivers, lakes and streams across the United States. The American farmer and rancher have a stake in the future of America's natural resources. With 98 percent of America's farms and ranches operated by individuals, family partnerships or family corporations, maintaining and improving our nation's natural resources is vital to keeping the business in the family for generations to come. Using precise plant nutrition and crop health practices and tools helps today's farmers produce more food with less seed and fewer inputs.
- A 2011 survey of America's young farmers and ranchers revealed that 58 percent use conservation tillage (or no-till) to grow crops, which helps protect the soil and reduces the need for chemical pesticides.



Other Agriculture Facts

General Points

- More than 21 million American workers (15 percent of the total U.S. workforce) produce, process, sell and trade the nation's food and fiber. But only 4.6 million of those people live on farms -- slightly less than 2 percent of the total U.S. population.
- Farmers and ranchers receive 16 cents out of every dollar spent on food at home and away from home. The rest goes for costs beyond the farm gate: wages and materials for production, processing, marketing, transportation and distribution. In 1980, farmers and ranchers received 31 cents.
- For 2012, USDA projects \$137 billion worth of American agricultural products will be exported around the world.
- More than half of America's agricultural producers intentionally provide habitat for wildlife. Deer, moose, fowl and other species have shown significant population increases during the past several years.
- Ethanol and biodiesel fuels made from corn, soybeans and other crops are beneficial to the environment and promote energy security.

Today's Farmer and Farm Family

- There are 2.13 million farms dotting America's rural landscape, and 98 percent of U.S. farms are operated by individuals, family partnerships or family corporations. American agriculture provides jobs -- including production agriculture, farm inputs, processing and marketing, along with retail and wholesale sales -- for 15 percent of the U.S. population.
- A 2011 survey of America's young farmers and ranchers revealed that 94 percent planned to farm and ranch for life. And 87 percent said they would like their children to follow in their footsteps. This provides strong incentive for today's farmers and ranchers to protect and preserve the natural resources on their property. Not only is the land and its resources a farmer's lifeblood today, it represents the future for his family and its business.
- America's farmers and ranchers are true professionals. Most farmers and ranchers are trained and certified in the use of agricultural chemicals. And farmers test and evaluate the soil before administering fertilizers. Farmers and ranchers don't spend hard-earned money on costly fertilizers and nutrients unless they absolutely have to. Doing otherwise doesn't make good business sense.



Today's Modern Farm

- Thanks to modern farming techniques, America's farmers and ranchers are producing more food on fewer acres, leaving more open space for wildlife habitat. Modern farming practices free up millions of acres for wildlife to live and thrive.
- Precision farming practices boost crop yields and overall efficiency by using satellite maps and computers to match seed, fertilizer and crop protection applications to local soil conditions.
- A 2011 survey of young farmers and ranchers reveals that virtually all of them use cell phones, computers and the Internet. More and more of them are using social media platforms (blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to connect with consumers.



Interview Tips

Farm Bureau's Food Check-Out Week is an excellent way for you to take a positive message to members of the news media. It is consumer-oriented and focuses on stretching your grocery dollar, a subject in which everyone has an interest. But, how do you get started? The first suggestion is to contact a member of your state Farm Bureau information/public relations staff. Ask for guidance. You also should find out if special material is available or special efforts are being planned.

You already know what your basic message will be:

Food Check-Out Week is devoted to helping teach Americans how to stretch their grocery dollars with healthy, nutritious food.

The story of Food Check-Out Week, especially when told at the local level, should prove newsworthy to members of your local news media. Try taking the viewpoint of the media person who must get a newspaper out, produce a television or radio news or talk show.

What can you tell them about Food Check-Out Week -- and related events -- that will make their life easier? What elements make your story news? If you can take that viewpoint when contacting the media, your job of promoting Food Check-Out Week will be much easier and more productive.

