

QMS



Making the Most  
of the Media



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Making the  
most of media  
opportunities

A simple guide



## Introduction

This guide is designed to provide farmers and others working in the production of beef, lamb and pork in Scotland with some at-a-glance tips to help you interact with the media with confidence.

Our industry is a rich source of news for the media – tv, print and digital – and it is important we have the understanding to make the most of these opportunities and the savvy to say no on some occasions.

While traditional print media still offers a valuable opportunity, the speed at which news is communicated in many cases is now almost instantaneous thanks to new digital communication routes.

## QMS Communications Team

QMS's communications team works hard to build strong, positive relationships with key journalists and bloggers both in trade media (farming, meat and food service) and in the consumer-facing media. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you would like any information or advice relating to the red meat industry in Scotland and the media.





## If you are approached to undertake a broadcast interview

Ask for a clear explanation of what the journalist is looking for. Your questions might include:

- What is the context/topic of the interview?
- Who is the interviewer?
- Will it be live or recorded?
- Do I need to go to a studio or will landline be sufficient (in the case of radio)?

### And consider....

- Are you an expert in the subject of the interview?
- Do you know what your key messages are and can you deliver them effectively?

If the responses to these leave you feeling out of your depth and not confident that the end result will be beneficial for our industry you should consider saying no. If you are uncertain please contact QMS comms team for advice.



## If you decide the interview offers a good opportunity to get a positive message out about the industry

- Find out what is expected from you e.g. where will the interview take place and when?
- Think about the audience of the programme – will it be farmers or the general public? If the audience is not farmers try hard to stick to layman's terms – remember there is still a big gap to bridge in terms of understanding (see page 13 for examples).
- Work out a few simple, key messages and stick to them.
- When answering questions from journalists remember your ABCs:
  - **A**cknowledge the question you are asked (you can't ignore it),
  - **B**ridge to your key message,
  - **C**ommunicate your key message.
- Try to resist the temptation to speak too quickly – be clear and concise.
- Try to get the length of your response right – a simple “yes that's right” isn't enough but a very long-winded answer isn't useable.
- Finally, remember you are the expert – be confident!



## Pre-interview

- If time allows, make a point of outlining the facts to the journalist before the interview to set the scene and give your messages context. This will help to ensure they formulate questions sensibly.
- Ask the interviewer what the first question will be so you have an opportunity to formulate a response. A confident start will set you up well for the remainder of the interview.
- Consider the background which will appear behind you when being interviewed or photographed. Rusty barbed wire doesn't look good!



## Live versus recorded

### Live:

The prospect of a live interview might seem nerve-racking but there are definite upsides and you stand a strong chance of getting your message across.

The main advantage is that your key messages can't be edited out at a later stage. Similarly your responses can't be edited and broadcast in an out of context way.

During a live interview, however, it is vital your response is clear and concise as, unlike a pre-recorded interview, you can't jump ship halfway through your response and start again!

Likewise if a tractor roars into life nearby during the interview your opportunity may be completely lost.

### Recorded:

If the interview is recorded you can ask to answer a question again giving you the opportunity to phrase it better or more clearly.

Just ask the interviewer to run through the question again. Remember, though, to make it clear to the interviewer if you have answered something incorrectly and request that it is not broadcast.



## Specialist subjects

There are a number of areas where, tempting though it may be to accept an opportunity to get your viewpoint across, it might be better to ask a specialist to undertake the interview. If you are not an expert in the subject matter – whether it is an animal welfare issue or anti-meat campaign – please contact the QMS communications team. It is vital that the information given to the media is factually accurate or our industry, and its public credibility, can be undermined.

## Avoid farming terminology

Bear in mind your audience. If it is the general public they won't be familiar with terms like "heifer" or "gimmer" and you should avoid acronyms with which they may be unfamiliar, e.g. QMS!

Even "red meat" is jargon – by red meat we mean beef, lamb or pork so say that.

Avoid using too many figures if you can.

Where possible use examples to illustrate your points – a story from your personal experience or an anecdote adds welcome colour to an interview.





## Offering stories to the media

### What makes a good story?

A local angle to a national story.

Human interest stories (involving people or animals).

#### The sound bite:

The media love a “sound bite”. This is a short, pithy phrase which captures the essence of the mood or story angle.

**The expert:** Someone who can explain the facts behind a story or promote a particular angle on it.

**The opponent:** Someone who can give balance to a story.

### A major incident/issue

If the story is of major potential negative significance to the reputation of the industry please call the QMS communications team for advice. If the context is local and, for example, only involves your farm or business remember the three “Rs” if undertaking an interview – Regret. Reason. Remedy.

**Example:** a cow has injured a hill walker in one of your fields.

A film crew arrive and you decide to go ahead with the interview.

**Regret** – it is regrettable this has happened and your hope is the injured person has a full recovery.

**Reason** – explain why it happened. The walker’s dog had been off the lead (despite warning signs) and had disturbed some cows and calves.

**Remedy** – It is important that walkers and others enjoying the countryside adhere to The Countryside Code and understand the risk of disturbing cows with young calves.

#### The location:

If a TV interview is taking place on your farm bear in mind your premises will be clearly on view. Try to look at the location through the eyes of the general public and consider if it presents a good image? Rusty wire and lame sheep do not present a good image. You may know the wire is being collected for recycling and the sheep’s foot has been treated but that won’t be communicated visually.

Make sure the film crew knows what's expected from them before they arrive – any biosecurity requirements you have or areas you do not wish to be filmed (with explanation for your request). Let them know if they need wellies.

### **In the studio**

Allow plenty of time to find the studio and get settled so you are relaxed. If you arrive early you may have the opportunity to listen in on the preamble to your interview too. You may be in the same studio as the interviewer or you may be in a different studio doing a “down the line” interview.

