

Social Media Strategy Analysis: Comparison of Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation and The Pioneer Woman Social Media Presences

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OVERVIEW

In today's world, online marketing *is* marketing, and having a robust social media presence is critical to building a successful brand identity. In this paper, I will discuss the similarities and differences between two brands, each with different business objectives, yet with some overlap in audience demographics.

Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation (ARFB) is, for all intents and purposes, the lobbying arm of the Division of Agriculture. As the Digital Media Program Director for the Cooperative Extension Service, I am familiar with the underlying goals and audiences ARFB targets. I am also keenly interested in how they reach their audience and promote their brand, as their objectives align closely with Extension's. Primary objectives include:

- Increasing memberships (in Extension's case, it would be increasing client reach)
- Supporting/spreading the word about their mission
- Voicing concerns for farmers in government
- Educating the public about farming in Arkansas
- Advertising/selling Farm Bureau Insurance (separate company, similar audience)



The Pioneer Woman - Ree Drummond
@thepioneerwoman

In comparison, popular blogger and food expert **The Pioneer Woman (Ree Drummond)** has a much wider target audience. She targets (primarily) women all over the world with her down home and folksy content about food and rural living. Those who identify with her country/farm lifestyle, can envision themselves as her friends, and aspire to be as accomplished in the kitchen as she.

In passing, I had heard two women at Extension refer to her as the the "go-to" person for delicious and doable recipes. I began to follow her blog and social media platforms (over 30+ Extension friends also follow her) and found her to be enormously popular within the same demographic Extension targets for Family and Consumer Sciences content (recipes, family life tips, education and child rearing, etc).

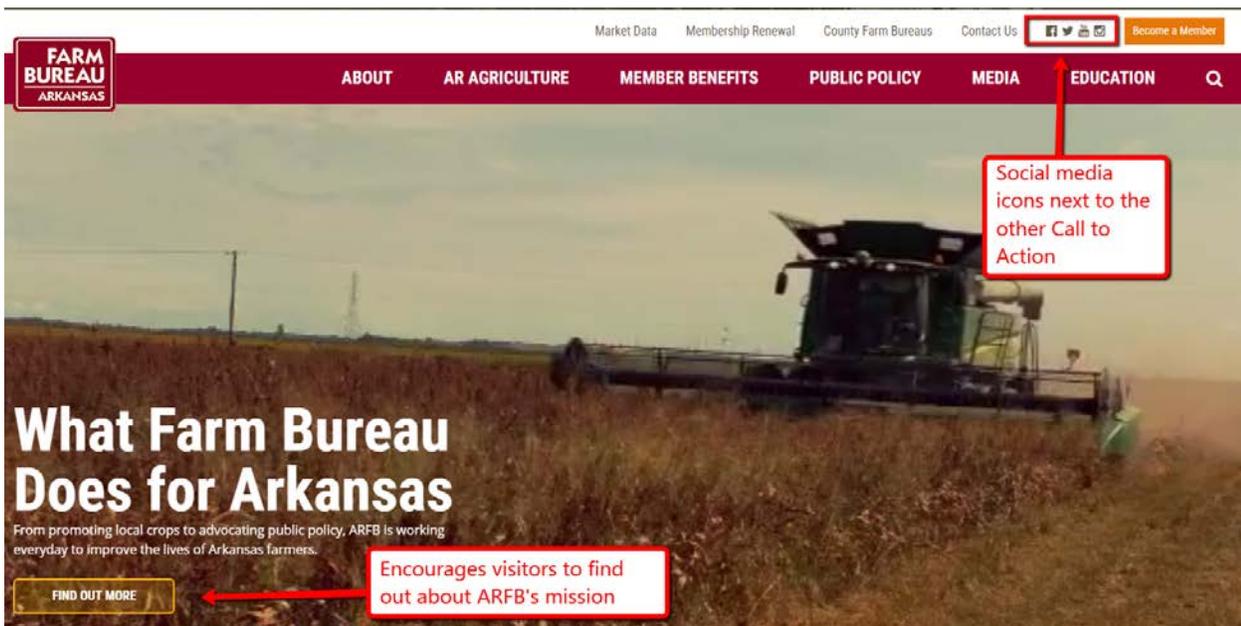
To begin the comparison of these two entities, let's first look in-depth at Arkansas Farm Bureau and their approach to social media marketing.

