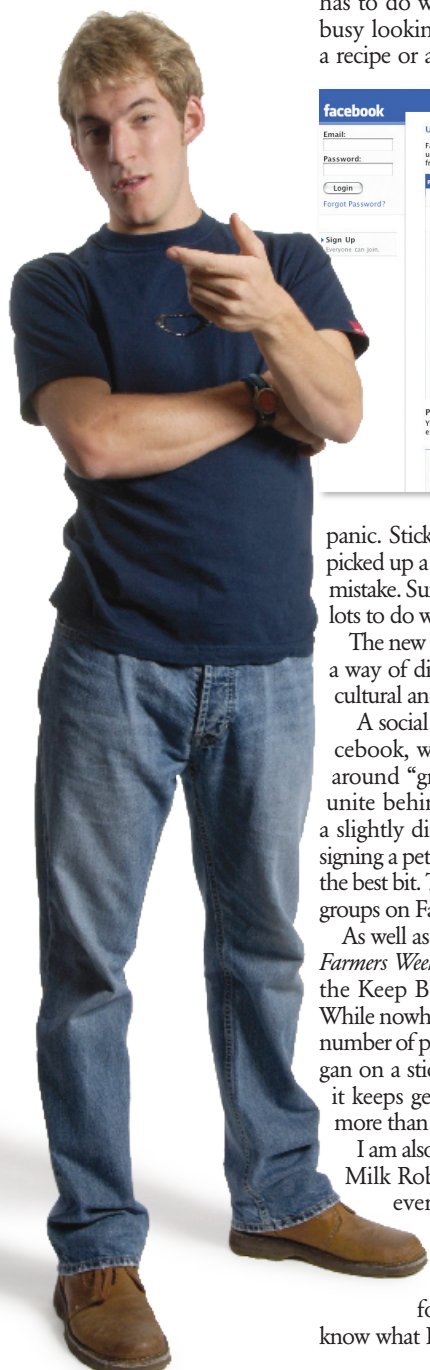


# Get face to face with rural allies

Social networking websites are massively popular these days. **Adam Bedford** investigates how useful they are to country people



**U**ntil recently, I thought social networking was just a fancy way of describing going out for a beer with your mates. That is what it used to mean, until websites like Facebook appeared. Now things are different.

Anyone can join Facebook and millions have. For the uninitiated, this allows you to set up a profile of yourself and then people you know can become your "friend" and vice versa. Among other things, you can send messages, look at photos and write notes on your friend's "wall".

If you are wondering what this has to do with farming – and are busy looking for a tractor review, a recipe or a new job – then don't

be sour!", the group cries, "our cereal would be bone dry, our scones would go without clotted cream and our cheese on toast would be just toast!". What a brilliant description of why milk is good I thought, and then read the real reason behind the group. "The case for milk seems obvious," they note, "but we need to make the case for the milk producers who are facing testing times".

It is clear that the groups, as well as being humorous, can also raise important issues. One person says "we should all co-operate!", and another explains the milk supply chain. Somebody else replies, "are you saying we shouldn't buy milk from supermarkets? I don't understand!".

This shows that just because a fairer deal on milk makes sense to those involved in farming, not everybody knows the issues. Facebook highlights this very well.

I also recently joined the 12,528 members of the Support Your Farmers – They Feed You group. This is for "people who realise that farming is vital to everyday life".

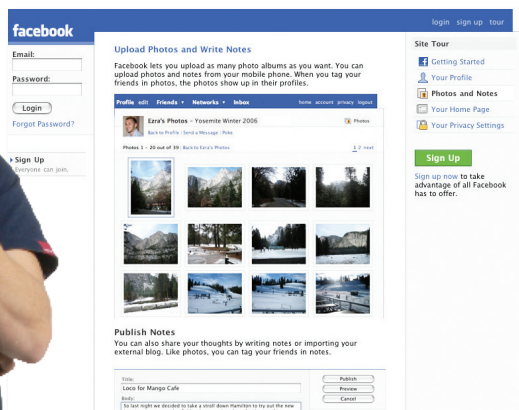
I was pleased to click the "join" button of this one. One member from America is apparently "glad he is not the only guy out there trying to save rural America, the foundation of morals, values and a strong work ethic". This is strong stuff, I think, and then read in the Farmers Need More Credit group that "farming is quite possibly the noblest profession in the history of all mankind".

Thankfully, not all groups are so serious. My favourite is the meat-eaters' group, For Every Animal You Don't Eat, I'm Going to Eat Three. While this does not necessarily suit everybody's tastes, I did have to nod my head at one comment. "The only greens I eat," says one member, "is whatever my steak ate." Brilliant.

The groups range from the deadly serious to the utterly ridiculous and everything in between. Facebook is excellent for keeping in touch with people, and from the farming viewpoint is great for getting people discussing important and not so important, issues. It also gives most of the population who have no involvement in agriculture the chance to ask questions and discover things that appear simple to us, but not so straightforward to everybody else.

I am just hoping that traditional social networking doesn't fall by the wayside. I can't see how it will, and not if the YFC has anything to do with it. "To all young farmers across the world!" the YFC group shouts. "Big up the cider drinkers!"

I can almost hear a Würzels tune somewhere there.



**New internet sites like Facebook can help spread the word about rural issues.**

panic. Stick with me. You haven't picked up a computer magazine by mistake. Surprisingly, Facebook has lots to do with farming.

The new forums on FWi provide a way of discussing all things agricultural and sharing photos.

A social networking site like Facebook, with its structure based around "groups", enables you to unite behind common causes in a slightly different way – much as signing a petition would. And here's the best bit. There are lots of farming groups on Facebook.

As well as being a member of the *Farmers Weekly* group, I am also in the Keep Britain Farming group. While nowhere nearly as high as the number of people who have this slogan on a sticker in the car window, it keeps getting bigger. There are more than 2200 of us so far.

I am also a member of the Great Milk Robbery group. They ask everybody, "where would we be without milk?".

As an honorary milk delivery operative for the past 10 years, I know what I think. "Our tea would

## FWi space

If you are interested in social networking you will definitely want to check out FWiSpace – a platform designed for the farming community to discuss issues, make contacts, share pictures and offer support to each other.

It is a free, easy-to-use service and a great place for us in the agricultural industry to meet up and exchange ideas.

You can put up a message at any time of the day or night. Or you can just read the comments left by others.

The opportunity to view and share pictures of your own farm is another big draw. Since the site was launched in July we have had more than 500 pictures from all parts of the UK. Why not take a look?

Visit [www.fwi.co.uk/community](http://www.fwi.co.uk/community)  
**\* You can also have your say about which are your favourite farming-related Facebook groups by going to [www.fwi.co.uk/forums](http://www.fwi.co.uk/forums)**

### FACEBOOK FARMING GROUPS

- \* Askham Bryan College Group
- \* Harper Adams Disco Dancing Injuries (in the bar)
- \* The John Deere Appreciation Group
- \* I love to show cattle
- \* Extreme Sheep Shearing (UK)
- \* Dairy Farming is the best
- \* Beef cattle farmer and proud of it!