

DRAFT

Bridging the Gap: Sharing Plain Language Summaries Through Social Media and Newsletters



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Comments on this document are welcomed. Please send comments to hdougl01@uoguelph.ca by May 15.

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Background

This resource was developed through the Connecting the Dots initiative. This initiative focused on mobilizing rural research to reach community leaders, organizations, businesses, all levels of government, and researchers. In partnership with knowledge creators, the Connecting the Dots initiative co-constructed research focused on rural people, rural environments, and rural places into impactful plain language summaries and brief videos. Through a strategic communication plan, these outputs were shared through social media and newsletters among rural organizations across Ontario and Canada.

The Connecting the Dots initiative was funded by the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the University of Guelph. Learn more about the Connecting the Dots initiative at <https://ruraldev.ca/connecting-the-dots-mobilizing-rural-knowledge-to-knowledge-users/>

Purpose of This Guide

This how-to-guide walks discusses two ways to mobilize your plain language summary and accompanying video. The first is through social media messages, where this guide will walk you through how to write and post social media posts for your summary. It will also walk you through the process of writing a newsletter for your summary and where and how to distribute it.

This guide uses the example of an academic article titled “Farmer Knowledge as Formal Knowledge: A case study of farmer-led research in Ontario, Canada. If you are interested in reading this article, it is available in the [Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development](#).

Part 1: Social Media

Social media is a great way to mobilize your plain language summary, it gives the audience a glimpse of what the research and the plain language summary discusses. You can tailor it for different platforms and to draw in your desired audience, and create further access to the research.

Step 1: Choose your Social Media Platforms

The first step is to decide which platforms you want to share your message on. Our team uses LinkedIn, Facebook, and X (formerly known as Twitter). You may also wish to use platforms like Instagram, Threads, or BlueSky. Keep in mind that each social media platform may have different text restrictions, such as X where your character count is limited to 280. This is an important consideration to ensure you get your point across concisely. To ensure your messages reach the intended audiences it is useful to identify which platforms your target audience(s) already uses. Selecting these platforms can assist in ensuring the messages are seen by the intended audiences.

Step 2: Draft your Message

1. Create an opening statement for your message:

The first sentence of your post should capture the reader's attention, something that informs them on the research being shared while drawing them in to engage with the post and read further. For example, if your post is highlighting research that discusses farmer-led research, your opening line may be one of the following:

- What happens when farmers help lead agricultural research?
- Farmers are shaping the future of agricultural research, here's how.
- New research shows how farmers' knowledge strengthens research outcomes.

2. Discuss the key point(s) of your research summary:

Now create the main body of your social media message, this can further delve into what is being discussed in your research summary. Focus on the key message from your plain language summary and opening statement and expand on it one to two sentences.

Examples include:

- Researchers from the University of Guelph partnered with EFAO to examine the impacts of the FLRP. Their findings highlight how farmer-led research can support innovation, knowledge sharing, and practical solutions tailored to local needs.
- In collaboration with University of Guelph researchers, the FLRP has supported farmers in testing innovative practices, sharing knowledge, and strengthening their communities.

Ensure that you are using plain, non-technical language in your social media message, following a similar style of your summary.

3. Call the reader to action:

End your message with a simple call to action and include a link that will direct readers to your plain language summary, and if applicable video. This may include:

- Read the plain language summary here:
- Learn more about this research:
- Watch the video to find out more:

4. Create hashtags:

Finally, include three to five hashtags that relate to your message, this will increase your post's visibility and help people find your content more easily. Examples of hashtags include:

- #Agriculture
- #FarmerLedResearch
- #AgResearch
- #OntarioFarming
- #KnowledgeMobilization

It may be challenging to initially come up with social media posts, so one way to start is by using generative AI, such as Microsoft Co-Pilot or Google Gemini. The responses provided are likely not the final product, but they can be a helpful starting point in the brainstorming process.

Step 3: Create a Visual Element for your Post

You should consider including a visual element in your social media post. This could be a video you created to accompany your research summary (see the how-to-guide on creating a video summary) or it could be an image. Research indicates social media posts with videos gain more attention than posts with only text with image or only text. Posts with videos are 20 times more likely to be shared on LinkedIn, while videos on Facebook generate nearly 60% more engagements.

If you choose to create an image, this can be done in [Canva](#). [Canva](#) offers several free images, try opening your project and navigating to the elements tab, and type in keywords that relate to your research. For example, some keywords you could use in your search include:

- Knowledge sharing
- Agriculture
- Farm research

There are many websites offering royal free use of photographs. Through the Connecting the Dots initiative we frequently used [pixabay.com](#) for free images.

