



# Amplify Our Voices: Telling Your Story



## Share your story

Sharing our personal stories is the key to any interview, and women farmers are in a strong position to speak from the heart with authenticity and confidence. But it takes a dash of thoughtful preparation and strategy. Read on for ideas on identifying your storytelling moxie and why this is important to growing our organic movement.



**Denise O'Brien**

Founder  
Women, Food and Agriculture Network  
Farmer  
Rolling Acres Farm (Atlantic, IA)

### Pro Tips:

SHARE



**Mary Peabody**

UVM Extension Professor (Burlington, Vermont)

## 3 reasons we need to tell our stories!

1. As women farmers and ranchers, we have the opportunity to be role models for others just getting started or thinking about making the leap into agriculture. By sharing our stories we illustrate how diverse farm businesses can be and how many different paths there are to success. There is no one right way to start/grow a farm. Sharing our stories helps others understand how they might carve out a niche for themselves.
2. Few people understand farming and food systems. Telling our story helps educate our consumers and the general public. Plus, in a world where women are making a majority of the household purchase decisions having another woman tell the story of their farm is a powerful marketing tool.
3. The more we tell our story, the more we reinforce our expertise. Women can be too quick to minimize efforts—through storytelling we become a more authentic voice in our own minds which in turn helps us grow in confidence.

Be concise but tell your story. For example, because I have been doing organic ag for such a long time, it used to be that you couldn't say the "O" word out loud. I say this, and it always gets a laugh.



**Di Lohr**

Founder & Owner  
Adunate

Each of us has a uniqueness that makes up our story. Often what we think are ordinary attributes are actually good for marketing ourselves in an authentic way. For example, perhaps you are a good listener. Listening is a huge factor in building a relationship with media and learning their needs. Examine yourself and then figure out how to harness your attributes to work for you.

**Liz Johnson**

Co-Founder and Board Member  
Vote Run Lead

As a young woman, I had a slew of wonderful teachers along the way who encouraged me to speak up and use my voice. Teachers, coaches, coworkers, elders and others were full of advisements. I was softspoken and it was a challenge to change that. I recall feeling my face turn red when I would speak up and speak out. Still happens but now I know not to worry. Not necessarily.

Marie Wilson, founder of Take Our Daughters to Work and the White House Project, helped me to realize the true value being seen and heard in public. She would say “Visibility is viability!” and encourage us to take every opportunity to be heard in public forums. Marie was also a master storyteller. She taught us that the skills we honed “leading from the foot of the table”—relationship building and storytelling—were exactly what was needed to solve the complex issues facing our communities.

**Audrey Arner**

Farmer  
Moonstone Farm (Montevideo, MN)

Even though we have been involved in direct marketing and agri-tourism for about 30 years there are still people within our own community for whom this organic movement is news. We have told our story over and over again continually embellishing it with our own expanded knowledge and consciousness for students, bankers, chefs, teachers and others to elevate the understanding and support for organic agriculture. Stories help to sell our distinctive products as well as building broad based societal engagement to help flip the food system.

In my experience the media are our friends. Tell stories with broad scale truisms about the ecosystem coupled with details related to your own farm-based experience. Know what the three most important things you want to convey will be. If you don't have much experience practice talking with a friend or family member about these points or about a detailed story or what the values are that drive your decision making.

**Pro Tips:****Nancy Matsumoto**

Freelance Writer and Editor

**Make an outline of the basic points you want to get across, which might include:**

- Your origin story: Generational farmer or new? What brought you to the farm?
- Why here on this land in this place, growing these crops/herds/flocks?
- Notable successes
- Goal(s) you are working toward
- Challenges you have overcome, the learning curve: give your story a dramatic arc
- Your community, your network, your support system
- What drives you? What values guide you? Speak from the heart, it's the best way of engaging editors, writers, readers

**Sylvia Burgos Toftness**

Farmer  
Bull Brook Keep (Amery, WI)

I worked in the communications field for over forty years before becoming a farmer, and I truly believe we women farmers need to be aware that we all already have a great story inside us, one that we can deliver with humility and passion. Pull out a piece of paper and write down your reflections on the first steps you took to start your farm, first successes and mistakes, what you hope to do, what would you change. You have great stories to share with the media.

**Mariann Holm**

Farmer & Organic Inspector  
Holm Girls Dairy (Elk Mound, WI)

When talking on the phone to a reporter, it's important to verbally give a sense of place to where you are, share and describe what you see and add the visuals. I describe things from where I'm sitting in my house, how I see the Jersey cows and the pasture. This builds rapport and also establishes me as a voice from the heartland of the country.

The highest level of connection is experiential. A few weeks ago, a reporter from *The New Yorker* contacted me. He asked to meet to do an interview—and I invited him to my kitchen table. I knew that by him driving past the cattle on pasture, walking into a barn built the year the Titanic sank and sitting in a well-worn farm kitchen would speak louder than most words I could share.

**Pro Tips:****SHARE****Wendy Allen,**

Writer and Editor  
*Edible Madison* magazine

**Celebrate your knowledge**

Own your expertise! Even if you're not the "primary farmer," you know a lot! Don't be afraid to speak, and do it with confidence. Even if you're just beginning, your experiences are valid and worth sharing because they could be exactly what someone else needs to hear.

Also, as cliché as it sounds: Be real. You don't have to make yourself fit the image of the down-home, uncomplaining farmer. If you're having a terrible season, it's ok to talk about it. Although farming is a foundation of American culture, so many people still have no idea what it takes to put food on their plates. Speak up. Don't say the ag world is fine if it's not. Let reporters be your mouthpiece.



### Alicia Razvi

Farmer  
Wooly Thyme Micro Farm (Stevens Point, WI)

It's important that we as female farmers share what makes us unique and that our movement represents an increasingly diverse group of women. I have the honor of serving as the first Muslim person to serve as a president of a Farmers Union chapter, a privilege I take very seriously. I've learned to share my passion for sustainable and organic agriculture with my personal stories, such as how caring for the land helped my whole family heal when my husband had leukemia. I was shaking the first couple of times I spoke publicly about my story but found bravery comes through practice and it gets easier!



### Kirsten Jurcek

Farmer  
Brattset Family Farm  
(Jefferson, WI)

We can connect the dots when talking to the media about how we female farmers champion conservation by sharing analogies of how our land stewardship practices often illustrate things we women naturally do. For example, I'm a big cover crop advocate and talk about how they are such a natural way to nurture the land. Just like I would feed my kids carrots that fuel their bodies to grow up healthy, cover crops add nutrients to my soil fertility for the long term.



**WOMEN**  
in  
**agriculture**

renewingthecountryside.org