

Communicating About the Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA:  
An Application of Organizational Identity, Organizational Image, and the Situational Theory  
of Publics to a Public Relations Plan

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the School of Journalism  
and Mass Communication (Public Relations)

Chapel Hill  
2007

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To Eddie, Finnbar, Patrick, Grey, Annadale, Isabel, and Boo, for their love and support.

## ABSTRACT

CLAIRE HERMANN: Communicating About the Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA: An Application of Organizational Identity, Organizational Image and the Situational Theory of Publics to a Public Relations Plan  
(Under the direction of Lois Boynton, Elizabeth Dougall, and Sarah Dempsey)

This project analyzes RAFI's current communication methods and provides a plan for its communication future. I begin by giving a short overview of RAFI's structure and history to provide context to the discussion. Second, I review literature on organizational identity and segmenting publics that will illuminate the key role that communication plays in defining an organization and helping it connect with stakeholders. Finally, this project develops a public relations campaign to create a coherent and compelling way of communicating about the organization to stakeholders while working within the time and budget constraints of a small organization.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background**

### ***Preface: The Personal Side***

I came to the Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA for the first time in the spring of 2006. I was meeting the director, Betty Bailey, to interview her for a class on executive leadership. Within 20 minutes of arriving in the building, I found myself seated at a conference table in a sunlit library, talking with Betty and with Kathy Zaumseil, the associate director, about what I might be able to do for the organization. I started working there as an intern that summer, and have continued to volunteer ever since.

In RAFI I found an organization that tapped into my growing fascination with where our food comes from, and its human and ecological impact. RAFI staff described the organization as “anti-globalization,” working to protect local food systems, small farms, and sustainable agriculture. Initially, I was a bit dazzled at having an international organization in Pittsboro, N.C., a few miles from my hometown. As I talked with Betty and Kathy, I realized that RAFI's programming was geographically similar to those diverse local systems it strove to support; the organization works primarily in North Carolina, but also addresses issues of national policy, consults with farmers internationally, and works with coalitions of organizations that span state and national borders.

At RAFI I also found a staff dedicated to their work and to each other. Many of the staff members, including Betty and Kathy, have been with RAFI since its founding, a testament to the team in the high-turnover world of small nonprofits. The staff members

come from a variety of specialties and backgrounds. For example, the staff includes a man instrumental in developing the original United States Department of Agriculture organic standards (Michael Sligh, director of the Just Foods program), an aspiring organic farmer (Jason Roehrig, director of the Tobacco Communities Initiatives), several community organizers (Becky Ceartas and Laura Klauke, both with the Contract Agriculture Reform program), and the former executive director of the Chatham Arts Council (Regina Bridgeman, the office and communications manager). Although staff members enjoy flexible hours, telecommuting options, and ample vacation times, they also deal with the abundant workload and limited funding familiar to so many nonprofit staff.

RAFI is currently undergoing a period of transition. Betty Bailey will retire in two years, and several of the other founding and long-time staff, including John Justice, the development director, have retired recently. Staff and board members are beginning to create a new strategic plan (Zaumseil, personal communication, June 2, 2006). As the RAFI staff and board work to define the organization's future, the time seems ripe to work to find a more comprehensive and effective public face for the diversity of work and passions that comprise RAFI.

My connection to RAFI's work and my admiration for and friendship with the staff led to the development of this project. This project analyzes RAFI's current communication methods and provides a plan for its communication future. I begin by giving a short overview of RAFI's structure and history to provide context to the discussion. Second, I review literature on organizational identity and segmenting publics that will illuminate the key role that communication plays in defining an organization and helping it connect with stakeholders. Finally, this project develops a public relations campaign to create a coherent

and compelling way of communicating about the organization to stakeholders while working within the time and budget constraints of a small organization.