Reaching the Right Reporter

At all media outlets, there are reporters covering many different beats, or areas of interest. If your story was about a garden club meeting, you obviously wouldn't want to contact the sports editor. You'll need to do some research -- something as basic as calling the station or newspaper and asking for the name of the person who covers consumer or food issues, agriculture or business. In smaller outlets, a general reporter or editor may be assigned to several areas.

To attract the most attention possible, go to the phone book. Look up broadcast stations -- radio and television. Look up publications, newspapers, magazines and even wire services. Publication mastheads often list the names of primary editors, reporters and columnists, so you may be able to get the information you need there.

The Newsroom

When you make initial contact to pitch the Food Check-Out Week story, keep in mind that newsrooms, by their very nature, are busy places. Reporters and photographers are scrambling to meet their deadlines. The most important thing is to catch their attention with your piece of news. Don't waste their time. If you already have a positive one-on-one relationship with a particular reporter, that may well be the person to approach first.



If you don't know anyone at your local newspaper, or don't know where to begin, just ask for the news desk or news editor/director as a starting point. After that, provided that what you have to say sounds interesting, you'll be put through to a reporter to take full details regarding Food Check-Out Week and related events. Then it should all happen automatically.

A point to remember is that you should never ask a reporter to preview the story. Only when you pay for material are you entitled to ask to preview any printed material. Reporters generally never let sources review stories, though they often check back when information is unclear to them. Remember, it's their job to gather the facts and tell the story accurately -- to suggest they can't do so without your input insults their professionalism. It's better to listen carefully during an interview to be aware of when a reporter may not understand something. Remember that the likelihood of your being misquoted is reduced substantially if you speak briefly and clearly. People are usually not misquoted, even when they truly believe they are. It is best to simply tell the Food Check-Out Week story to the best of your ability and trust in the reporter's professional ability to get it right. That's what they're trained to do. It's a simple matter of trust.

Afterward, if the reporter does a good job on Food Check-Out Week, send a thank-you and make a mental note to deal with that person again instead of going through the news desk. That's the start of your relationship-building. You now have a "contact."

Arranging Photography

If you are trying to arrange for a local press photographer to attend your Food Check-Out Week event, then the news desk (or photo desk, if they have one) is a good starting point. If your reporter contact expresses interest in the story, you should inform him/her of any special photo opportunity. This might be a public relations effort at a local grocery store or a commemorative food donation to a charitable organization, such as the cooperative effort with Ronald McDonald House Charities.

Don't be discouraged if the photographer doesn't promise to attend your event -- photographers seldom make such promises, but they will always do their best if you can make this photographic opportunity sound attractive. While reporters are simply looking for a news story that sounds new and interesting, photographers want to illustrate the news with a good photo.

Don't Forget Radio and Television

Radio and television stations are also on the lookout for what sounds interesting. An interview with someone who knows the Food Check-Out Week message could make an ideal feature for a local station.

The rules for dealing with broadcast news directors/reporters are essentially the same as dealing with the print media. Make sure you cover details of the Food Check-Out Week event including the date, location, time, etc. You may be asked to pay a visit to their studio to give a more in-depth story related to Food Check-Out Week and the wonders of American agriculture, maybe even as a talk show guest.



It's unlikely that your event will receive a mention as a main news item on one of the daily reports, but stories about Food Check-Out Week would likely fit into an afternoon show or be treated as a feature story.

When a Reporter Calls

There is a good chance your attempt to pitch the Food Check-Out Week story will be followed by a phone call from a reporter. Just what should you expect? Since you are looking for coverage, you certainly will want to grant an interview. You should, however, attempt to determine:

- Whether a phone interview will be the extent of your contact with the reporter, or does the reporter need a one-on-one interview?
- Will the phone interview or subsequent interview be taped?
- If the reporter is from a television station, will you be on camera live?
- How long will the subsequent interview take and where will it be conducted? Try to set a reasonable time limit. You may have more than one interview to do. Having a reasonable time limit shows you are cooperative, but lets the reporter know you may be busy during your event.
- What is the reporter's deadline?
- What type of story the reporter envisions -- news or feature?