ARKANSAS FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation is an organization whose tagline is “The Voice of Arkansas Agriculture.” According to their website, their mission is to:

1. Advocate the interests of agriculture in the public arena;
2. Disseminate information concerning the value and importance of agriculture; and
3. Provide products and services which improve the quality of life for our members

This mission is echoed in the main page of the website where we can see at least two clear calls to



action (CTA) for ‘Find out more’ and ‘Become a Member’. Their mission and goals are closely aligned. Becoming a member of ARFB is the primary money-maker for the organization. They are advocates for farm families and promote agriculture and ag education throughout Arkansas. Included on their “About” page is this paragraph:

We connect consumers with the farmers and ranchers who work hard every day to provide the world with food, fiber and shelter. We speak out on the issues that matter to farmers, ranchers and rural communities in the halls of government and we share the latest news, facts and stories about agriculture in Arkansas.

The organization represents 190,000 member families throughout the state and has a physical presence/office in all 75 counties.

ARFB began as an organization in 1935. They utilize the most popular and common social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and an e-newsletter and Taste Arkansas [blog](#) which features Arkansas grown ingredients.

The target audience for Farm Bureau is, ideally, all Arkansans. However, their ultimate goal is to influence lawmakers and build grassroots support for local foods and Arkansas farmers. Rural families are aware of Farm Bureau, yet more urban families may not have heard of Farm Bureau outside of their insurance.

BRAND PERSONALITY

The personality of ARFB is reflected in its visuals. Photography and videography showcase the farm families in Arkansas which is, ultimately, what Farm Bureau is promoting. The rural “country” lifestyle and proud heritage of agriculture in the state is showcased by panoramic bucolic scenery likely chosen



because of its familiarity with and comfort for tens of thousands of Arkansas residents.

The tagline, as mentioned earlier, reiterates this message in that ARFB is the “Voice of Arkansas

Agriculture” and variations on the tagline are included in photo captions as noted in the image above on their [about page](#) (“Working for Family Farmers”).

About Farm Bureau

Promoting Arkansas Agriculture

Colors used throughout ARFB branding are similar to those used by Extension (maroon, white, gray). The deeper blue of the subheadings indicates a “red, white, and blue” theme and harkens back to American pride that might resonate with rural Arkansans. The tagline, colors, imagery, and message all combine to reinforce the idea that Farm Bureau is in YOUR corner if you are a farm family. They are there to be the voice of the “little guy” in a world that often overlooks and even condemns traditional agriculture.

Detractors from Farm Bureau’s message include organic farming initiatives whose messages encourage suspicion for large-scale traditional farming practices. “Clean eating” or organic farming are popular trends and many Arkansas farm families often feel their livelihood is misunderstood.

ARFB ON FACEBOOK

Farm Bureau has been on [Facebook](#) since 2008. They now have 22,450 followers on the platform. Daily posts range from contest promotions

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Vernon Caviness has been an agriculture aviator or cropduster pilot since 1998. For the past eight years he has worked for Bell Ag Service in Des Arc. In our latest podcast, he discusses how the recent river flooding affected their business, the challenges flight services face, and why, despite some inherent dangers, he plans to continue flying ag planes for years to come. Listen here: <http://bit.ly/2qBCDmq>



92

Top Comments

35 shares

to advocacy-related stories about topics such as National Dairy Month, which garner anywhere from 4-20 likes and a few shares each. The most popular posts by far appear to be the profiles of Arkansas farmers. This visual storytelling is the bread and butter of sharing the grassroots efforts of ARFB (at right). These posts get 90+ likes and reactions and several shares.

ARFB ON TWITTER

Farm Bureau has been on [Twitter](#) since 2009. Row crop farmers are heavy users of Twitter due to the immediacy of the news and shorter format of the posts. They have 3,768 followers on Twitter and appear to tweet several times a week which is a departure from their daily posts to Facebook.

The cover photo on Twitter reflects their brand and message with the tagline and large-format, people-focused imagery. However, the audience on Twitter reacts differently to the people-focused content that performs so well on Facebook. The same content that had been shared on Facebook (farmer who uses planes to spray crops) garnered zero reactions or retweets on Twitter. This indicates a disconnect possibly, in understanding the habits of their followers on the disparate platforms.



EVALUATION OF ARFB

Overall ARFB is doing an excellent job at imagery and portraying the story of Arkansas farm families. Through consistent branding and messaging one can easily understand the goals and mission of ARFB on each platform. They have clear calls to action and reinforce their message as the “Voice of Arkansas Agriculture” through the content they share.

