

#AskAg Twitter Chat Final Report

Introduction

One Twitter chat in, and we were hooked. What started as a one-time experiment by USAID’s Knowledge-Driven Microenterprise Development (KDMD) project has transformed into a successful regular series for USAID’s Bureau for Food Security (BFS) and its Agrilinks knowledge sharing platform.

The goal of Agrilinks’ #AskAg Twitter Chats was to create a space for individuals and organizations to ask questions of featured experts and discuss a selected food security or agriculture topic. The #AskAg hashtag was used to keep track of the conversation, allowing all experts and participants to follow and join the conversation in one Twitter stream. By hosting these discussions on Twitter, Agrilinks leveraged Twitter’s global reach and accessibility, enabling users to connect online or via mobile devices around the world.

Over the course of 1.5 years and 12 Twitter Chats, the KDMD team, in partnership with USAID/BFS, has continued to refine and adapt the structure and implementation of #AskAg Twitter Chats. This report will:

- Discuss the benefits of using Twitter
- Highlight the evolution of the chat structure and share insights on process
- Share quantitative and qualitative impact from #AskAg chats
- Outline recommendations for future chats

Twitter Chats

1. “The Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index,” featuring Emily Hogue (USAID/BFS) and Tania Tam (USAID/BFS) on April 3, 2012
   Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

2. “Feed the Future Learning Agenda,” featuring Emily Hogue (USAID/BFS) and Magda Ismail (The Millennium Challenge Corporation) on September 19, 2012
   Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

3. “Women in Cross-Border Agricultural Trade,” featuring Deborah Rubin (Cultural Practice, LLC) and Caren Grown (USAID’s Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning) on November 1, 2012
   Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

September 2013

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WHY TWITTER CHATS?

In using social media, KDMD sought to expand the project’s knowledge management activities to widen the Bureau for Food Security’s sphere of influence. Social media, particularly Twitter, provided one of the best opportunities for BFS to extend the reach of its development work, while also providing an opportunity for engagement and interaction.

4. “Making the Case for Investing in African Agriculture,” featuring Ben Hubbard (USAID/E3/DCA), Nate Schaffran (Root Capital), and Sean Moore (Acumen Fund) on December 6, 2012
   Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

5. “Serving the Poorest Smallholder Farmers,” featuring Roger Thurow (The Chicago Council on Global Affairs), Stephanie Hanson (One Acre Fund), and Michael Hudson (One Acre Fund) on January 10, 2013
   Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

6. “Agricultural Higher Education,” featuring David Kraybill (Ohio State University), Kurt Richter (Virginia Tech), and Clara K. Cohen (USAID/BFS) on February 14, 2013
   Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

7. “Gender in Agriculture—Not Only About Women,” featuring Mara Russell (Land O’Lakes International Development), Greta Schettler (U.S. Department of State), Wenchi Yu (U.S. Department of State), Lindsey Jones (ACDI/VOCA), and Sylvia Cabus (USAID/BFS) on March 8, 2013
   Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

8. “Water and Food Security Nexus,” featuring Moffatt Ngugi (USAID), Timothy Prewitt (IDE), Julie Wroblewski (JW Strategic Consulting), Mark Duey (Water for People), and Elynn Walter (WASH Advocates) on March 22, 2013
   Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

   Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

10. “Youth Employment in Agriculture,” featuring Rachel Blum (USAID’s Office of Education), Karen Brooks (IFPRI), David Feige (Making Cents International), and Carol O’Laughlin (Winrock International) on June 11, 2013
    Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

11. “Smallholder Access to Improved Technology,” featuring Milton Lore (Kenya Feed the Future Innovation Engine), Bob Rabatsky (Feed the Future Partnering for Innovation), and Kristen Gendron (USAID Development Innovation Ventures) on July 16, 2013
    Agrilinks event page | Blog post recap

12. “Beyond promotion: Using Social Media for Development,” featuring Roxanna Samii of (IFAD), Silke von Brockhausen (UNDP), Milica Begovic Radojevi (UNDP), and Lindsay Levin (USAID KDMD Project) on September 19, 2013
    Agrilinks event page
Twitter’s Potential

With a global user base of half a billion people—Twitter reached 517 million total users in July 2012—KDMD had a tremendous opportunity to tap into one of the world’s most popular social media platforms that is rapidly expanding into developing country markets. From a development perspective, it is important to note most accounts and tweets now come from a global audience, with the United States accounting for only 30 percent of all users. (Explore this TechCrunch article for a graph of countries with the highest number of Twitter accounts.) In addition to its worldwide reach, Twitter presents a unique opportunity because of its impressive accessibility. Creating an account is free; nearly all a prospective user needs is an email address. While creating an account and using Twitter on an internet-connected computer or smartphone may be ideal, it is certainly not required. Twitter continues to invest in developing robust platforms for “dumbphones.” Users can create accounts and tweet using no more than simple SMS messaging.

In addition to its reach, Twitter is one of the best social media tools for engagement between users of all levels of influence. In addition to posting tweets, users can follow and view updates from others, post public replies (also known as mentions), or send private messages. Twitter allows users to tag topics and keywords through the use of hashtags (a keyword paired with the pound symbol, such as “#agriculture”). Hashtags enable users to easily locate topic-based discussions and engage with others working in similar fields.

The ability to find and converse with organizations, experts, and others with similar interests has created a venue for information exchange unlike anything the world has ever seen, breaking down traditional barriers that previously existed. The use of hashtags and search features exponentially increases visibility and reach by allowing users to see all people or organizations tweeting on a certain topic. Even though “food security” conversations may represent a small percentage of overall traffic within the Twitterverse, the ability to create a food security-focused space within Twitter provides tremendous value for stakeholders dispersed across the globe, often in areas with little, if any, connectivity.