***Background: An Overview of RAFI***

RAFI grew out of the National Sharecroppers' Fund, an organization founded in the 1930s, whose leaders included Dr. Frank Porter Graham and Eleanor Roosevelt ([rafiusa.org](http://rafiusa.org), about us). RAFI split from the National Sharecropper's Fund in 1980. RAFI's Web site lays out the organization's defining goals: Securing a reliable supply of safe, healthy food, which depends on strong family farms and rural communities, close connections between consumers and producers of food, environmentally sound farming and safeguarding of agricultural biodiversity. The site states that RAFI will achieve this by promoting conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity as insurance against human and natural disasters; educating farmers, consumers and policy-makers about the importance of sustainable agriculture for rural and urban communities; safeguarding soil, water, air and rural communities through promotion of sustainable agricultural practices and sound rural development; advising farmers and their communities of rights and opportunities; assisting agricultural communities in having a voice for their concerns and in organizational development; and linking communities together for the common good ([rafiusa.org](http://rafiusa.org), about us). The goals illustrate the breadth and diversity of RAFI's work on a variety of divergent issues relating to agriculture and farming.

Each program within RAFI has one or two dedicated staff members. The executive director, office and communications manager, assistant director, development director, and accountant all work to maintain the organization as a whole. The staff stays in contact

through frequent meetings. All of the RAFI staffers have offices on one hall of its new building, with the exception of Michael Sligh, Just Foods program director, who works from home. RAFI's building is relatively large; it accommodates all the offices, a library, a kitchen and workroom, a small conference center, and the offices of several nonprofit tenants. Still, the space is laid out to ensure that staff members see each other often in the course of their days, even if they need to close their doors occasionally to work on their separate projects. Despite this closeness, however, RAFI's programs are fairly distinct.

### ***RAFI Programs***

RAFI's programs change through time in order to meet new issues and opportunities as they arise. Currently, RAFI works on four main programs. They are Just Foods, Tobacco Communities Initiatives, the Contract Agriculture Reform Program, and Farm Sustainability.

Through Just Foods, one of its keystone programs, RAFI advocates for sustainable and socially equitable food production. Michael Sligh, the Just Foods director, was instrumental in developing the original United States Department of Agriculture organic standards (Zaumseil, personal communication, May 17, 2006). This program continues to promote meaningful standards for food labeling, both by working to ensure the integrity of the federal organic agriculture regulations and by working with a coalition of groups to create standards for a label that would guarantee social justice in food production (Richardson, 2006). The program also educates farmers and consumers about the importance of diversity in agriculture and the dangers of genetically modified foods. Just Foods staff also works to influence federal policy. Finally, through Just Foods, RAFI works with farmers worldwide to help them improve production, marketing and research in organic and sustainable farming.

Just Foods' strategies include policy advocacy and advising; organizing regional, national and international coalitions and workshops; providing legal research and support to farmers and processors challenging the weakening of organic standards and contamination of fields by genetically modified crops; developing reports and other resources for researchers; and providing educational and outreach materials.

The Tobacco Communities Initiatives allow RAFI to administer the Agricultural Reinvestment Fund grant program. The end of state-imposed tobacco quotas and tobacco auctions and the increased importation of tobacco from overseas have dramatically lowered the price of the crop (Roehrig, personal communication, May 26, 2006). North Carolina traditionally has had a large number of small and mid-size farms because of the large profit-per-acre that tobacco provided. These smaller farmers find it increasingly difficult to make money. The 2004 state tobacco buyout provides all tobacco farmers and quota holders with a yearly check. According to Jason Roehrig, the Tobacco Communities Initiatives program director, this check does not provide enough income for most farmers to replace their tobacco profits. The unusually large profit-per-acre that tobacco provided created many small and medium-sized farms in North Carolina. Simply transitioning to commodity crops, such as soybeans or corn, would not provide small farmers with nearly enough income to keep a farm solvent, Roehrig said.

The main work of the Initiatives is the Agricultural Reinvestment Grants, through which RAFI distributes grants to individuals and communities in North Carolina who have lost farm income due to the recent restructuring of the tobacco market in the state. In past years, the program has been funded by a state-appropriated grant from the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund. In 2007, the program is funded by a smaller, also state-appropriated

grant from the Golden Leaf Foundation. The program allows farmers to try out innovative ideas for increasing farm income, from raising grass-fed beef cattle to creating a community kitchen. The projects are intended to provide a collection of documented techniques, successes, and lessons from and for farmers.

The Tobacco Communities Initiatives program also heads up the Farmers and Lenders Project, which provides guidance and resources to farmers and agricultural lenders to ease the process of obtaining loans for non-traditional agricultural projects like those funded by the reinvestment grants (Bonitz, personal communication, August 1, 2006).