Once you have found the image you would like to use for your post, create a text box and enter the title of your research/plain language summary. You can play around with different fonts and text box background colours to find something that fits your research.

You can take this a step further and add effects to your image such as shadows which can all be found under the elements tab in [Canva](#). Examples include:

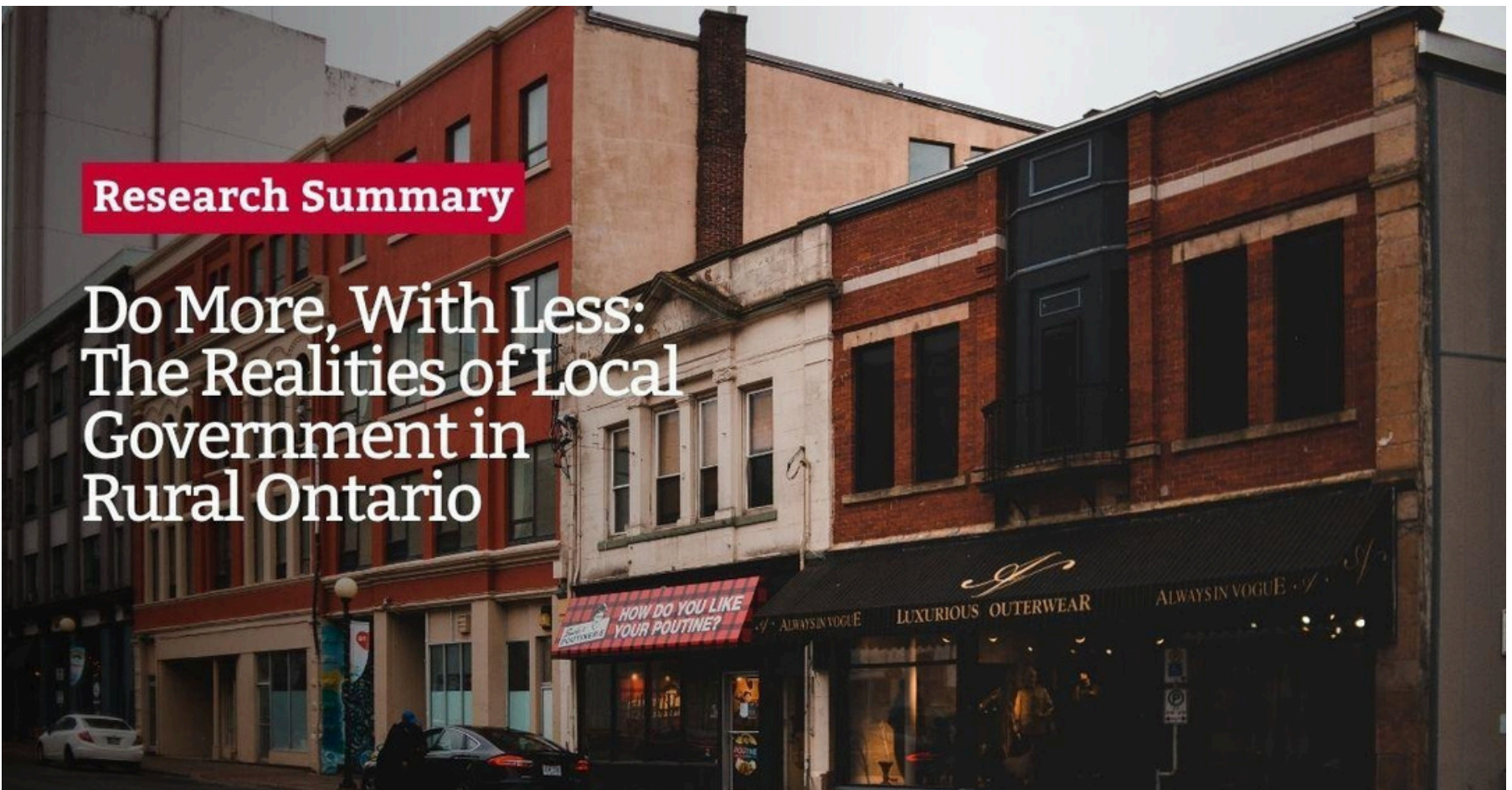


Research Summary

Farmer Knowledge as Formal Knowledge: A Case Study of Farmer-Led Research in Ontario, Canada



<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/impact-photos-videos-engagement-why-visual-content-text-untreiner-t69kc/>



Research Summary

Do More, With Less: The Realities of Local Government in Rural Ontario

Step 4: Adjust Your Post for Each Platform

Some social media platforms such as X and Threads have character limits, so before posting, check that your message is within the character limit and adjust if necessary. These adjustments may include removing some of your hashtags or condensing your message to include your captivating statement and only one expanding sentence.