The reporter who calls or meets with you in person should be able to answer many of these questions for you. Be particularly aware of reporters' deadlines. They have a job to do and editors to please. The deadline may be weeks -- or minutes -- away. Respect for those deadlines will go a long way in ensuring positive media relations in the future.

Interview Preparation

After referring to Farm Bureau's Food Check-Out Week news release and talking points, outline your main points. Once you've scheduled the interview, you should prepare three to five points to get your message across as briefly as possible -- especially for the broadcast media, you should limit the time of your responses, preferably to 20 seconds or less. Make sure to localize your comments when possible.

When formulating your main points, ask yourself these questions:

- Why is recognition of Food Check-Out Week important?
- Why is it significant to consumers?
- What does it say about agriculture in your area?
- What is your personal contribution to this success story?

Here is a basic formula you might use when answering questions:



1. Make a statement that outlines the purpose of Food Check-Out Week as briefly as possible: “Food Check-Out Week focuses on helping consumers stretch their grocery dollars with healthy, nutritious food.”
2. Support your statement: “Farm Bureau is helping consumers find solutions to eating healthy on a stretched budget.”
3. Make a transition into your message: “We’re pleased to provide consumers with tools that help them grocery shop smart and buy healthy food that fits within their budget.”
4. State your message: “America’s farmers and ranchers, including those of us right here in (your state or county), are committed to producing safe, healthy food. Like all consumers, we are concerned about putting nutritious meals on the table while sticking to a tight budget. We’re pleased to share some tools and tips for stretching grocery dollars during these challenging economic times.”

You also should be ready to answer any tough questions that might be offered as a follow-up. To prepare, list the 10 most difficult questions you might be asked regarding agriculture and food production -- perhaps topics such as chemical use or subsidies. Think about how you will make a transition from those questions into a key point you want to make about Food Check-Out Week.

Colleagues and friends often can provide good sounding boards.

Don’t forget to rehearse. Review the questions until you are confident you can handle each and every one. You might even record answers with a tape recorder. Don’t plan to read your answers during the interview, however.

Interview Basics

- Relax. Chances are that an interview designed around Food Check-Out Week will be nonadversarial and serve as a good opportunity for you to tell the public about the success of American agriculture. Smile. Be personable and confident.
- Get your messages across. Even if you have said a message before, don’t be afraid to repeat it. Don’t ignore any of the reporter’s questions, but take charge and steer the interview back to your main points. You are the expert. You know what is important to tell the public -- so tell them.
- Be informative and friendly. While Food Check-Out Week interviews might tend to be more conversational, always try to concentrate on the information you want to impart. Interviews are exchanges of information. You are the source of that information and the reporter represents the public. Do not feel obligated to maintain the social rules of conduct that guide conversations.



