




# **Crisis Communications:** **Proactive planning and communication** **strategies to stay ahead of the crisis**

**Kimmi Devaney**

KDev Communications, LLC



# Leading the Narrative

- 
1. Developing an action plan
  2. Handling media interviews
  3. Staying centered amidst the chaos





# CRISIS VS. ISSUE

**Issue:** An issue is a topic of debate or controversy that, if not appropriately addressed, has the potential to chip away at the farmers market's and/or agriculture's reputation and erode consumption over the long term. Issues are situations that are responded to on a regular basis. Examples include:

- Animal welfare
- Nutrition questions / concerns
- Raw milk

**Crisis:** A crisis is an incident or situation that has an immediate and widespread impact on consumer confidence in – and consumption of – products sold at the market or the wellbeing of stakeholders.

Crises could include:

- Multi-state outbreaks of food-borne illnesses
- Terrorist/activist attacks impacting the food supply or local farms
- Outbreaks of animal diseases, such as foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), TB, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)



# **ACTION PLAN**

## **CRISIS TEAM**

- Who is leading your crisis team?
- Who is your primary spokesperson? Back ups?
- Who will be monitoring media & social media coverage?
- Who will keep stakeholders informed of updates and their role?
- Who can 'project manage' the crisis to keep everyone on track?
- Who else may you need to call on for assistance if the situation is larger than anticipated?

Example of a farmers market crisis team

- Market Manager
- Board members
- Other key stakeholders





# **ACTION PLAN**

## **INDUSTRY CONTACT LIST**

- Market Manager
- Board members
- Vendors
- Neighboring markets
- Key contacts in town
- WSFMA
- Relevant state agencies (Health Department, WSDA, etc.)

### **Information needed:**

- Names
- Personal cell numbers
- Email addresses (Be careful of what is put in print, including texts)

***Build these relationships before you need them***



# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 1: CONDUCT A SITUATION ASSESSMENT**

- What happened? What is known at the present time?
- Where did this happen?
- When did this occur or when was it made public? How long has this been going on?
- Who is aware of the situation and what do they know?
- What authorities have been notified or are involved?
- Has a specific product, company, co-op or farm been identified?
- Is public health at risk?
- Has the safety of products sold at the farmers market been called into question? If so, by whom? If not, is there a possibility it might be called into question?
- Has there been any mention of the situation on social media?

*Note: Do your research online. Search by relevant keyword terms on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. If information is found, note who is saying it and how are the terms trending (i.e. keyword mentions, number of people, is the term spreading: more people saying something now vs. the past few hours)*





# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 2: MEDIA AWARENESS ASSESSMENT**

- Is the media aware of the situation?
- Are there any media onsite?
- Are they reporting on it?
  
- Who is sharing this initial information?
- Are they the main contact for additional information or someone else?
- How do we reach them?



# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 3: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Alert the crisis team**

- Hold conference call with crisis team: notify that crisis response plan is being activated
- Determine the availability of team members and back ups
- Review crisis roles and responsibilities

### **Ongoing Situation Analysis**

- Identify key known facts and summarize action steps made and share with team
- Participate in internal briefings and report on key developments with your primary audiences/contacts
- Establish daily calls to gather updates from key stakeholders





# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 3: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Stakeholder engagement**

- Alert board members (in most appropriate manner – email, conference call, etc.)
- Send a ‘heads up’ to industry partners so they are not caught off guard
- Assess the needs of our primary audiences/contacts and email the crisis team a short summary of immediate needs, questions and recommendations
- As appropriate, initiate touch-base calls with our contacts (WSFMA, state agencies, commodity groups, neighboring markets, other local stakeholders)
- As new information becomes available, circulate it to your primary audiences/contacts in the appropriate format and vehicles. Immediately notify the crisis team of any information or questions that may be relevant to the organization’s crisis response.



# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 3: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Receptionist: Handling Inquiries**

- If you receive an inquiry from local or national print media, broadcast media or industry trade media, notify the crisis lead immediately.
- Examples of national print and online media include *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times* and WebMD. Examples of national broadcast media include National Public Radio, "Good Morning America," and CNN.
- Please report any inquiries from **local or national media** using the media call log. If you need assistance or want to connect the reporter with an industry spokesperson, contact the crisis lead. Refer all calls to the crisis or program leaders based on the type of call / inquiry.
- All statements to the press will be conducted by selected spokespeople.





# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 4: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Media Call Log**

Information to be collected includes:

- Date and time of initial contact
- Contact name
- Media outlet name
- Contact info number
- Caller's e-mail address (if appropriate)
- Subject / Details of media inquiry (i.e. need a quote? Interview?)
- Reporter's deadline



# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 4: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Messaging**

- Standby statement (sooner is better: action binds anxiety)
- Key messages
- Develop plan for distributing updates
- Distribute alert/statement/Q&A as needed
- Update website with information
- Refresh messaging with up-to-date information for farmers/stakeholders interviewed based on questions being asked
- Change outgoing voicemail as appropriate

### **Social Media**

- Disable scheduled social media posts (not appropriate at this time)
- Develop social media strategy: proactive or response only?
- Draft and distribute social media messaging where appropriate, respond where appropriate





# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 4: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Media Coverage**

- Anticipate local news coverage
- Ongoing media and social monitoring
- Ongoing log of media calls – summarize key interviews and inquiries and share with team
- Gather information on farmers/others contacted by the media



# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 4: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Statement Guidelines**

If you must make a statement to the media, constituents or others prior to the initial conference call, please keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Refer only to known, previously released facts about the situation as provided by an authoritative body.
- Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation and express empathy and compassion for those the situation has affected.
- State confidence in the safety of the products and the industry's ability to handle the situation and protect consumers, as appropriate.
- Direct requests for additional information to the government entity leading the investigation (USDA, FDA, Homeland Security).





# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 4: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Do:**

- Be professional, calm and empathetic
- Use comments such as “I will connect you” and “Someone will get back to you as soon as possible”
- Be very careful what you say on the phone. NOTHING is off the record.

### **Don't:**

- Don't provide more information than necessary.
- Don't speculate as to the outcome of the situation
- Don't use statements such as “We are swamped with calls.” OR “The phone is ringing off the hook!”

These comments have a negative connotation and can be quoted in the news



# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 4: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Media Interviews**

- Only assigned spokespeople will conduct interviews with the media.
- Prepare designated spokespeople for interviews.
- Develop specific messaging related to the crisis at hand – share with all relevant parties to ensure consistent messaging.
- Depending on the nature of the crisis, it may be necessary for federal and local government agencies will serve as primary crisis spokespeople regarding emergency response operations. In these instances, follow government lead on all communications and only report on what they already have. Refer media inquiries to the respective agency.





# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 4: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Media Interviews – What to do when the media calls**

- Gather information: name, contact information, media outlet, deadline, topics they'd like to discuss
- You do NOT have to do the interview immediately. Be respectful of their deadline and offer to call them back at a specific time (and follow through).
- Work with the crisis lead and/or primary spokesperson to review messaging based on topics. Anticipate additional topics and questions.
- For phone interviews, you can have notes in front of you to stay focused on your messages.
- Practice.
- Call the reporter back on time. Be aware of long pauses, off-the-wall questions and other conversational tactics to get you to say something you shouldn't.
- Admit if you don't know the answer. If there is someone else that is a better fit for that question, offer to connect them (ensure that this person is ready for an interview prior to volunteering them).



# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 4: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Social Media**

Word of mouth and social search are two reasons to use social media during a crisis. Consistency of information is absolutely paramount on social channels during a crisis. **One person should lead the social media work.** The media team leader should be sitting next to the person in charge of the social channels, advising on what information to include, and even on how the content can be reworked to fit into a more personal, approachable tone online.

A team of people (preferably in the same room) could monitor a large amount of content and conversations online. The team needs to know the history of what's been discussed earlier that morning or the day before, so you're not repeating yourself or talking to people that were engaging yesterday, as if you've never spoken to them before. If comments get personal or too heated suggest they contact you personally by sending you their e-mail or phone number for more in-depth discussion.





# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 4: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Social media best practices during a crisis**

- Identify and prioritize key social media platforms
- Outline platform objectives (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube)
- Blogs should be updated with the current information
- Provide regular updates on Facebook, direct people to website
- Consider videos with key spokespeople providing information
- Ensure consistency of information shared on social channels
- Remember time is of the essence
- Use empathy



# **ACTION PLAN**

## **STEP 5: DEVELOP CONTINGENCY PLANS**

- What are your worst fears of what could happen regarding your farmers market?
- What is likely to happen?
- Are there anti-agriculture groups, protesters, petitioners or other detractors that could cause problems during a market?
- What situations occurred at other farmers markets?





# STAYING CENTERED AMIDST THE CHAOS

Are there enough crisis team members so no one is on call 24/7?

Prioritize self care and the care of those on the crisis team

- Time to sleep
- Time to regroup
- Regular exercise
- Healthy food
- Activities to stay calm
- 5-4-3-2-1



**Kimmi Devaney**  
**KDev Communications, LLC**  
**[kimmi@kdevcommunications.com](mailto:kimmi@kdevcommunications.com)**