

# How Can the Agricultural Communications Media Relations Team Help You?



## What Is Your Goal?

*I want to invite Mississippians to attend or register for an upcoming event of interest across the region or state.*

You need a **news release**.

*I want to invite local newspapers and TV to cover an upcoming event.*

You need a **media advisory**.

*I want to publicize an event that's already happened, and I have pictures.*

You need a **photo and cutline** (caption).

*I'd like to tell the public about a recent award or an important staff change.*

You need either a news release or a photo and cutline. A **news release** is better if you have a lot of information to share. A **photo and cutline** is better if a few sentences will do.

*I'd like to give participants in my program a way to announce their participation in their hometown newspapers.*

You need a **fill-in-the-blank news release** or a **photo with a fill-in-the-blank cutline**.

*I'd like to tell Mississippians about an unusual program, person, or study in MSU Extension or the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine.*

You need a **feature story**.

*I want to invite local people to an event.*

You probably need to **contact your local media outlet**. If you aren't sure whether we can help you or not, please call us at (662) 325-2262.

## Types of Media We Handle

### News Release

A news release is a brief, informational summary of an upcoming event or an announcement with statewide appeal.

**Goals:** Invite people to register or participate; encourage a newspaper to write a story; get information into the calendar section of a newspaper; share news of an award or filling of a significant position.

**Timeline:** Sent out 3 to 4 weeks before an event or a registration deadline, or when an announcement needs to be made.

**Special requirements:** Recent staff portrait for awards; events open to the public; space available; a contact person for the accessibility/disability accommodation statement.

**Examples:** Fall Flower and Garden Fest; Free workshops cater to private well owners

### Media Advisory

A media advisory is an invitation for print and TV media to come to your event.

**Goal:** Get local news coverage conducted by the outlets' own staff.

**Timeline:** Sent out 3 to 4 days before an event.

**Special requirements:** Best times for media to be at the event; a person at the event who is prepared to be on TV or to speak to a reporter; an understanding that there is no guarantee the media will attend.

**Examples:** 4-H Legislative Day at the capitol; Crosby Arboretum lecture; 4-H robotics kick-off

## ***Photo and Cutline***

A photo and cutline are a picture and brief description of an event or award.

**Goal:** Quickly promote an event or award (takes up less space in a newspaper than a story, so it may get more use than a feature).

**Timeline:** For Associated Press, must be sent out within 24 hours of event; for general news, ideally within a week.

**Special requirements:** Must have signed permission for any minors pictured; must have names of people pictured; electronic file must be high resolution (300 dpi or greater; phone cameras do not work well); you may request Ag Comm photographers, but you must schedule in advance.

**Examples:** Fashion Show; Afternoon on the Farm

## ***Fill-in-the Blank Cutline or News Release***

A fill-in-the-blank **cutline** is a template given to attendees of an event with a group photo they can submit to their local papers. A fill-in-the-blank **news release** is a news release template given to attendees that they can submit to their local papers.

**Goal:** Provide a standard cutline in newspaper style to encourage local media to print a photo of or report about someone's participation in an event.

**Timeline:** Should be prepared 1 to 2 weeks before the event so it can be shared with participants at the event.

**Special requirements:** May require slight changes in wording from one user to another.

**Examples:** 4-H legislative day; 4-H Congress; county supervisor training

## ***Feature Story***

A feature story is a traditional news article based on interviews with Extension sources; it is usually 500–750 words plus photos.

**Goal:** Promote the programs, individuals, research, and accomplishments of the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

**Timeline:** Depends on the type of story, but it is best to send as close to the event as possible.

**Special requirements:** Two sources, one of whom must be affiliated with or employed by Extension (can be a student, graduate student, administrator, faculty, or staff); topic should be newsworthy, timely, and relevant to the average Mississippian.

**Examples:** Winds of change influence Coastal sunflower grower; Timber market lags now, shows long-term promise

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***Before You Submit the Request...***

***I've read this information, but I'm still not sure which option I need. Where can I get more information?***

You can dial (662) 325-2262 to reach the Office of Agricultural Communications (Ag Comm) and ask to speak to our customer service representative.

***I know what I want! To whom should I send my request?***

Talk to the customer service representative. Call (662) 325-2262 or simply complete the online request form at <https://msues.sharedwork.com/requests>.

***What will I need to make my request?***

You'll need to give advance notice of events you need Ag Comm to cover, especially if travel is involved. You'll also need to be able to describe the story idea and explain its news relevance.

***What about photos?***

You can ask to have an Ag Comm photographer cover your event. If you request a photographer, please give as much notice as possible, especially if travel is involved.

If our photographer can't make it, you will need high-quality photos to accompany your project. A good picture increases the odds that a paper will pick up your story. Photos must be 300 dpi or higher to be used in print. Some smartphones take photos that are 300 dpi or higher, but many do not.

### ***While the Story Is Being Written...***

***I'd like to check on the status of my story. What should I do?***

If you have already heard from an Ag Comm professional, contact the customer service representative at (662) 325-2262.

***Will I see the story before it's sent out to newspapers?***

Yes. We always send stories to our Mississippi State University sources for approval before we send them to papers. You'll have a chance to review your quotes and check the facts included in

the story. One of the best ways for you to help the process flow smoothly is to read and edit the story as soon as you can. We can't move forward until you approve it. **Tip:** If you don't want readers or media personnel to call your personal office phone number, make sure the main office phone number is listed on the copy of the story sent to you for approval.

***Why are your capitalization and grammar rules different from the ones I'm used to?***

We use *Associated Press* style so newspapers can pick up our work as-is. AP style may be different from some of the style rules your English teacher taught you.

***When will my story go out to the media?***

News releases and features go out as soon as they're ready. Media advisories go out 3 to 4 days before the event.

***After the Story Is Released...***

***Will I need to do anything after the story is released?***

It's possible. The media or the general public may call you for more information when your story goes out, especially if you are listed as the contact.

***Who will print my story?***

News releases and feature stories are posted at *extension.msstate.edu*. Most stories are promoted on the Extension Service's social media platforms.

Most feature stories are sent to the *Clarion Ledger*, the *Associated Press*, and statewide media outlets. All other products are sent to local or statewide news outlets, the *Clarion Ledger*, the *Associated Press*, or some combination of these as determined by the media relations team. The only exceptions are fill-in-the-blank news releases and fill-in-the-blank cutlines, which are provided to county agents or event participants to share with local media.

Unfortunately, we can't tell you ahead of time who will respond to our stories. The media outlet editors decide whether they want to run the product as-is, assign one of their writers to cover the topic, or not include it at all.

***How can I find out where my stories were printed?***

You can view clippings online via the Extension intranet. Clippings are usually posted about 1 month after the story's release, and we won't be able to tell you where it ran until they are posted. We do not currently track websites that pick up the story.

***How can my group help promote my story?***

Individual colleges and centers may link stories to their websites and social media sites. If you have a good relationship with your local paper, you can call your contact to make sure the paper knows the story is available for use. If there are publications specific to your industry that might be interested in the story, tell the media relations manager or the media relations writer you worked with.

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