



## Farmers focus on social media

By MARCO SANTANA, The Des Moines Register

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DES MOINES, Iowa—Deb Brown bristles when she hears people suggest that farmers and other rural residents lag when it comes to social media.

She said the social aspect of farm life, where neighbors and farmers gather at local establishments to share news, long served as its own kind of "social media."

"It's so inaccurate, it's not even funny," she said. "Rural has been doing social media long before big towns were."

Brown has organized Aglowa, a conference based on the national 140 Character Conference series that showcases social media use in several industries. It comes to Ames on Friday, and Brown said she hopes to highlight the intersection of agriculture, social media and technology.

Social media such as Twitter and Facebook have become indispensable in the lives of farmers and rural Iowans, Brown said.

"We want to show the rest of the people who don't live in an agricultural environment how important social media is to agriculture," she said.

Yet some farmers continue to resist, sticking with traditional ways of getting information.

Larry Sailer, a 60-year-old farmer in Iowa Falls who serves on the Franklin County Farm Bureau, said he often meets resistance when he tries to sell fellow

farmers on the benefits of social-media use.

Sailer, one of 15 speakers at Aglowa, said he uses Twitter and Facebook to educate politicians, bloggers, dietitians and consumers about his profession. But he also connects with farmers who run different types of farms across the world.

Not surprisingly, Sailer said, the younger farmers are, the more likely they will take to Twitter or Facebook.

"Older guys, they can't see the value," he said. "There is a generational gap, where some of these guys have not even started using computers. To have a smartphone would be unheard of."

Sailer continues to press farmers because, he said, social media can be used as another farming implement to maximize output and, by extension, profits.

"It's a tool we have discovered in agriculture," he said. "It might have started out as just a social-type tool for college kids, but it has turned into a valuable tool for farmers. As more people in my profession learn that, the more it will catch on."

Danny Johnston, AP

Corn being harvested on a farm near Coy, Ark.

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