Twitter Chats

With the early success of Agrilinks’ engagement on Twitter, the KDMD team and the BFS Activity Lead, Zachary Baquet, saw a unique opportunity for Agrilinks to lead agriculture and food security-related discussions on Twitter.

Subsequent #AskAg Twitter Chats were developed with the following primary goals:

• Bring people together and engage in discussion on specific agriculture/food security topics
• Create a network of people talking about agriculture/food security on Twitter
• Lower the barrier for USAID participation

By achieving the above goals, the #AskAg chats also subsequently sought to:

#AskAg Twitter Chat Final Report
- Connect Twitter users directly with experts and each other
- Tap into existing networks of agriculture/food security Twitter users
- Lead to collaboration with other USAID offices, USAID Missions, and implementing partners
- Introduce Twitter to USAID staff and implementing partners (as experts or participants)
- Create awareness of specific resources and tools
- Increase awareness of Agrilinks and showcase KM/technical expertise
- Expand the Agrilinks audience
- Generate resources to add to the Agrilinks Library
- Drive traffic back to Agrilinks

**Putting #AskAg Chats into Context**

As KDMD looks at the impact of #AskAg Twitter Chats, it is useful to put the project’s work in the context of other chats taking place on Twitter. Although there are a number of relevant global development chats to explore, only a limited amount of information is available on the reach and impact of these chats. Even so, periodic participation and monitoring of other chats has proved useful in bringing Twitter chat good practices to light.

**#AskUSAID**

USAID’s main Twitter handle, [@USAID](https://twitter.com/USAID), holds regular chats under the [#AskUSAID](https://twitter.com/USAID) hashtag. These chats typically follow a question and answer format, bringing one or two experts on board to answer inquiries from the Twitterverse. See previous chats on the [future of food aid](https://twitter.com/USAID/status/808756272438847489) featuring USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah and [combating human trafficking](https://twitter.com/USAID/status/808756272438847489) featuring Sarah Mendelson, USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance. In KDMD’s experience participating in and monitoring #AskUSAID, these chats focus on providing their Twitter audience with access to USAID technical expertise.

USAID’s Bureau of Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA), managers of the @USAID Twitter account, shared the following information regarding recent #AskUSAID chats:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
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| 7/18/2013  | AskUSAID Twitter chat with @USAIDEducation                           | • #AskUSAID hashtag reached 245,230 accounts  
• Top contributors (#AskUSAID): @USAID, @USAIDEducation, mHealthAlliance, @EDCTweets, @YIYtweets  
• Most retweeted (5) tweet: @USAID: christyolenik: #askUSAID interesting: access to ed increas by tech & distance from home to school #Youth in #Education in Crisis & ow.ly/mQkxv |
| 7/11/2013  | AskUSAID Twitter chat with @USAID_Careers                            | • #AskUSAID hashtag reached 712,262 accounts  
• Received and answered 35 questions  
• Top contributors (#AskUSAID): @PeaceCorps, @USAID, @LisaLFlowers and @USAID_Careers  
• Most retweeted (7) tweet: @USAID: Consider @peacecorps or volunteering for the UN & language training in french, spanish, or portuguese @weathersurfer #AskUSAID |
| 6/27/2013  | AskUSAID Twitter chat w/South Africa Mission @USAID_SAfrica          | • #AskUSAID hashtag reached 242,176 Twitter users  
• Received and answered 22 questions  
• Top contributors (#AskUSAID): @USAID, @crsnews, @USAIDSerbia, @USAIDS_Africa, @USAIDRwanda and @USAIDAfrica |
| 5/23/2013  | AskUSAID on Water Strategy                                           | • #AskUSAID hashtag reached 254,655 Twitter accounts  
• Most retweeted (16): Access to safe & clean #water saves lives & is vital to a productive future for every man, woman, & child http://t.co/EH68X7CIs2  
• Most retweeted (13): Two-thirds of the world could be living in severe water stress by 2025. We’re addressing this in our #waterstrategy: http://t.co/X9jmu3Vqhb |
| 4/15/2013  | AskUSAID w/ Raj on food aid reform & budget                           | • Over 50 questions received |

**#AgChat**

#AgChat, hosted by @AgChat, is a weekly conversation held every Tuesday at 8-10 pm ET. As explained on agchat.org, #AgChat “is a virtual venue for participants on Twitter to share viewpoints and ideas about the issues impacting agriculture, such as sustainability, water, communications, agronomy, animal welfare, USDA programs, mainstream media coverage and public perceptions of farming. The goal is to create an ongoing, open dialogue among the various players interested in agriculture…. More than 12,000 people from 12 countries and 4 continents have participated in #AgChat.”
#AgChat is meant to facilitate community discussion. There are no experts, and instead chats open with 15 minutes of networking and introductions before launching into a series of questions, sent to the moderator in advance of the chat, and meant to solicit input from the entire community. That chat also ends with 5 minutes of “pitches” where users can promote their organizations and services.

**Evolution of Structure & Process**

Over the course of hosting 12 #AskAg Twitter Chats, the KDMD team continuously adapted and enhanced both the structure of the chat and event preparation and implementation processes. In addition to internal feedback loops, the KDMD team relied on feedback from participants through surveys tweeted out immediately following each chat, as well as feedback collected informally from experts following the chats. The feedback survey questions are available in the Appendix.