- Be wary of a reporter who is silent. This may tend to lead you into longer, drawn-out narratives that could dilute your basic message. It's human nature to want to fill those lulls with conversation. Don't. Lulls may not be as long as they seem. Make your point and stop talking.
- Again, be brief. Reporters generally don't want lengthy, drawn-out explanations. They're looking for quotable quotes -- a punchy line that will fill two or three lines of newsprint or 8 to 15 seconds of radio or television air time. Use your 8 to 15 seconds to get your message across -- there's a much greater likelihood it will be used. Knowing what you want to say in advance will go a long way in simplifying your answers. You may have about 20 seconds of response time but that would only be if the reporter truly wants a more detailed comment on a specific aspect of farming.
- NEVER go "off the record." There is no such thing as "off the record." An "off-the-record" comment may not be attributed to you directly, but the reporter often will use the information to confirm aspects of the story with other sources. If you don't want something to appear in print, don't say it.
- If the interview moves into questions about agriculture in general, don't use jargon, and try to end your answer with a point about Food Check-Out Week. Avoid using terms or acronyms that can't be quoted without explanation. Also, avoid lengthy statements such as: "It is clear that much additional work will be required before we have a complete understanding of the issue." Instead, say, "We're working on it."
- Always tell the truth. Give a direct answer when asked a direct question, even if the answer is "No," "I don't know" or "I'm sorry, I can't answer that question."
- Be patient. These are reporters, not ag scientists or Extension educators. You may have to begin at the beginning to help them understand an issue related to Food Check-Out Week and agriculture.
- Even if a hostile question is asked, don't lose your temper. Sometimes reporters are intentionally rude to elicit a charged response. It's unlikely this would happen during a Food Check-Out Week interview, but if it does, don't fall into the trap. Respond politely, in control at all times. Don't get into arguments -- your angry comments may be reported without any mention of the provocation. Don't be defensive. Make positive statements instead of denying or refuting comments from others. State your message; let others speak for themselves.
- Don't answer a question with a question, especially when you really know that the reporter is trying to push you toward a subject you don't want to address. The reporter asks, "What do you think about the plight of the nation's hungry people?" Don't say, "What do you mean by the nation's hungry people?" or "What do you think about it?"



Such responses can come across as evasive or hostile. Simply say, “That’s unfortunate (or interesting, depending on the question), but overall...” If you truly don’t understand a question, simply ask the reporter to clarify.

- Even if a loaded question is lobbed your way, never say “No comment” or “I can neither confirm nor deny.” The public views this as: “I know but I won’t say.” Instead, tell the reporter that you are unable or not qualified to comment and, if possible, why. If a reporter asks about statistics or information you know nothing about, tell the reporter you will attempt to have someone closer to that issue return a call. Again, don’t answer questions if you are not the appropriate spokesperson. If a reporter presses, repeat your answer. Don’t waver or go off the record.
- Remember that you are talking through the reporter to the public. How does Food Check-Out Week affect individuals in the community? Say it in terms readers and viewers can relate to.
- Be prepared to repeat yourself. Reporters may repeat their question because your answer was too long, too complex, they didn’t understand you or they’re simply trying to get a more concise response. Welcome the question as another opportunity to state your message, perhaps more clearly.
- Be aware of when you are being taped. In broadcast situations, such as in the studio or when talking to a radio reporter, assume that everything you say is being recorded.

Lifeline Phrases

When you sense that an interview is straying into territory where you prefer not to go, do not hesitate to steer the discussion back to Food Check-Out Week. The following phrases will help you regain control of the interview:

- “To fully answer that, you’d need to talk to an expert on..., but I do know...”
- “I can tell you that, in general ...”
- “That’s too complicated for me to be able to answer/demonstrate properly, but I’d recommend that interested parties contact ... Personally, I know that...”
- “The answer to that may really come down to a consumer’s personal preference. What’s important is that that Farm Bureau understands consumers are hungry for information about stretching their grocery dollars. And we’re helping them do that.”
- “The scenario you are referring to really depends on knowing more about the specific situation...but I can tell you that...”



Tips for TV

If you are able to arrange a TV interview or are invited to appear as a guest in an in-studio TV program to talk about Food Check-Out Week, remember these tips.

Before you go on:

- Dress neatly in clothes you are comfortable in (use makeup, as appropriate) and wear a color that makes you look your best. Dress conservatively -- you want people to pay attention to what you are saying, not what you look like.
- Talk with the interviewer about Food Check-Out Week and about the general questions they wish to cover.
- Review your list of important points.
- Think in terms of quotes that a reporter can use.

While you're on:

- If nervous, take some deep breaths. Think about key points. Remember, you are well prepared.
- Look directly at the interviewer, not the camera. And, maintain eye contact.
- Use anecdotes, when appropriate, to dramatize your points. A good anecdote must be relevant, interesting and help you make a point.
- Use full names instead of acronyms -- say Agriculture Department rather than USDA and explain terms that may be unfamiliar. Never hesitate to politely refute comments that are untrue.

