

# PRODUCTIVE PUBLICITY

Media Relations for  
Agriculture and Natural Resources academics

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**W**ading thigh-deep through healthy cotton, tasting a juicy plum right in the orchard, inspecting pest-free tomatoes. These are among the joys of farming. But it takes experience, hard work and patience to reap these rewards.

So it is with media relations. With the right information, nurturing and practice, ANR advisors and specialists can expect that their efforts to work with reporters will yield a bountiful harvest of valuable media exposure.

Your program and the university benefit from that exposure. The news media extends ANR research results and recommendations to a large audience and the publicity informs taxpayers and decision-makers about accomplishments they make possible by investing in UC Cooperative Extension and the Agricultural Experiment Station.

Working with the news media, like farming, gets easier with practice. The information in this brochure will help you prepare, making your encounters with reporters positive and productive.

## CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIPS

- Allow time in your schedule to work with the news media.
- Respond to phone messages as soon as you can. Many reporters, especially those with daily deadlines, need sources quickly. Tomorrow is almost always too late.
- Help reporters find written background information, including research reports, newsletters and journal articles, World Wide Web sites, and other story sources.

## WHEN A REPORTER CALLS

- Ask a few questions before the interview begins.  
*What is the reporter's name and affiliation?*  
*What is the story about?*  
*Who is the audience?*
- If you are not the best source, direct the reporter to another academic or to a public information representative.
- Find out the reporter's deadline.
- Tell the reporter you will call back.  
Use the time to form your key messages.

## PREPARATION

- Prepare three key messages in simple language, no jargon. Condense each key message into two or three sentences.
- Anticipate tough questions and rehearse your answers.
- Compile background information about the subject for the reporter. Include your name, title, organization, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address.
- For in-person interviews, gather visuals. Meet the reporter at a research site or in a laboratory. Set up demonstrations, prepare examples or analogies. Offer simple, clear graphics and photos.

## TIPS FOR TV

- Be professional and polite at all times, even when the camera's not rolling
- Look at the reporter, not the camera.
- If standing, stand tall with arms relaxed at your sides.
- Avoid distracting gestures.
- Answer in short, targeted statements.
- Try to avoid wearing solid white or patterned shirts.
- Avoid wearing large shiny jewelry.
- Use powder or tissue to blot facial oil, if necessary.

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

- State your key messages early and often. You never know when the interview will end.
- Answer the reporter's questions and add the specific points you want to make.
- Be honest. If you don't know an answer, say so.
- Never say "no comment." It raises suspicion and sets up barriers. Instead, explain why you prefer not to answer the question.
- Be aware of questions that may evoke conflict in a story. Tell your story with positive words and don't repeat a negative statement in a reporter's question.
- For radio and TV interviews, be precise and to the point. The sound bites reporters use are only a few seconds long.
- Close the interview by restating your main messages.
- Invite the reporter to call back for more information or to clarify points.

## IMAGE CHECKLIST

1. Sit or stand in a comfortable, yet professional, manner.
2. Project with your voice and gestures.
3. Maintain eye contact with the reporter.
4. Be brief.
5. Use simple language (avoid jargon).
6. Speak in short sentences.
7. Use positive terms.
8. Don't fan controversy.