**Structure**

**Q&A vs. Guiding Questions**

#AskAg Twitter Chats originated as question and answer (Q&A) sessions geared to provide a platform for the Twitter audience (also known as tweeps) to ask specific questions of experts on a selected topic. The KDMD team encouraged tweeps to submit questions before and during the chat, and experts would answer as many questions as time allowed. Although this provided a good outlet for experts to promote a specific issue, over the course of the first several chats the KDMD team realized, with the help of participant feedback, that this format could be improved. Although providing a space for Q&A was useful, it did not maximize the potential of #AskAg chats as a space for community engagement. By guiding the chat towards two-way conversation between the experts and individual Twitter users, KDMD overlooked the opportunity for users to connect both with the experts and with each other. As is seen in this sample of survey responses, #AskAg participants expressed the desire for a larger conversation among all attendees.

“I’d like to suggest that Twitter chats are best for conversations where everyone or nearly everyone can chime in with an answer and exchange ideas. This #AskAg chat seemed to be mostly about people asking a lot of questions, but only two official experts to respond—though I noticed a few other USAID representatives were around too.”


“Twitter chats can absolutely be an effective format. But I would seriously suggest narrowing the topic and crafting your topic so that participants have value to add to the conversation—other than just questions.”


“As much as possible, try to have multiple 'experts’ or contributors answer key questions—it’s great to see different perspectives/experience coming together.”

To meet this need, the KDMD team transitioned to a new format centered around several guiding questions to maximize discussion and dialogue among the audience as a whole. With this new approach, four to six guiding questions served to frame the conversation. The questions, posted at 15-minute intervals during the chat, generated responses from both the experts and the participants. The 15-minute windows allowed for the entire audience to respond, ask follow-up questions, and engage further on this sub-topic. Participants also still had access to ask direct questions to any of the experts.

After making this adjustment, the project received positive feedback in survey responses:

“I really liked the more ‘2-way’ conversation setup. I think this has promise…”

“I liked this ‘three questions ahead of time’ format. Thanks!”

“I feel as though your team does a good job at driving the conversation. The posted guiding questions are useful in developing program/company-line/focused questions/points ahead of time. The panelists seem to engage equally and directly with the public. The range of time is good too. It’s not too short and not too long.”
— Participant response, “Youth Employment in Agriculture,” June 11, 2013

Additional structural adjustments

After each chat, the KDMD team held brief internal reviews, in addition to reviewing participant feedback, to reassess the format and structure and identify areas for improvement. Several additional changes to the format/structure over time included:

Moving the introduction period before the chat
In the earlier chats, KDMD would prompt experts and participants to share introductory tweets with biographical and geographical information right as the chat started. Although this provided a great opportunity for active participants and those just following along to identify themselves, it clogged up the #AskAg stream with superfluous tweets as the team tried to move into the questions immediately following the intros. To remedy this, KDMD moved up the prompt for introductory tweets to 10-15 minutes before the chat. This allowed people to chime in without disrupting the chat.

Sending the feedback survey link individually
During earlier chats, the survey link was tweeted out several times from the Agrilinks account at the end of the chat. In an effort to increase the number of survey responses, KDMD began tweeting the link several times between the middle and end of the chat. In addition, KDMD tweeted the link individually, via
mentions or direct mentions, to chat participants. This approach successfully increased the number of survey respondents.

Collecting links and resources shared during the chat
As a result of increased requests for links and resources, KDMD began compiling a selected list of links and resources sharing during the chat to be included within the blog post recap of the chat on Agrilinks. View the blog post from the chat on Smallholder Access to Improved Technology.

Process
The KDMD team put in substantial effort to ensure that the entire event process was structured and organized. Despite the chaotic nature of Twitter, over time the KDMD team developed a system to turn Twitter into “controlled chaos.”

While this report is not intended to be a comprehensive “how to” guide for Twitter Chat facilitation, there are several process-related components that KDMD found particularly useful in organizing and hosting chats.

• Hold a planning call with experts prior to the chat to run through logistics, decide on guiding questions, and allow experts to get to know one another. See the Agrilinks Twitter Chat Guidance document for more information.

• Provide Twitter training and guidance to experts unfamiliar with Twitter. (Access Agrilinks Twitter 101 & 102 Trainings here.) Insist that Twitter neophytes post a minimum of 10 tweets before the chat. New/unused accounts do not always appear in search--stress this fact in your appeal to the experts.

• Have experts draft responses to the guiding questions before the chat. Then responses can be easily tweeted during the chat, leaving more time for real-time discussion. Experts should also compile a list of relevant links ahead of time for easy sharing.

• Use a shared spreadsheet, such as Google Sheets, to stay organized during chats (access a Google Sheets template here).
  o Have experts post their drafted responses to the guiding questions in the shared document so the experts can see how others are responding.
  o During the chat, the shared document should also be used to record new questions that Twitter users post during the chat. Designate one member of the facilitation team to copy and paste questions from the stream into the shared document. Once the event hashtag stream starts moving, it can be easy to lose track of questions.

• Create a “control room” where experts can come together in-person for the chat. If experts are remote, use a conference call line.
• Assign two people to play facilitation roles. One facilitator should lead the room/call, manage the main Twitter account, and set the pace for posting the introductory tweets and guiding questions. A second facilitator should be responsible for copying all incoming questions to the shared spreadsheet, and assigning at least one expert to each question.

• Provide experts new to Twitter with “handlers” to help them navigate Twitter during the chat. If participating remotely, encourage experts to enlist a Twitter-savvy colleague to provide assistance.