Your Role as Spokesperson

When you are conducting an interview for Food Check-Out Week or other agriculture-related topics, reporters will not distinguish between your personal opinion, Farm Bureau's position and facts about agriculture in general -- neither will the public.

Answer questions appropriately. You are a spokesperson for Farm Bureau and all of agriculture, not for yourself -- unless you are asked a question specific to your own farm or ranch. Don't speculate on issues that might come up during an interview if you do not know the answer. Also, answer one question at a time.

Reporters do have agendas. They want to:



- Develop stories with good audience appeal, which Food Check-Out Week has.
- Get the jump on any competitors covering the same story.
- Secure space or air time that other reporters are competing for.
- Find a new story or uncover a new angle, which Food Check-Out Week offers.

As a spokesperson, you also have an agenda. It is to use the Food Check-Out Week event to:

- Let consumers know that America's farmers and ranchers care about the quality of their food and are interested in providing them with healthy solutions for stretching their food dollars.
- "Tell the farmer's story" and let consumers know that farmers and ranchers care about the health and well-being of their animals, and are committed to ensuring this through proper management and shelter.

Gather Some Background

Background materials are helpful to a reporter, particularly if a topic is complex, or involves complex statistics. Personalize and make copies of the Farm Bureau news release to hand out after your interview. Other material, such as a copy of Farm Bureau's *Food & Farm Facts* publication, could also prove helpful to a reporter. You can also give the reporter a copy of the page with general agricultural facts included in this folder. Always leave the reporter a phone number where you can be reached, as well as the name and number of additional sources, possibly a member of your state Farm Bureau staff.



Event Planning Tips

Commemorating Food Check-Out Week through a special event will help deliver agriculture's message. It will help generate positive publicity about agriculture while providing information to consumers about stretching their food dollars. While this document contains a few specific ideas on how to commemorate Food Check-Out Week, what you ultimately decide to do in your state or county is entirely up to you. Following, however, are a few pointers for conducting special events that should prove helpful, no matter what form your effort takes. First, it is important for you to choose and plan your event. Ask yourself several questions:

- What is the purpose? Who are your target publics? Are you familiar and comfortable with the message?
- Do you have the time and resources to implement an effective event?
- Have you secured input and/or support from members of your state Farm Bureau staff?

Following are some specific event planning details you should address--

- Develop a plan and put it in writing.
- Assemble a team to carry out your plan. This should include volunteer Farm Bureau members, but could also include staff involvement.
- Assemble a basic media kit that includes: background on Farm Bureau; a localized Food Check-Out Week news release; information on local agriculture; and other supportive material.
- Consider a booth with handouts, posters and perhaps a giveaway item. In the past, one state Farm Bureau printed bookmarks commemorating Food Check-Out Week. This material does not have to be specific to Food Check-Out Week, but should focus on points that promote a positive image of agriculture.
- Determine a schedule for your event and invite the news media.
- Choose a location/facility for the event and contact the person in charge. If the event involves a local grocery store or a local Ronald McDonald House, contact the manager.
- Make sure your event is staffed with an adequate number of workers.
- Follow up with thank you notes to everyone who helped make your event a success.