If you are using an image instead of a video for your post, you may also consider adjusting your image size for each platform. For example, you might benefit from using a squarer image on Instagram but might use a different shape/size for LinkedIn.

Step 5: Review and Post

1. Double check your message: Before publishing, re-read your post to ensure it is clear and free of technical jargon and check links to make sure they work.
2. Decide when you want to post: Social media post engagement can vary depending on which day of the week and time you post. The experience from the Connecting the Dots initiative is that messages receive better engagement mid-week, mid-day. We generally schedule our messages on Wednesdays at 12:00 pm. Engagement can also vary depending on the time of year, so, when possible, avoid posting during busy periods such as around exam season and the holidays.

3. Schedule your post: Some social media platforms allow you to schedule messages ahead of time free of charge such as LinkedIn, however, others charge for this feature. The use of a multiple platform social media scheduler can facilitate a communication strategy whereby messages can be scheduled in the future. The Connecting the Dots initiative used the Fedica platform. It is free to use and allows you to add multiple accounts, so you can schedule post on multiple social media platforms at a time. With the free option, you can schedule up to 10 posts; however, the Connecting the Dots initiative subscribes to a plan to allow for more posts to be scheduled in advance. Once you have created a Fedica account, follow these steps to schedule your post(s):

- On your web browser, go to fedica.com.
- Select “Dashboard” in the upper right corner of the page.
- Navigate over to the “Publish” dropdown menu and select “Create Post”
- Ensure that the correct social media platforms and accounts have been highlighted.
- From here, you can enter your social media message(s).
- If you are including a visual piece in your post, select the little camera in the box where you entered your social media message. In here, you can upload your image or video.

- If you are using a different message for each platform, you can select the custom posts option and modify your message from each platform.
- Now select the “Schedule” dropdown menu and select “Specific date”, from here, you can input the date and time you want your message(s) to be posted.
- Select add to calendar, and your post(s) will be published based on the date and time you entered!
- Note: If you want to go back and edit your post or change its publication date/time, navigate to the “Publish” dropdown menu at the top of the page and select “Calendar”. Find your post in the calendar and click on it to edit

Part 2: Newsletters

Another great way to mobilize your plain language summary is through newsletters of relevant organizations. This method of knowledge mobilization allows you to circulate your information through existing networks of actors without having to build a mailing list of recipients. This method also ensures your messages are reaching key audiences. You can write a newsletter that highlights the research and the plain language summary and send it to different organizations asking them to include it in their newsletter. This is a great way to get your research out to specific audiences who you believe the summary would be valuable for.

Step 1: Choose the Organization(s) For Your Newsletter

There are an infinite number of organizations you could send your newsletter to. To help you narrow it down consider the following factors:

- Geography: where is this organization based and where does my research cover?
- Audience: who would this research and plain language summary be valuable for?
- Existing connections: are there any organizations that I have a connection with that would include my summary in their newsletter?

For example, the Farmer Knowledge as Formal Knowledge article looks at farmers conducting their own research in the Province of Ontario. We know that the geography of this summary is Ontario and that it would be valuable for people in farming and agriculture. The Connecting the Dots initiative shared the newsletter article with the following organizations: the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, Community Futures of Ontario, Community Futures of Western Ontario, the Rural Ontario Institute, the Canadian Centre for Rural Creativity, the Ontario Professional Planners Institute, the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Ontario Farmland Trust.

Each organization was emailed and invited to include the newsletter article in their upcoming newsletter and/or social media platforms. Not all organizations who received the invitation shared the information.

Step 2: Drafting Your Newsletter

1. Create titles for your newsletter: When writing your newsletter, it is okay to use the same newsletter for multiple organizations. However, it is recommended that you use a different title for your newsletter for each organization so that if the newsletters are published online, it creates a greater visibility and allows for measuring impact. Your title should be catchy and catch the reader's attention while still being informative of what the newsletter is about. To do this effectively you can use this format: short catchy title: informative subtitle.

Examples include:

- Field-Tested, Farmer-Approved: Research Led by Local Farmers
- Cultivating Knowledge: New Research Methods in Agriculture
- Beyond the Lab: How Ontario Farmers are Leading Research.