**Assessing Impact**

Twitter, like other social media platforms, presents certain challenges in terms of measuring impact. Although access to a number of quantitative indicators is available, a big part of social media’s value is its ability to generate substantive conversation and engagement. This latter component is not as easy to measure. To gauge the impact of #AskAg Twitter Chats, KDMD collected both quantitative and qualitative data to reflect both sides of the story. Below you will find encouraging statistics indicating increased activity and reach paired with specific examples and highlights that reflect the meaningful impact generated through Twitter Chats.

**The Numbers**

![#AskAg Twitter Chats: Tweets and Participants](image_url)
## Chat Participants:
Chat and pre-chat promotion | Participants: During chat | Tweets: Chat and pre-chat promotion | Tweets: During chat
--- | --- | --- | ---
The Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (April 3, 2012) | Data not collected |  |  
Feed the Future Learning Agenda (September 19, 2012) | 70 | 29 | 205 | 127
Women in Cross-Border Agricultural Trade (November 1, 2012) | 74 | 41 | 207 | 125
Making the Case for Investing in African Agriculture (December 6, 2012) | 162 | 73 | 386 | 204
Serving the Poorest Smallholder Farmers (January 10, 2013) | 194 | 129 | 945 | 718
Agricultural Higher Education (February 14, 2013) | 90 | 36 | 301 | 171
Gender in Agriculture—Not Only About Women (March 8, 2013) | 124 | 56 | 440 | 280
Water and Food Security Nexus (March 22, 2013) | 184 | 110 | 606 | 421
Intersection of HIV and AIDS & Food Security (May 23, 2013) | 113 | 55 | 421 | 280
Youth Employment in Agriculture (June 11, 2013) | 199 | 100 | 803 | 580
Smallholder Access to Improved Technology (July 16, 2013) | 170 | 106 | 617 | 434
Beyond promotion: Using Social Media for Development (September 19, 2013) | 230 | 133 | 1067 | 783

Over the course of the #AskAg series, 100 users were repeat chat attendees, participating in two or more chats. When looking at the total number of users who both promoted and participated in #AskAg chats, there were 207 repeat users.

In addition to looking at the number of participants and tweets for each chat, the feedback surveys provided useful data on the ability of participants to apply learning from the Twitter Chat and the effectiveness of the format (see following charts).

Of all survey respondents, 82 percent indicated that they “strongly agree” or “agree” that knowledge generated during #AskAg Twitter Chats could be applied to their work. In terms of the effectiveness of the format, 69 percent of survey respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” that Twitter Chats are an appropriate and practical medium for knowledge exchange.
Advanced Twitter Analytics

For the July 16, 2013 chat on “Smallholder Access to Improved Technology,” KDMD experimented with a new hashtag analytics tool, Keyhole. An image of the live dashboard, captured following the chat, is pictured on the following page:
Keyhole provides a quick snapshot of posts, users, reach, and impressions. ‘Reach’ is the number of unique followers that a user has (representing the unique people that a tweet could potentially reach), while
‘impressions’ takes into account the number of times a user posts (looking at how many times followers would see these posts). These quick stats allowed KDMD to easily track influence and growth over time.

According to Keyhole, during the July chat, an impressive 42 percent of #AskAg tweets were from outside of the United States. Kenya, Zimbabwe, and India produced the most tweets, respectively, following the U.S. You can view live analytics (and segment by date) using the #AskAg KeyHole tracker. It will be worthwhile for USAID/BFS to continue use of this tool and explore the full capabilities of this Twitter analytics platform. There are also several comparable Twitter hashtag analytics platforms that USAID/BFS can also explore, such as: Twitalyzer, Hashtracking, Hashtagify.me, or oneQube.

The Stories

While the data provides compelling information on the reach and activity surrounding the chats, it is just as important to look at stories of engagement and qualitative information collected from #AskAg participants and experts. Although the feedback shared below represents only a sample of the total audience, the initial results are promising and demonstrate tangible impacts and benefits from Twitter Chat participation.

Real-Time Engagement

As discussed, two of the key goals of #AskAg Twitter Chats were: 1) to bring people together to engage in discussion on specific agriculture/food security topics and 2) create a network of people talking about agriculture/food security on Twitter. While the numbers showed a growing number of Twitter users tuning into #AskAg chats, what do the chats actually look like? What type of knowledge exchange is occurring? Is tangible networking taking place? While difficult to answer definitively, over the course of the #AskAg series KDMD has seen increasing amounts of positive engagement, networking, and information exchange.

The selected exchanges on the following pages highlight community engagement.
From “Smallholder Access to Improved Technology”

@Agrilinks May you let me know if you have offices in Uganda and or partners you work with? #AskAg

@WilliamYang120 @mercycorps We will be working with AgriLife on Value Chain project in E. Africa. Do u av connections to each other? #AskAg

@mercycorps work with Orange in Uganda and we have an office in Kampala. #AskAg

I also know @mercycorps & AgriFin but we @wougnet needs Value Chain partners 4 women n youth farmers project in E.A #AskAg

@mercycorps also work with #ecoChampion, which are usually farmers familiar with the operation of #technology in villages. #AskAg

I’m sure we can move our #gender model currently experimenting in #indonesia to #uganda so we can partner. #AskAg

@LandOfLakesIDDD recently closed a program in Uganda, but staff still there. We R currently in Kenya. DM for more details. #AskAg

Okay, I will and thanks for @Agrilinks #AskAg -providing connections :-)
From “Youth Employment in Agriculture”

@Agrilinks if we're investing in youth, is it a trade-off between more education and a career in agriculture? #AskAg
9:22 AM - 11 Jun 2013

1 FAVORITE

@ifpri #AskAg Do you have examples of programs that work to help young people enter farming or value chains and succeed?
9:30 AM - 11 Jun 2013