A grocery store visit is just one of many events your group may want to undertake as a way to communicate the affordability of food to the American public. While we encourage you to work in cooperation with your state Farm Bureau information/public relations staff, following are some points to consider when planning a grocery store visit to promote Food Check-Out Week:

- Contact the grocery store manager to request approval and/or cooperation for an informational event. Make sure the manager knows that you are planning to invite the media.
- Posters and stickers commemorating the day may be ordered from AFBF. These items may be used during your in-store event. As shoppers come by, use a sticker to break the ice. Stickers can be placed on the bags of shoppers who stop to find out more about the campaign. Don't be overly aggressive, but this should provide you with an opportunity to deliver your message.
- Consider setting up an in-store display about agriculture or depicting the variety of food products produced in your state. A supermarket information kit available for order includes instructions for 5 stations (produce, grains, dairy, meat & poultry and alternative proteins), talking points and signage.
- Consider sponsoring an in-store food giveaway that includes agricultural products produced in your state and county.
- When contacting volunteers to assist with the in-store effort, make sure you have a shift change every three hours to prevent fatigue or boredom. Groups consisting of two or three people work well and make the event fun for everyone.
- Invite members of the media to help celebrate. With the manager's permission, invite them to the store, but make sure you have reviewed the talking points included in this packet.

Other Promotional Ideas

Your commemoration of Food Check-Out Week can be as detailed as you like. In addition to conducting an in-store event or making a food donation, here are a few other ideas for promoting Food Check-Out Week:

- Write a guest editorial for your local newspaper focusing on Food Check-Out Week. Review this event planning kit and use the media points described in it.
- Although Food Check-Out Week is Feb. 19 - 25, 2012, consumers are interested in stretching their grocery dollars with healthy, nutritious food every day. Remind others of this when promoting Food Check-Out Week.



- This would be a good opportunity to request public speaking engagements with local civic groups, such as Rotary, the Lions Club, the local Chamber of Commerce, etc. To make it hit home, consider a little giveaway during the meeting that marks Food Check-Out Week. Easy-to-use PowerPoint presentations (Food & Farm Facts, Addressing Misconceptions About Agriculture) are available from AFBF, as well as Food & Farm Facts Pocket Guides.
- Work with your mayor or other elected officials, to secure an official proclamation for Food Check-Out Week at the local level.
- Food Check-Out Week also presents a good opportunity for visits to local classrooms. Contact the school principal or classroom teacher ahead of time to find out what is required to make a visit and have fun! You might even want to hand out some Ag in the Classroom material. “The Farmer Grows A Rainbow” is an excellent educational kit for presentation during Food Check-Out Week.
- Contact a local food-processing facility about hosting a tour for local officials or school students. This would drive home the message that local farmers team up with processors to make food affordable overall, despite some recent retail increases.



The Story of Ronald McDonald House®

When an unlikely partnership was formed in Philadelphia in 1974 between an NFL team, a children's hospital and a restaurant chain, none of its members could have imagined that their dream of a "home-away-from-home" for families of seriously ill children would grow to become an international phenomenon. They simply wanted to create a place where parents of sick children could be with others who understood their situations and could provide emotional support. The seeds of the partnership were planted when Kim Hill, the 3-year-old daughter of Philadelphia Eagles tight end Fred Hill, was diagnosed with leukemia. Hill and his wife camped out on hospital chairs and benches, ate food from vending machines and did all they could to keep Kim from seeing their sadness, exhaustion and frustration.

All around them, the Hills saw other parents doing exactly the same thing. They learned that many of the families had traveled great distances to bring their children to the medical facility; but the high cost of hotel rooms was prohibitive. They continued to think, "there has to be a happy medium." Hill rallied the support of his teammates to raise funds to help other families experiencing the same emotional and financial traumas as his own. Through the Philadelphia Eagles' general manager, Jim Murray, the team offered its support to Dr. Audrey Evans, head of the pediatric oncology unit at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. It was Dr. Evans' dream for a house that could serve as temporary residence for families of children being treated at her hospital that led to the first Ronald McDonald House.

By 1979, 10 more Ronald McDonald Houses had opened. In the next five years, local communities founded 60 more Houses; 53 more opened in the next five years. Across the country and throughout the world, people viewed Ronald McDonald House as a way for a community to band together for their neighbors in need of comfort and security during a particularly difficult time.

Currently, there are 293 Ronald McDonald Houses in 30 countries including: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Hong Kong, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. All told, more than 6,000 bedrooms are available for families every night.

