



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

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I. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

Social media is one of the most direct and important ways the South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA) communicates with the public. Online social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn are valuable tools with high visibility—and similarly high risks.

II. GUIDELINES FOR SCDA PROGRAMS

- A. In general, SCDA urges staff to work with the Communications Department to create content for SCDA's existing accounts rather than creating new accounts for particular programs. Because brand consistency and message strategy are important, SCDA programs wishing to use a social media channel must receive prior approval from the Public Information Director. This includes any channel that will be managed by a SCDA employee as part of their official duties, including programs that are not part of our agency, but for which SCDA provides staff support.
- B. Offices should submit to the Public Information Director material about the service to be used, the intended audience, the type of content to be posted, and which employees will have the ability to manage the site. Site management rights should be limited and closely monitored by senior management.
- C. SCDA social media accounts should make every effort to clearly identify their official status. Handles and screen names should incorporate the appropriate name or acronym whenever possible and should use the appropriate official logo if possible.
- D. Some social media sites allow user comments. Carefully consider whether to allow comments before launch-

ing a social media initiative. However, if comments are allowed, user feedback should remain regardless of whether it is favorable or unfavorable to the organization. A comment or posting will be deleted in its entirety if it contains:

1. Hate speech or hateful content.
2. Violent or graphic content.
3. Profanity, obscenity, or vulgarity.
4. Nudity, including nudity in profile pictures, or sexual content.
5. Defamatory statements.
6. Threats, name-calling, or personal attacks of any kind to any person, including SCDA employees.
7. Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination.
8. Solicitations of commerce that promote commercial services or products (non-commercial links that are relevant to the particular posting being commented upon are acceptable).
9. Comments that may infringe on copyrights, trademarks, patents, or other forms of intellectual property.
10. Content that is not topically related to the particular posting being commented upon or spam comments, such as the same comment posted repeatedly on a profile, or links to non topically related websites.
11. Comments in support of, or opposition to, political campaigns, candidates or ballot measure.

- 12. Information that may compromise the safety, security, or proceedings of public systems or any criminal or civil investigations.
 - 13. Harmful or dangerous content.
 - 14. Personally identifiable/sensitive personal information or impersonations.
 - 15. Content that violates federal or state law, or any SCDA policy.
- E. Do not post or link to any content that falls within the categories listed in Section D, above.
 - F. Be mindful of functions that allow the organization to “like” or follow an individual or cause. Consider whether such an action would imply support for a political cause.

III. GUIDELINES FOR SCDA EMPLOYEES

SCDA employees should be sensitive to the fact that social networks and other online forums blur the distinction between an individual’s official and personal identities.

- A. If you publish content to any website outside of the SCDA’s official online presence and it has something to do with subjects associated with our agency, consider a disclaimer such as this: “The postings are my own and do not necessarily represent the opinion of the SC Department of Agriculture.”
- B. Never use or reference your formal position when writing in a non-official capacity. Do not use your official email to establish a private social media presence.
- C. Those with leadership responsibilities, by virtue of their position, must consider whether the personal thoughts they publish, even in clearly personal venues, may be misunderstood as expressing the position of SCDA. They should assume that those outside our agency will read what is written. Be aware of your SCDA association in online social networks. If you identify yourself

as a SCDA employee or have a prominent position in which your association with SCDA is known to the general public, ensure your profile and related content (even if it is of a personal and not an official nature) is consistent with how you wish to present yourself as a professional, appropriate with the public trust associated with your position.

- D. When writing in your official capacity, do not write anything that could appear to be legal advice. Legal issues should only be handled through SCDA’s Office of General Counsel to avoid conflicts and other ethical problems.
- E. Emails and other correspondence conducted over personal social media channels that is official business of the agency should be preserved and retained in a manner similar to other official documents. If you receive an unsolicited official contact through your personal email or social media presence, forward a copy of the correspondence to your official email account and respond from that platform.
- F. Remain focused on customers, existing commitments, and achieving SCDA’s mission. Your use of social media tools should never interfere with your primary duties, with the exception of where it is a primary duty to use these tools to do your job.
- G. Always pause before posting. Do not publish information in haste or without thinking carefully about the impact of the statement you are about to make.
- H. If you are responding on a non-SCDA site concerning an official agency matter, be sure to identify yourself and your position with the agency. Comment only about matters that you are qualified to address. Do not respond without consulting first with your supervisor or the Public Information Director.
- I. To others online, there is no clear distinction between your work life and your personal life. Always be honest and respectful in both capacities.