@kimarie_lok #AskAg AWARD program strengthens research & leadership for young women scientists bit.ly/19XZp6Q @CGIAR
9:34 AM - 11 Jun 2013

@skstortz @Agrilinks Youth in ag doesn't mean no education. There's also need for young extension workers, researchers. #AskAg
9:23 AM - 11 Jun 2013

David Feige
@DavidFeigeAg
Depends on life stage. Ag can be viewed as career or short term means of generating income to invest in further education
9:29 AM - 11 Jun 2013

1 RETWEET

@kimarie_lok #AskAg Educ. in Income Generation, Nepal-litarcy; value chain, market approach; 54,000 youth ag income inc. by 230%;
9:34 AM - 11 Jun 2013

1 RETWEET
Survey responses

The survey responses from participants provided some insights on the overall experience of the chat. Although the conversation can be chaotic at time, participants were often able to glean key information and specific resources from the event. Participants also found value in the ability to connect and engage with the larger agriculture and food security community. The complete collection of Activity Reports, including all survey responses, can be found in the Appendix.
“Great job. I learned a lot—in terms of Twitter and in terms of WEAI.”

“Twitter chats are always a bit chaotic and can be hard to follow, but there are usually a few gems and new pieces of info that make it worthwhile.”

“It was helpful - and what I particularly like about Twitter chats is that they leverage the share ability of social media where we share information across individuals and partners.”

“I like the Twitter chats because they show a sense of community. They can give direct access to specific information -- if there are links to support the info behind the tweet. They can be difficult to follow, but that is why the Storify’s are so important.”

“There was a real buzz about this event, it was very interesting and a good chance to raise awareness and bring agriculture and development folks together on Twitter. Perhaps have another #AskAg chat as it went so well? Thanks for organising it.”

“I don't have any suggestions for improvement. For all Twitter chats, there is a sense of chaos with competing tweets from panelists and attendees. However, for #AskAg there is always a way to find the people and topics you want to talk about.”

“Very impressed by today’s chat & loving the involvement from Africa. Having joined a lot of Twitter chats in the past few months, this is one of the best I've seen. Ashoka is also doing some good stuff with their #nutrients4all group, might be relevant to your work?”
Follow-up with Chat Participants

To further assess the impacts of #AskAg Twitter Chats, the KDMD team held follow-up interviews with several chat participants in 2013. This allowed the team to get in-depth stories on how information and connections from Twitter Chats can have a direct impact on improved development outcomes. In one case, the interviews revealed practitioners making connections via Twitter with plans to meet in-person and collaborate at an upcoming conference. In another case, a participant who lacked running water in his apartment in Jamaica was still able to join an #AskAg Twitter Chat through his mobile phone. It is examples like these that reveal the importance of collecting impact stories that can help gauge the success of innovative knowledge sharing activities.

Read the excerpts from conversations with chat participants below, or the full text in the Appendix.

- [#AskAg] has connected me to a community of people…
- I have been thinking a lot more about gender violence at border markets since one of the #AskAg talks on gender and markets.
- This is definitely where the Twitter chats fit for me—a chance to virtually expand my professional network or connect with old friends….I end up following a lot of those people on Twitter and working with them that way.

- ...Great to see topic/themes...recorded those down for reference to look into...that I could apply to my work.
- The guiding question on wastewater—this is a topic I’m researching more and might come up when I’m talking to food security people
- [#AskAg] has brought organizations and people in this sector to my reference. I can more actively connect who they are and what they do.

- ...A lot of times when links are shared they are really relevant.
- Helped me reconnect, recent expert was a former professor of mine and we reconnected
- I have no running water, but I have enough bandwidth to join a Twitter chat, that is pretty great.

- Connected with people we engaged with during chat.
- We still engage with them now on Twitter, ask each other questions, especially those focused on agriculture in Africa
- We are supposed to attended G8 conference on Monday in DC, and we are exchanging DMs and messages with people we met through the chat, and hope to meet up in-person there.
Follow-up with USAID Experts

To gain a better understanding of the experiences of USAID staff that join #AskAg chats as experts, Zachary Baquet contacted his USAID colleagues with a short questionnaire. The questionnaire and complete responses from eight USAID staff can be found in the Appendix.

Overall, the USAID experts had a positive experience and found value in participating in #AskAg Twitter Chats. Many USAID staff were new to Twitter and saw the chats as a learning opportunity. The chats also connected USAID staff to new networks of development practitioners. While some experts used their experience as a launching pad for continued Twitter engagement, other experts found they were too busy to maintain a Twitter presence. Selected excerpts are below:

“Absolutely, yes, I found great value in the #AskAg Twitter Chat, as it had two major benefits: 1) it generated information for which there was relatively little documented evidence and/or knowledge around the topic (rural youth), and 2) it introduced me to a whole new set of youth practitioners, policy makers, and academics whose existence I was unaware of before. And yes I would do a Twitter Chat again... and already did!”

—Rachel Blum, Youth and Workforce Development Technical Specialist in USAID’s Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment (E3)

“Yes—we saw a huge value in participating. In fact, a few months later we did another Twitter chat, but this time hosted by LPA. They’ve scaled up their Twitter chats after seeing how successful yours were (I believe). We would love to do it again. We’re thinking about our next topic!”

—Stephanie Grosser/Ben Hubbard, USAID Development Credit Authority

“I got a lot out of participating in the Twitter chat. I’d like to go back to the archive as I prepare talking points for Paul Weisenfeld’s remarks at our upcoming innovATE symposium. Yes, I would do it again.”