The Houses are supported by nearly 30,000 volunteers who annually donate more than three million hours of their time. Ronald McDonald House is the cornerstone program of Ronald McDonald House Charities, a non-profit, 501(c)(3), that creates, finds and supports programs that directly improve the health and well being of children. To date, RMHC's and its global network of local Chapters have awarded \$400 million in grants to children's programs worldwide. For more information, visit <http://www.rmhc.org>.



Ronald McDonald House Charities

Once again this year, we are working cooperatively with Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC), and its cornerstone program Ronald McDonald House (RMH). Last year's food donations to RMHC helped make the day and event far more visible. Once again, we are pleased to extend the opportunity for you to work with RMHC in your state on similar events. How you ultimately commemorate the event remains entirely up to you, but the relationship with RMHC provides another angle for additional media coverage.

Before contacting the RMHC official in your area, please review background material in this packet regarding RMHC and how to effectively work with them. You may also want to:

- Work with your local Ronald McDonald House Charities executive director and/or Ronald McDonald House manager to arrange to have Ronald McDonald be part of your publicity event.
- Work with your local Ronald McDonald House Charities executive director and/or Ronald McDonald House manager on other ways to promote Food Check-Out Week with local McDonald's franchisees.

Ronald McDonald House Contacts

At this Web site below you can search for the Ronald McDonald House in your state. You should contact the appropriate House manager in your state to seek his or her cooperation for a Food Check-Out Week event or food donation. <http://www.rmhc.org/who-we-are/chapter-search/>

The Ronald McDonald House Charities – Farm Bureau Connection

The first official national commemoration of Food Check-Out Day took place in 1998 in Chicago, Ill., at the Ronald McDonald House there. The effort continued with comprehensive campaigns for 1999-2011. Events were held, respectively, at RMHC Houses in Phoenix, Ariz.; Nashville, Tenn.; Philadelphia, Pa.; Las Vegas, Nev.; New Orleans, La.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Los Angeles, Calif.; Washington, D.C.; Baltimore, Md.; Columbia, S.C.; Phoenix, Ariz./Louisville, Ky., Wichita, Kan, and Jackson, Miss.

The idea for Food Check-Out Day surfaced through the Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee. At the national level, AFBF typically employs the speaking talents of AFB Women's Leadership Committee Chair Terry Gilbert as national spokesperson for the event. At the state level, however, the project is carried out by selected committees, such as Farm Bureau Women, Young Farmer & Rancher or Promotion and Education; a combination of those committees or by the entire organization.



Your RMHC Checklist

If your Food Check-Out Week celebration includes a food donation to a Ronald McDonald House in your area, here is a handy checklist to follow:

- Contact the Ronald McDonald House executive director/manager in your area to express your interest.
- Ask the Ronald McDonald House executive director/manager for a wish list of food items he/she would like to have donated to the pantry.
- Ask for the House's assistance in promoting Food Check-Out Week at any local McDonald's franchise. This could include the store's use of special promotional material.
- In advance, notify the manager of the grocery store where you will do your shopping for food items. Tell the store manager about Food Check-Out Week, your plans to purchase food items from the store for your donation, and see if the store is interested in assisting in some manner. Ask the store manager if it would be possible to borrow a shopping cart or two to help deliver the donated goods.
- Secure enough help from Farm Bureau volunteers for shopping, delivery, etc.
- Make sure you have ample vehicle space to transport the food from the store to the Ronald McDonald House.
- The news media should be invited (at a specified time) to cover the donation that takes place at the Ronald McDonald House. Hand out news releases about the donation and Food Check-Out Week.
- Identify key spokespersons for media interviews. These people should thoroughly review the talking points and other media-related material in this packet.
- Make signs for the shopping carts, or other means of delivery, that clearly indicate for the camera that the food is being donated by Farm Bureau, or is made possible by the farmer's productivity.