To improve their audience on Twitter, I would suggest not sharing the same content that is shared on Facebook. It appears they aren’t always catering to the Twitter audience (row crop farmers who want useful, quick info) as well as they could. The storytelling definitely performs best on Facebook and Instagram. However, most farmers often just want the “facts” and information they can use. If ARFB isn’t presenting them with up-to-date content they can use to help their farms they won’t be getting the most gains from that platform. There is a missing personal touch to some of the content as well. They would do well to encourage a back-and-forth conversation with their followers by sharing client photos with other ARFB followers.

Finally, I also didn’t notice any content from the Taste Arkansas blog on either Facebook or Twitter, which is a missed opportunity. The recipes and food-based content would do very well on almost all platforms.

THE PIONEER WOMAN

The Pioneer woman (Ree Drummond) is a woman living in Oklahoma who began her career as a [blogger](#) in 2006. She is also now an author, TV personality, and now magazine publisher with a show on the Food Network. Her initial posts focused on food and recipes she creates from scratch. She is an influencer, someone who holds sway over a large following online. Her mission is simple: sharing her ranch life with the world while selling her books and items she offers in her online store.

While it is possible Ree updates all of her own social media accounts, it's probable she has assistance from others, particularly with regards to running an online store. As an influencer and TV personality, she works with a team possible of hundreds of people to ensure her brand identity is consistent across platforms.



Her target audience appears to be American moms/women. The floral motif of her website and “Confessions” style of writing is relatable, humorous, and attractive to other women who may be able to relate to the struggles of rural home life.

BRAND PERSONALITY

Ree is a mother of four and her down-to-earth personality shines through in her writing. Her website features sections on “Food & Friends” as well as “Fun & Learning,” indicating she wants to share her life with her followers (whom she calls “friends”).

Ree is very personable in her blog and social media posts. You get a real “slice of life” feeling from her content. Her followers are treated like her friends by the way she shares her day-to-day experiences.

For other rural American moms, Ree might be seen as a lifeline and positive role model for motherhood and traditional American values. Her delicious recipes, though, are what initially attracted people to her content. But even the recipe posts are fun and engaging. Note below her [casual writing style](#):



There's no evading this simple truth of the universe: Sausage and egg casserole is one of the greatest breakfasts there is. It's retro (80's bridal showers, anyone?), it's satisfying, it's flavorful, and best of all, it's family friendly.

These are individual versions of the original, and they're great. I love making them for the Drummond kids. The Drummond kids love it too, haha. They're delicious fresh, of course, but they're a good thing to keep in the freezer, too!

Her message is "I can do this and so can you!" which is exactly the type of recipe most busy moms want to follow and what makes Ree's content stand out from other food bloggers and authors is HER. She is a very likeable person online and she is both accessible and genuine.

Similar public personalities would be Paula Deen who is a successful southern chef whose brand expanded to furniture, TV, and clothing. However, Ree is different in that her family (and she) are younger and vibrant and more "rural" and less "southern".