—Clara Cohen, Senior Science Policy Advisor, USAID’s Bureau for Food Security, Office of Agricultural Research and Policy
RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the first chat in April 2012, KDMD has continually adapted the format, processes, and evaluation efforts to improve the overall chat experience. This report provided an opportunity to step back and look at the big picture. In doing so, several areas for improvement came to light.

Responding to Survey Feedback

While there were plenty of positive survey responses, many respondents also had ideas on areas for improvement, or even alternate approaches. One recurring theme in the survey responses was the desire for an alternative format, outside of Twitter, to allow for more substantive conversation. To address these concerns, perhaps #AskAg chats could be used in conjunction with other planned events, such as AgExchanges (facilitated online discussions) or webinars, to allow the Agrilinks audience to participate in a series of events. Twitter Chats can be used a testing ground for new topics or ideas, with popular topics later revisited via webinar or online discussion. Twitter Chats also present an opportunity to tie into Agrilinks groups as a space for further discussion.

Another concern mentioned by respondents was the broad scope of #AskAg Twitter Chats. Some were hoping for narrower, specific topics, which would perhaps result in a more substantive exchange. This presents a challenge, however, because with a narrower topic there is a risk of alienating a broader audience of tweeps concerned with global development. In the future, USAID BFS could revisit a past chat topic with a new, narrower focus and compare results.

A sample of survey responses:

“Twitter communications are for short/quick responses. Not for long/involved questions. Use the right communication tool to for specific need.”

“Since it was so industry heavy, it seemed like a real chatroom would have been most effective—the topic was so dense, that it didn’t lend itself to 140 character questions.”

“Twitter chats can absolutely be an effective format. But I would seriously suggest narrowing the topic and crafting your topic so that participants have value to add to the conversation—other than just questions.”
In addition to looking at survey responses, the KDMD team developed a general list of recommendations:

**Reconnect with USAID experts**

Based on the feedback above, a number of USAID experts indicated that after following or participating in #AskAg Twitter Chats, they failed to stay active on Twitter. In the future, USAID BFS can take several steps to keep these experts engaged:

- Personally invite past experts to participate in upcoming chats.
- Periodically mention past USAID experts on Twitter to share relevant events or resources or ask questions. Give them a reason to log on.
- If there is a related Ag Sector Council Seminar or other event, send a personal invitation and encourage the expert to tweet along during the event.

**Enhanced outreach to USAID**

For each chat, KDMD develops a targeted list of influencers to reach out to for each topic. KDMD users tool such as Klout to identify influencers. In the most recent Chats, KDMD began targeting more USAID Missions and other USAID accounts, and many have been receptive to sharing out the chats. This outreach to USAID accounts should continue.

**Advanced analytics**

KDMD’s first use of Keyhole provided interesting insights and new data, via reach and impressions that will be useful in tracking reach and growth of chats. The ability to easily see audience by location is also valuable as one goal of the activity was to reach a wider, global audience. KDMD recommends continued use of Keyhole or a similar hashtag tracking tool.

**Impact-oriented survey**

Now that KDMD has held 12 Twitter chats, it may be worth revisiting the feedback survey questions. Is there a way to ask more direct questions about impact? It might also be useful to add a space for respondents to indicate if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up phone call.
Regular date/time for increased participation

Many popular Twitter chats are held at a regular date/time so users always know exactly when to join in. Although it may be difficult to establish a set schedule because of expert availability, perhaps regular scheduling would increase turnout. In general, Twitter Chats should be scheduled no later than noon EST to increase participation from overseas. Holding the chat in the middle of the week (on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday) is also helpful in terms of event promotion and availability of most participants.

Regional focus

A number of participants have expressed the desire to focus on a specific region. More regionally focused chats also present an opportunity for #AskAg to try to bring in beneficiaries and those working in the field to participate directly.

Conclusion

Overall, #AskAg Twitter Chats have succeeded in bringing people together to discuss agriculture topics while also creating a network of like-minded development practitioners. Never static, #AskAg Chats continued to evolve to meet the needs of BFS’s Twitter community to foster increased engagement. Although it can be difficult to capture social media impact, through a combination of quantitative assessment, participant feedback, and documented interaction, the KDMD project and USAID have been able to see the powerful knowledge sharing capabilities and opportunities that Twitter Chats can offer.
APPENDIX

Activity Reports

Activity reports for the first 11 chats can be found [here](#) or in the Dropbox folder transferred from KDMD to USAID.

#AskAg Twitter Chat: Participant Feedback Survey

1. Please indicate the type of organization you are affiliated with:

   USAID; Other U.S Government; Foreign Government; Academia/University/Research Institutions; Non Profits/Private Voluntary Organizations; For Profit (Consulting/Contractors/Industry); Other Donors (Multilateral, Bilateral); Foundations

2. Please indicate where you work:

   Washington, DC; Other U.S.; International

3. Have you participated in a Twitter chat before?

   Yes; No

4. Please indicate the extent to which the following apply:

   A) I can apply what I learned to my work.
   B) This was an effective format.

   *Likert Scale: 5 - Strongly Agree, 1 - Strongly Disagree

Follow-up with chat participants

MPULE

1. Where are you based?
   - New York, but we also have a Development Fund out of Botswana

2. How many #AskAg Twitter Chats have you participated in?
   - Two

3. Have Twitter Chats connected you with valuable resources that have been applicable to your work? (for example: using the information in reports, academic curricula, proposal writing, etc.)
   - We already do research, we already have such a huge volume, so not looking for reports as much

4. Can you provide examples of the content you have applied?
   - N/A
5. How has your participation in Twitter Chats allowed you to expand your professional network?
   • Connected us with people we engaged with during chat
   • We still engage with them now on Twitter, ask each other questions, especially those focused on agriculture in Africa

6. Have you continued the discussion on other online platforms or in person following Twitter Chats?
   • Not yet, we are supposed to attended G8 conference on Monday in DC, and we are exchanging DMs and messages with people we met through the chat, and hope to meet up in-person there.