It may be challenging to come up with titles initially, so one way to start is by using generative AI, such as Microsoft Co-Pilot or Google Gemini. The responses provided are not always what you will want to use, but they can be a helpful starting point in the brainstorming process.

2. Write the body of the newsletter: When writing your newsletter, like the summary and video, it should use plain language and be free of technical jargon. There should be three key sections in your newsletter:

- Introduction: This section should capture the audience's attention further; it should start with a 1 sentence hook that highlights the issue or main point the summary and research discuss. It should then introduce the research article you summarized and provide a very brief summary of the research article in 1-2 sentences. Include any other key information here such as the author(s) and if applicable the research was published.

For example:

- `Formal agricultural research is often conducted by professional researchers, however, recently there has been in an increase in farmer-led initiatives such as the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario's (EFAO) Farmer-Led Research Program (FLRP).
- The Connecting the Dots initiative is excited to share a research summary about the impacts of the FLRP – Farmer Knowledge as Formal Knowledge: A Case Study of Farmer-Led Research in Ontario, Canada.
- The summary highlights the value of the EFAO's FLRP and how it has been beneficial for ecological farmers in Ontario. The research was conducted by Erin Nelson, Sarah Hargreaves, and Dillon Muldoon and published in Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development.

- Key points: This section highlights the main components of your summary and provides a high-level overview of the research you are summarizing; it should be 3-5 bullet points in length. Following the Farmer Knowledge as Formal Knowledge example:
 - The research explores:
 - The key impacts of the FLRP.
 - The importance of farmer-led research as a method that can support ecological farming.
 - The limitations and challenges of the program.
- Call to action: This section should call the newsletter to action to read the full summary and watch the video. Be sure to include the links to your summary and video here. You may also wish to include a brief statement about who the research may be valuable for and/or why it's valuable. For example: Learn more about the research through a brief one-page summary and a short video. This summary serves as a valuable resource for those interested in sustainable development and land-use planning in rural Ontario.

It may be challenging to initially come up with newsletters, so one way to start is by using generative AI, such as Microsoft Co-Pilot or Google Gemini. The responses provided are likely not the final product, but they can be a helpful starting point in the brainstorming process.

3. Review and finalize your newsletter: Now that you have drafted your newsletter, review it. Ask yourself:

- Does it have a captivating title?
- Did I create a different title for each organization I will send my newsletter to?
- Does it start with a hook to draw in the readers?
- Does it discuss the key points of the research and its summary?
- Does it link people to the summary and video?
- Is it free of technical language?

Once your newsletter is completed and you have reviewed it, it should look something like this:

Formal agricultural research is often conducted by professional researchers, however, recently there has been an increase in farmer-led initiatives such as the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario's (EFAO) Farmer-Led Research Program (FLRP). The Connecting the Dots initiative is excited to share a research summary about the impacts of the FLRP – Farmer Knowledge as Formal Knowledge: A Case Study of Farmer-Led Research in Ontario, Canada. The summary highlights the value of the EFAO's FLRP and how it has been beneficial for ecological farmers in Ontario. The research was conducted by Erin Nelson, Sarah Hargreaves, and Dillon Muldoon and published in Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development.

The research explores:

- The key impacts of the FLRP
- The importance of farmer-led research as a method that can support ecological farming
- The limitations and challenges of the program.

Learn more about the research through a brief [one-page summary](#) and a [short video](#). This summary serves as a valuable resource for those interested in sustainable development and land-use planning in rural Ontario.

This summary has been created through the Connecting the Dots initiative at the University of Guelph, supported by the [Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance](#). To view more research summaries or learn about the initiative visit rural.uoguelph.ca/research-summaries.

We'd love to hear your thoughts! Please take a few minutes to complete our short [survey](#) and share your feedback on the research summary and video.

Step 3: Send out Your Newsletters

Once your newsletter is ready, you can send it to the organizations to request that they include it in their newsletters. You can reach out to them via email. Whenever possible, reach out to the communications person within the organization, you can often find their contact information on the organization's website. If you are unable to find their information, then you can also try emailing the general email found on the website or use the contact form.

If you do not have prior connections with the organization, be sure to introduce yourself in the email. State your name, your organization, your position/affiliation, and a quick overview of the summary and research video. Be sure to kindly and professionally ask them to include your newsletter in their next newsletter and include your newsletter itself as an attachment in the email and send it off!

Note: Not all organizations publish their newsletters online, so if you would like to see your newsletter, be sure to subscribe to the organization's newsletter.

And that's it, you've mobilized your plain language summary and video!

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