THE PIONEER WOMAN ON FACEBOOK

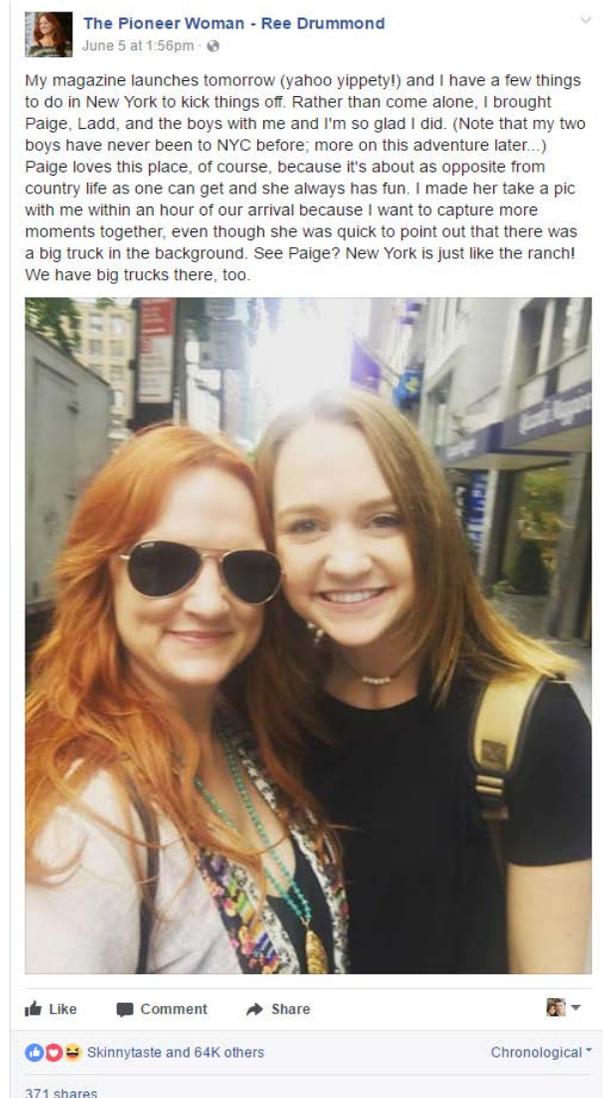
Ree transfers her folksy and personable style to [Facebook](#) which is the perfect platform for her demographic (women/moms over the age of 30). She has an outstanding following of 4,411,793 people, and her posts are engaging and fun. She engages her audience in posts that she writes almost daily ("tell me if I need more lipstick. Ha.").

Her posts do not entirely focus on food, rather, they feature her family at the forefront. One thing that is interesting, is the number of shares of her persona/non-food-related posts. It is possible women (almost all of the comments are from women) feel they know her personally and want to share her content on their personal pages as well.

THE PIONEER WOMAN ON TWITTER

The [Twitter page](#), started in 2008, has almost 1 million followers (973K). Ree has a larger following on Facebook possibly because Twitter skews to a more male and urban audience.

She posts similar content on Twitter as she does on Facebook and her blog. However the fun tidbits she shares on Twitter are more detailed insights into her personal life that will further endear her followers to her quirky sense of humor (see below).



Her Twitter cover image is of a wide open road, presumably from Oklahoma, to further the message that her roots are in rural America. She also shares recipes from the blog and encourages people to visit the blog to get details about specific content.



EVALUATION OF THE PIONEER WOMAN

The Pioneer Woman is an example of a wildly successful blogger. She shares on social media and her charm resonates with millions of American women. Ree Drummond has become a brand herself outside of the recipes and daily observances she began her blog with over a decade ago. Social media allowed her to further her reach to an even wider and younger audience. Her most outstanding quality on social media is her “voice” which can be heard throughout all of her online channels. More than anything, Ree is the friend every woman wants to have in her life: confident, funny, relatable, and above all, a great cook who shares her reliably delicious recipes with you! She encourages interaction and engagement, which is key to retaining a loyal audience. She knows her audience, and works and what doesn’t.

The only criticism I see is that Ree could utilize video on Facebook and Twitter. She has several short videos she shot herself (presumably) and a few recipe related videos. However this could be an area where she could reach even more people with the popularity of the medium including Facebook live or Periscope.

CONCLUSION

Both entities, ARFB and The Pioneer Woman, have overlapping audiences: rural Americans. Both utilize photography and visuals in most of their social media posts. Traditional values associated with home, family, and American pride are evident across both company’s digital media platforms.

A few key points to note for each of their social media strategies are that they:

Encourage interaction > They encourage visitors to like, share, comment, and interact with their content.

Share PERSONAL stories > The personal stories of farmers perform the best for ARFB on Facebook and the personal messages from Ree are by far her most engaging across both Facebook and Twitter.

Are relatable > Ree in particular excels at this aspect of social media. ARFB may have a disadvantage since they are not a “fun” personality and instead are a decades-old association. However, their message of advocacy is relatable to many Arkansans.

Share quality/useful content > Again, the Ree does a fantastic job selling her products and sharing her recipes with her followers. She is timely, relevant, and most of all, FUN. ARFB has a primary goal of

garnering new members. Some of their content is useful, however overall their services are limited to the general public.

After evaluating the messaging from both entities, I realized that The Cooperative Extension Service could benefit from encouraging more interaction, finding a more familiar voice, and segmenting the various audiences (FCS, ag, business, etc.) into personas each with a different voice. We benefit from not having products to sell, rather, we have experience and knowledge to share. Our audience is truly statewide, both rural and urban, adult and youth. Finding the right engagement method on each platform will be the key to future success.