7. Have Twitter Chats improved your ability to engage with Ag experts at USAID? Please elaborate.
   • No answer given

8. What do you like most about #AskAg Twitter Chats and how does it compare to other Twitter Chats?
   • Other chats: Young people on ag in Africa, youth ag chats, participated in those
   • Youth & ag are more focused because the sector is narrowed down to youth and ag in Africa, ag in general is so broad
   • Specific demographic makes it easier to have a more focused conversation
   • Structure: Youth and ag chat puts out feelers, puts out tweets on the theme question on what the conversation will be on

9. Do you have one or two recommendations on how we can improve our Twitter Chats?
   • Have it a bit more focused, so different challenges and opportunities can be explored
   • If talking about African ag, talk about gender, ag productivity -- will be able to have more focused conversation

Agrilinks

10. Were you familiar with Agrilinks prior to the Twitter Chat?
    • I think so

11. How do you see Twitter playing a role in knowledge sharing?
    • Twitter can play role in connecting people, fostering partnerships
    • ICT and ag folks send us DM messages and messages to let us know about work and wanting to connect
    • Enable dynamic partnerships
    • Bringing together people who can complement each other’s work
    • It is hard to find people involved in this topic, this is an easy way to bring people together to have conversations
    • Focused on topics such as agribusiness, tech for smallholders, helping underemployment of youth through agribusiness, etc – can bring people together to foster solutions
Kevin

1. Where are you based?
   - Westmoreland Parish, Jamaica

2. How many #AskAg Twitter Chats have you participated in?
   - Three

3. Have Twitter Chats connected you with valuable resources that have been applicable to your work? (for example: using the information in reports, academic curricula, proposal writing, etc.)
   - Yes, a lot of times when links are shared they are really relevant

4. Can you provide examples of the content you have applied?
   - For personal self-education, I have come across some really good information

5. How has your participation in Twitter Chats allowed you to expand your professional network?
   - Helped me reconnect, recent expert was a former professor of mine and we reconnected

6. Have you continued the discussion on other online platforms or in person following Twitter Chats?
   - No I haven’t

7. Have Twitter Chats improved your ability to engage with Ag experts at USAID? Please elaborate.
   - Not outside of the Twitter chat, but tapping into knowledge during chat was useful

8. What do you like most about #AskAg Twitter Chats and how does it compare to other Twitter Chats?
   - Haven’t joined other chats

9. Do you have one or two recommendations on how we can improve our Twitter Chats?
   - It would be good to do it in the evening
   - I’m a peace corps volunteer, so a lot of people are going back to work after lunch, at night I would have more time to stay on and connect with people
   - I have no running water, but I have enough bandwidth to join a Twitter chat, that is pretty great.

Agrilinks

10. Were you familiar with Agrilinks prior to the Twitter Chat?
    - Yes
    - And working on master’s so use Agrilinks to find resources

Cydney

1. Where are you based?
   - Washington, DC

2. How many #AskAg Twitter Chats have you participated in?
   - 0 active participation
   - Followed 2-3
   - Sat in room during water chat (works with USAID Water office)
3. Have Twitter Chats connected you with valuable resources that have been applicable to your work? (for example: using the information in reports, academic curricula, proposal writing, etc.)
   • For the water chats specifically – don’t recall resources but great to see topic/themes... recorded those down for reference to look into…that I could apply to my work
4. Can you provide examples of the content you have applied?
   • Specific example: Guiding question on wastewater – a topic I’m researching more and might come up when I’m talking to food security people
5. How has your participation in Twitter Chats allowed you to expand your professional network?
   • Not personally because I’m not in water/food security field, but it has brought organizations and people in this sector to my reference. I can more actively connect who they are and what they do.
6. Have you continued the discussion on other online platforms or in person following Twitter Chats?
   • I haven’t directly linked a later event to a Twitter chat, but definitely the topics, I’ve brought them up in my work later on.
7. Have Twitter Chats improved your ability to engage with Ag experts at USAID? Please elaborate.
   • Already on USAID project
8. What do you like most about #AskAg Twitter Chats and how does it compare to other Twitter Chats?
   • I like the marketing, put up front who is going to be there, their Twitter handle, and guiding questions
   • Guiding questions are smart tool – help me start to think about questions/topics that I would ask. I have a hard time developing questions free hand, but if I have something to reference it is helpful.
   • Twitter 101 training really smart for those who haven’t been involved before.
   • I have heard people reference the #AskAg Twitter chats and say it’s something they want to do.
9. Do you have one or two recommendations on how we can improve our Twitter Chats?
   • What are you next ideas for the next three month? Right now it is on a month by month basis.

Agrilinks
10. Were you familiar with Agrilinks prior to the Twitter Chat?
    • Yes

Crump
1. Where are you based?
   • Davis, California (near Sacramento)
2. How many #AskAg Twitter Chats have you participated in?
   • Approximately 5
3. Have Twitter Chats connected you with valuable resources that have been applicable to your work? (for example: using the information in reports, academic curricula, proposal writing, etc.)
   • Not necessarily with those kinds of resources but it has connected me to a community of people.

#AskAg Twitter Chat Final Report
4. Can you provide examples of the content you have applied?
   - I have been thinking a lot more about gender violence at border markets since one of the AskAg talks on gender and markets.

