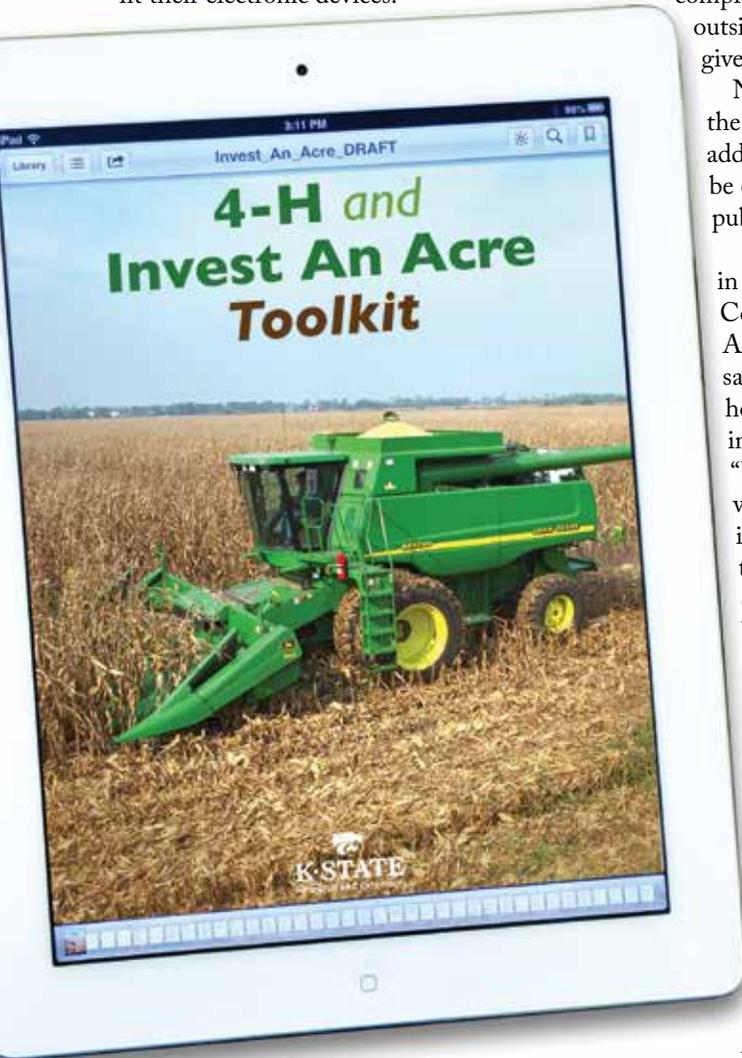


# Communication Legacy Advances with New Publication Formats

K-State's sesquicentennial leads us to ponder our heritage as the first land-grant institution and the research and outreach mission that serves the people of Kansas. In the past, communicating everything from fertilizer application guidelines to 4-H dog show rules was accomplished with print publications, but now the public needs formats that fit their electronic devices.



K-State Research and Extension professionals are striving to keep up. One project in the works is a website for 4-H horticulture judging guidelines. Evelyn Neier, associate specialist in 4-H Youth Development, explained that horticulture judging participants need to identify plants from the foliage, fruits, flowers, and sometimes seeds, and they must learn different varieties.

"It's always been a challenge for coaches and kids to find all those plants to study," Neier said. "We've been asked for study kits and manuals, and it's overwhelming to think how you would make a study kit for 120 plants."

So the website project was born. "Kids have so much more access to electronic media," said Neier. "It's not a complete substitute for getting outside to study plants, but it gives us another option."

Neier adds that when the website is complete, adding plants or photos will be easier than revising a publication.

Linda Gilmore, editor in the Department of Communications and Agricultural Education, said thinking about how the audience uses information is vital. "We need to make sure we're offering something in a format that is going to be most useful for the desired goal, not just because it's cool."

She added that books are often prohibitively expensive: "We want the material to be accessible, and kids are comfortable online."

New formats also have an interactivity advantage. Mark Stadlander, editor in the Department of Communications and Agricultural Education,

said projects are moving beyond mere availability online. In the "Wheat Disease Identification" book, readers can click on photos and see images of diseases.

He noted that some of his clients "are interested in alternate formats that add more value and a better user experience to educational materials."

Electronic publications (epubs) can be viewed on a variety of devices and

provide enhanced content. They are convenient for the user, Stadlander said, because after they're downloaded to a device, users don't need an Internet connection to read them.

According to 4-H specialist Deryl Waldren, youth like this format.

"Kids don't want all text. They want pictures, videos, and live links to websites so they can explore," he said. "We need to move that way as fast as we can."

To that end, Waldren is working with Gilmore on an epub called the "Invest an Acre Toolkit." The publication is a great candidate for an epub because it is designed to reach many audiences in an effort to help local groups of all types learn to reduce hunger.

"It uses materials from a variety of places and will include a recording piece you can use to fill in information for your project and other tools that make it easy to gather information," explained Gilmore.

Waldren hopes to see many 4-H resources offered in a similar format soon.

"We're hoping to move our project manuals that way, because they need to be in a format kids want," he said. "Anyone who works with youth is in this same situation: It can't be just print."

Stadlander and Gilmore say their shop is ready to assist Waldren.

"We posted some of the first extension PDFs," said Stadlander. "We were one of the first public universities to heavily adopt the PDF format and make sure most of our publications were accessible for free online. To stay viable and valuable, we need to continue to adapt to new technology and new formats."

Gilmore agrees and notes that she and her fellow editors are able to help clients consider what format best serves their information and audience.

"Editors are aware of the things that have changed," she said. "We make an effort to pay attention to trends and can help people understand their audiences."

— Sarah Hancock