



## More from farmer Gareth Plank of Scott River Ranch, Etna, CA on the Benefits of Twitter

([www.scottriverranch.com](http://www.scottriverranch.com))



**Gareth Plank, @ScottRiverRanch**

Twitter, believe it or not, has been a great help in fostering our ranch's focus. For the last eight years we have been working on converting Scott River Ranch to an organic grass-based operation. Regrettably, life and the Sisyphean task of ranching had interceded. Twitter helped break the log jam through the exposure to other ranchers that have faced similar challenges, yet managed to progress to the next stage of successfully marketing their products and thus slipping further away from the shackles of a commodity based operation.

Ranchers by their nature and geography are solitary critters. We have lots of time to ponder and occasionally pontificate at the local coffee shop but rarely an opportunity to travel and enjoy the fruits of a broad array of people and their ideas. Twitter provides that expanded community and assists in facilitating the sharing of ideas and experiences.

Twitter has introduced me to a large group of previously invisible friends and advocates. Although I had been a member of the American Grassfed Association and planned on being certified, time, etc., collided with my actually following through with the certification process. However, after starting to tweet, I was shortly followed by AWA and thus confronted with my propensity to procrastinate. Through Twitter I contacted AWA to start my now successful ranch audit and AWA and American Grassfed Association certification. In addition to AWA, Twitter introduced me to Carrie Oliver (@carrieoliver) from the Artisan Beef Institute. Carrie is a tireless rancher-beef advocate that is helping foster a new language to more accurately describe the differences and complexity of beef. Other Twitter friends include but obviously are not limited to GrassfedOrganics, Nyculla, Itweetmeat & Fairfoodfight. Each of these individuals bring the broader world to our little spot of the world that we call Scott River Ranch.



## More from Chris Kerston of Chaffin Family Orchards, Oroville, CA on the Benefits of Twitter

([www.chaffinfamilyorchards.com](http://www.chaffinfamilyorchards.com))



**Chris Kerston, @ChaffinOrchard**

### **Why is twitter important for your farm?**

I think direct communication between growers and eaters is one of the most powerful relationships in our society. I honestly believe that many of the world's ills, including economic, environmental and health concerns, could be solved by something as simple as people buying direct from farmers. This is one of the reasons our farm doesn't use brokers to sell our goods. We want to be the ones that hand the product directly to the person who is going to consume it. As our relationship grows we get to be able to call our customers friends; some are as close as family. Our farm is a 100-year-old multigenerational operation which means we have many multigenerational customers as well. By selling to people instead of companies, we get first-hand reviews from the folks that really matter. They tell us what they want and need and that gives us the opportunity to adjust the way we farm or tell them what is realistically possible and why. It's a very powerful democratic way to do business. It keeps us in touch with our buyers and allows information and education to pass between both interests.

Social media tools like Twitter and Facebook only work to enhance that relationship. Most of our customers have visited our farm. They've seen how we use the animals in the orchards to accomplish desired goals and ultimately reduce fuel and labor inputs, but the customers aren't with us all the time. Tools like Twitter allow me to keep in touch with them throughout my daily routine. I can ask questions, post pictures, let people know what crops are becoming available, remind folks about farmer's markets and specials we might be running, etc. It's an extremely powerful way to communicate. I can also post articles that I find interesting to our customers so that they can stay educated on the issues and vice versa. In fact, often I am first alerted about an issue by a customer and then I can pass that information on to everyone else.

Social media can also be tailored to serve both a local and a national market depending on your needs. We sell our meats and fruits only locally but ship our olive oil nationally. Twitter allows us to reach out to both demographics of buyers to both build brand and drive sales.

Obviously some customers are more interested in communicating digitally than others, and level of involvement from customers varies, but everywhere I go I have become known as the “Twitter guy.” We attend 8 farmers markets in the summer time and a couple year round. Every market we go to, people bring up recent tweets we have posted. It’s great to be able to communicate with a massive community all at once versus having to educate each person individually. Initially it sounded like it was going to be extra work but really using social media has streamlined my day and it keeps me much more in touch with our buyers.

As buyers become more educated their needs and requests change and I want to be able to adjust to those changes as quickly and smoothly as possible. Using tools like Twitter to keep a nice pulse on the market really helps me accomplish that. In fact, I noticed that a lot of customers are much more aware of welfare issues than ever before. I wanted to be proactive and respond to that and let people know that our ranch and our meats are different than what is in the grocery store for a myriad of reasons. That led us to getting involved with AWA. A branded seal on each label allows folks to see that humane care is a priority to us. Even though our regular repeat customers who have shopped with us for years already know this, the brand helps catch people’s eye at the farmers market or at our farm stand and it opens up conversations as to who we are and what makes us different.

**Please tell us about some of the most interesting and useful connections you’ve made on Twitter.**

My absolute favorite place to use Twitter is at a convention or large event. Usually some sort of hashtag will develop so you can track what all the other people at the event are saying. You can keep track of what individual workshops are doing or meet people in the same room as you. It’s a very cool way to meet new friends! You can also do this at farmers markets with tools like Tweetie on your phone which will allow you to bring up fellow tweeters in a local radius. You can strike up real time conversations with people in nearby vicinities.

We’ve made lots of new local customers via Twitter and built a national recognition which has led to other benefits, business partnerships, and press which is all very cool considering how little effort it really takes.