### **By telephone**

Don't be caught off guard during a telephone interview. It may feel more relaxed but your words are just as important as during a face-to-face filmed or radio recorded interview.

### **Off the record**

Be very careful what you say to journalists off-camera. It is best to assume everything you say is on the record.

### **Door stepping**

It is unusual but very occasionally a journalist may simply turn up on your doorstep in a bid to get an interview with you. If the journalist has not had the courtesy/confidence to call to arrange the interview with you it may well be their intention is to run a negative piece. You are advised to calmly ask what they want and insist they remain outside the property. You can then go inside and gather your

thoughts. If the matter is linked to the reputation of the red meat industry you can call the QMS communications team for advice. Don't feel pressurised and start answering questions off the cuff.

### **What to wear?**

Your clothing should be appropriate for the location you are to be filmed in. If this is on the farm you should be wearing clean work clothes/overalls and boots. In a studio a jacket would be more appropriate.

Avoid checked or stripy clothing where possible and fairly neutral colours are best. Importantly, wear clothes in which you are comfortable. Consider what branding or logos, if any, are showing.

### **Getting the message right**

Take time to think through your key messages before you appear on TV or undertake a radio or print media interview.

### **Consider the following:**

- What are the key words or phrases you want to make sure you communicate?
- Identify no more than three key messages.
- What evidence do you have to support these statements?
- What impactful sound bite can you deliver to communicate these messages?
- Write down your key messages as a reminder and run them by someone whose opinion you value for feedback.



## Some key messages for the Scottish red meat industry

The red meat (beef, lamb and pork) industry contributed around **£2.1 billion** to Scotland's economy in 2011.

Around **50,000 Scottish jobs** depend on the Scottish beef, lamb and pork industry.

**Family farms form the bedrock of our industry.** Generations of animal husbandry skills underpin the production of Scotch Beef, Scotch Lamb and Specially Selected Pork.

**Quality assurance schemes which are among the best in the world.** Our assurance schemes cover the entire lifespan of animals which must be born, reared and slaughtered in Scotland to be eligible. The schemes cover animals from farm to processing and include feed, auctions and transport.

**Scottish farmers take pride in the quality of the beef, lamb and pork they produce.** Scotch Beef was the first European red meat product to be granted European Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status, closely followed by Scotch Lamb. These brands have earned global acclaim for flavour and quality.

**Improving efficiency and reducing waste is a priority for our industry.**

**Beef, lamb and pork play an important role in a healthy diet.** Red meat is a major source of protein essential for the growth, maintenance and repair of the body as well as many B-vitamins, zinc and iron. Around 48% of teenage girls are deficient in iron.

**Cattle and sheep are beneficial to the biodiversity of Scotland's countryside.** Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb producers are at the forefront of managing Scotland's landscape in ways that help wildlife and this is acknowledged by organisations like the RSPB.

Grass and rough grazing covers nearly 80% of Scotland's agricultural area. This land is unsuitable for combinable crop, fruit or vegetable production but ideal for extensive grazing of cattle and sheep.

Animal health and welfare is a priority for Scottish livestock production. Our industry works closely with the Scottish SPCA and we were pioneers of the robust assurance schemes which underpin the Scotch Beef, Scotch Lamb and Specially Selected Pork brands.

### **Answering questions**

If the journalist says something you don't agree with remember you are the expert and have the confidence to say "No, that's not the case. What actually happens is...."

It is important to remember that questions are the start of a negotiation where you and the interviewer may have different goals.

The reporter wants to get answers to their questions while you want to get carefully thought through messages across.

Remember to be prepared – the more prepared you are the more confident you will be and the more likely you are to have a positive, successful interview result.

### **Interview tips**

You can't ignore the question. However you can respond in a way that gives you an opportunity to get your messages over. For example:

"That's a good question, but the real issue here is ...."

**Take advantage of the fact you have more knowledge on the subject and use that to bridge your answer to one of your key messages.**

"Yes, but that is only part of the story..."

**Don't be drawn into speculating if the interviewer asks a "What if...." question. Reinforce the facts.**

"It is not for me to speculate on what might or might not be but what I can say is this...."



**Be positive in the way you frame your answers.**

“The good news is that many farmers are now...”  
rather than “Unfortunately most farmers are not...”

**Avoid saying “no comment” and if you don’t know the answer don’t make up a response. Say you don’t know but move the conversation into an area where you have the facts.**

“I’m afraid I don’t know the answer to that but what I do know is that..”

**Use your own experiences to illustrate what you are saying.**

“On my farm, for example, we...”

**Don’t let inaccuracies go uncorrected.**

“If I could just go back and address one of the points you made previously ....”

**Following the interview**

It is a good idea to let other interested/involved parties know when and where they can listen to the interview.

QMS is always keen to hear of opportunities being taken to promote a positive image of the industry so don’t forget to give us a call.

**Social media**

Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, offers a great opportunity as a realtime news feed. However, don’t be caught out by tweeting or posting an ill-judged picture or comment. Remember social media is instant!



## Do’s and Don’ts


### Do...

- Respond quickly to media enquiries even if you don’t accept the opportunity.
- Keep returning to your key messages.
- Stay positive.
- Try to relax (but not over-relax!)
- Be polite and professional at all times – you are the face of our industry during the interview.

### Don’t...

- Let your words be twisted.
- Interrupt the interviewer.
- Become angry or offensive.
- Forget there is no such thing as “off the record”.
- Talk to fill silences – that’s the interviewer’s job.
- Use jargon or too many figures.

If in doubt call the QMS Communications team  
on 0131 472 4040.



Let your pride  
shine through.  
Our industry has  
a great story to tell!



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