5. How has your participation in Twitter Chats allowed you to expand your professional network?
   - This is definitely where the Twitter chats fit for me – a chance to virtually expand my professional network or connect with old friends.

6. Have you continued the discussion on other online platforms or in person following Twitter Chats?
   - I end up following a lot of those people on Twitter and working with them that way.

7. Have Twitter Chats improved your ability to engage with Ag experts at USAID? Please elaborate.
   - Not necessarily. With my job, I am already pretty well connected with ag experts and I already engage with many of the Twitter experts long before they are on the AskAg.

8. What do you like most about #AskAg Twitter Chats and how does it compare to other Twitter Chats?
   - AskAg is pretty comparable to other Twitter chats. Sometimes it works really well – there was a gender one in the spring that was really well run. There was a set of questions and every 20 minutes we switched. However, I am not sure that the experts are really Twitter savvy like they are on other Twitter chats. I feel like the AskAg experts never use Twitter in their regular life so it is too hard for them to tweet quickly. That makes the AskAg Twitter chats kind of slow compared to others. I would also like it if the experts would continue to tweet. I follow them during an AskAg chat and then they never tweet again.

9. Do you have one or two recommendations on how we can improve our Twitter Chats?
   - I live on the west coast so sometimes I simply can’t participate because I am not awake yet. I understand the need to be live when many people are awake but maybe regionally focused chats would help. I am awake for much of the time that people are awake in Asia, for example. Also, the ag experts that you choose really have to be great at formulating their answers into 140 characters. This means they need to practice. They need to have some sound bites ready. They need to have some links prepared ahead of time that they can link to. In other words, they need one person supporting each of them. When I am the “speaker” in a Twitter chat, my communications person is sitting next to me, loading Horticulture CRSP things online so I can link to them. Before the chat, we pre-load things we think will be interesting and make short URLs to them. And during the chat, she helps me think through answers. So, more preparation and support is key.

**Agrilinks**

10. Were you familiar with Agrilinks prior to the Twitter Chat?
    - Yes, I love Agrilinks – I have an account, I follow the blogs, I watch a lot of webinars (except for the ones that are too early in the morning), I try to tweet their stuff around. I’m a fan.
Follow-up with USAID experts
Questions asked:

1. Did you watch either Twitter 101 or 102 training modules? Did you find them useful?
2. Did you see or find value in participating in the #AskAg Twitter Chats? Would you do it again?
3. Have you continued to use Twitter after the chat? Why or why not?

Jason Wolfe
1. No, I didn’t watch them.
2. Sure. The fast pace and somewhat superficial engagement with public participants was very different than other media, but it prompted some different thinking and new ways of getting key messages out there.
3. My Twitter use/behavior has not changed since the #AskAg Twitter chat (I used it before and continued to use it in the same way afterwards).

Rachel Blum
1. N/A - did not watch
2. Absolutely yes I found great value in the #AskAg Twitter Chat, as it had two major benefits: 1) it generated information for which there was relatively little documented evidence and/or knowledge around the topic (rural youth), and 2) it introduced me to a whole new set of youth practitioners, policy makers, and academics whose existence I was unaware of before. And yes I would do a Twitter Chat again... and already did! I worked with the E3/ED office to put together a Twitter Chat on youth evidence and it was a great success: @USAIDEducation gained more followers from the Twitter Chat than from any other event combined.
3. Yes, the #AskAg Twitter Chat made me a more active user - since the event I went from 12 followers to 96 followers. I now Tweet about 5 times per week. And I now use Twitter to stay up to date on topics, conversations, and new reports that are relevant to my work.

Sylvia Cabus
1. I did not look at the videos but I did read through the quick tips.
2. I enjoyed participating in the Twitter chats and would definitely do them again.
3. Yes - but it is a bit difficult separating the personal from the professional tweets. I wish LPA would allow us to use our usaid.gov addresses. I hear that is in process....
Stephanie Grosser/Ben Hubbard
1. No- neither of us watched the Twitter 101 training module ahead of time.
2. Yes- we saw a huge value in participating. In fact, a few months later we did another Twitter chat but this time hosted by LPA. They've scaled up their Twitter chats after seeing how successful yours were (I believe). We would love to do it again. We're thinking about our next topic!
3. DCA continues to use the @USAID_Credit handle. I don't believe Ben tweets out personally but he does contribute to the DCA handle. Ben is going on TDY to Burma next month and is going to live tweet the whole thing from the DCA handle.

Caren Grown
1. I do not remember but I have watched the 101 module. Truthfully, it didn’t click until I actually started using Twitter and doing the chat.
2. Yes - It was fun!
3. No - I am just too busy with other things.

Kristen Gendron
1. I did not.
2. Yes, we have actually done another Twitter chat since. Would participate again, but perhaps on a broader topic. We did the chat with #AskUSAID, although have been considering others between our handle and our grantees directly.
3. Yes, we were active on Twitter before and continue to be.

Moffat Ngugi
1. I did watch both primers and they were really useful to me.
2. The value in doing Twitter chat is very obvious to me and I would definitely do it again and more frequently even!
3. I have been using Twitter since because it opened up my mind in terms of reaching people quickly & easily. I now tweet when I am excited about an event or news, I have now have a connection to LinkedIn where I am fairly active as well and try to track social media issues on HootSuite (all because of this water & ag Twitter chat!)

Clara Cohen
1. I didn’t watch the training modules
2. I got a lot out of participating in the Twitter chat. I’d like to go back to the archive as I prepare talking points for Paul Weisenfeld's remarks at our upcoming innovATE symposium. Yes, I would do it again.
3. I haven’t continued with Twitter -- mostly because of lack of time! I simply can’t do it all!