

Farm Foody

A Social Network Connecting Independent Farms to People

In addition to helping my son Matthew run Hollin Farms, I've been working with my friend Steve Knoblock to start a social networking service (farmfoody.org), which uses the Internet to connect local farmers like you to their customers.

A social network is a group of people who become connected to each other through their activities and interests within an online community.

We believe a social network increases the economic leverage for the independent farm. A catalog of farms or an individual farm homepage does not change the economic leverage of a farm. A social network gives the small farm leverage in a big agriculture economy in two principle ways: by helping farmers manage their relationships with customers more efficiently and generating a more effective marketing presence through the social networking experience.

The independent farmer must create a close relationship with the customer, similar to the relationship an artisan baker or butcher has with their customers. This involves effort, which our website seeks to reduce to a manageable level and leverage for marketing effect. We hope by providing a means to relate directly with consumers as a “personal farmer” your farm can compete in a small farm economy becoming dominated by high end, specialty products.

We like to think of the social network as restoring the balance that once existed in small town America between the farmer and the customer.

A social network provides benefits to both farmer and consumer. When people are members of a social network, they automatically generate a marketing presence for you through normal activities they find beneficial. This presence is much *larger* than any standalone website, catalog or advertisement could provide, since it includes all of the people who are friends of your farm and their friends, and so on. These indirect effects are difficult to enumerate, just as the fertility of the soil is hard to explain, but the effects are there for all to see. We all recognize fertile soil when we see it by the vibrancy of the plants growing in it. The social network is like the soil a plant grows in.

People are encouraged by the social network to discover new farms by exploring the relationships between network

members.

When people visit a social networking site, they will ordinarily explore the site through following relationships with “friends.” In a social network, anyone can be a friend of another member. In this manner, they often find other members to become friends with who they might never have found through searching. This process is similar to “word of mouth” in the real world, where people ask their friends where they bought their produce. This phenomena drives new customers to your farm without the farmer being required to do anything.

Think of how musical groups create elaborate websites to market their music, yet nearly all successful music groups today maintain a presence on a social networking website. They receive much more activity and feedback, much greater awareness among young people who buy their music, through the social network than the traditional website.

Unlike a catalog of farms, even with a locality search, the social network draws people in and keeps them there with an activity, it gives them a stake in the farm and in their own presence on the site, which benefits them and the farms they affiliate with. Your “profile” (presence) on the site becomes a place for customers to return to for the latest information on your farm. A customer's profile becomes a way to share their own interests (along with your farm) with others. When you post a bulletin (like a classified ad), it automatically flows out to friends of your farm. Non-farm members can even use the network to promote themselves.

Think of a chef joining the site, becoming a friend of several farms they purchase produce from promoting his own abilities through his network of friends and bulletins, leading new customers to your farm.

The social network involves people with the life of the farm. Interest in agriculture has never been greater. The farm is an exotic location for agricultural tourism. Organic food is an established product. Eating local has never been more attractive to the consumer. With books like Omnivore's Dilemma, and the recent anxiety and uncertainty about imported foods, people are more likely than ever to wonder where their food comes from. Farm Foody leverages this social change for you.

A site designed by farmers for farmers.

Our experience at Hollin Farms helped us to design an online service mindful of the needs of farmers. We understand the farmer does not have time to sit at the computer

figuring out how to update their information. Our goal was to make using our site as simple and immediate as possible in order to reduce the time and effort you spend answering customer's questions, keeping your customers up to date on availability of produce, and the like. We believe the Internet can play a vital role in helping the independent farmer survive and prosper in the 21st century.

farmfoody.org

A website by Tom Davenport, Hollin Farms (hollinfarms.com) and Steve Knoblock (brandymorecastle.org)