Through the Contract Agriculture Reform program, RAFI works to ensure fair relationships between contract farmers and the agribusiness corporations with which they contract (Ceartas, personal communication, June 20, 2006). The poultry and pork industries consist mainly of farmers who own only equipment and facilities. Larger corporate processors, such as Purdue and Tyson, own the animals themselves. Contracts are also routinely used for other crops, including, in the years since the buyout, tobacco. According to Becky Ceartas, the Contract Agriculture Reform program director, the current structure of contracts between the two parties now places an undue portion of the financial risk on the individual farmers' shoulders without providing adequate options for recourse if a grievance should arise. For instance, poultry farmers must renew their contracts every few months, but also must invest large amounts of money in building facilities that meet processor standards. If a farmer loses the contract, the debt from facilities costs alone has been enough to force several farmers to foreclose. Most contracts include mandatory arbitration clauses, so farmers cannot appeal to the courts if they feel they lost their contracts unfairly. The goals of the Contract Agriculture Reform Program are to provide information and advice to farmers about

contract farming and other options, work toward policy change on a national level, and educate the public about the issues surrounding contract agriculture. This work ranges from encouraging volunteers in key congressional districts to write to newspapers to training rural clergy recognize signs of depression in hopes of providing an emotional safety net for farmers who must foreclose on their family land.

The Farm Sustainability program works in North Carolina and other southeastern states. According to a report by Scott Marlow, the program director, the program's staff works on diverse projects with farmers, especially in times of crisis, to enable them to continue farming (Marlow, 2006). The advocacy arm of the program provides in-depth financial counseling and advocacy to lenders and the National Appeals Division of the United States Department of Agriculture. The program also involves workshops with farmers and farm advisors about issues surrounding disaster assistance. The clergy education project trains clergy to understand the need for mental health services and other support in rural communities, where changes in agriculture and the loss of manufacturing jobs may lead to unique social issues. Lastly, the Farm Sustainability program staff work with mid-scale farmers to help them make the transition from commodity crops to higher-value crops. The program provides technical support for marketing initiatives, advocates for policy changes, and works to increase participation in and effectiveness of conservation initiatives.

Taken together, this diversity of programming allows RAFI to take a comprehensive approach to sustainable agriculture. The organization's influence extends from individual farms to national policy. Staff works with farmers who practice conventional agriculture and farmers who grow exclusively organic and sustainable food. RAFI's values tap into issues of environmentalism, social justice, reduction of urban sprawl, animal welfare, economic

development, and the embedded myth of the American family farm. A diverse approach to agricultural issues defines RAFI's work, but also makes the project of presenting an easily understandable and comprehensive public image challenging. For example, donors who are attracted to RAFI's work in organics may be less than enthusiastic about RAFI's work with conventional poultry farmers. Still, RAFI's dedication to creating a diverse, sustainable, and just food system includes supporting farmers who struggle with a wide range of social, economic, and environmental issues. RAFI must find a way to communicate to these diverse publics about its varied work while still maintaining a coherent image of its work. In the next section, I will review scholarly literature from several disciplines in order to understand how RAFI staff might create and communicate a cohesive and effective image for the organization



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### ***Introduction***

The bulk of public relations theory development and scholarly research focuses on corporate public relations. Dozier and Lauzen (2000) argued that the bulk of public relations literature addresses the viewpoint of organizations large enough to employ a specialized public relations staff. In many nonprofit organizations, however, the public relations work is done by a staff member with little specialized training and with several other responsibilities (Dyer, et al., 2002). Dozier and Lauzen called for work that looks at public relations as a part of larger social and political structures, not simply as a professional function. They argued that activist organizations cannot practice public relations in the same way as for-profit corporations, mainly because their members owe allegiance to a cause over the organization, and are unwilling to compromise in ways that make sense to corporate public relations practitioners.

To address this discrepancy, I will move beyond public relations scholarship to look at literature in other fields that uncovers the roots and implications of public relations practiced in a nonprofit, social movement organization, not a corporation. However, my work will be grounded in an understanding of a public's relationship to a particular organization, not to a cause in general. Although RAFI, like most nonprofits, exists to serve a mission that takes precedent over the profitability of the organization, it needs to develop relationships as an organization, not just as a cause. It asks diverse publics to invest in its survival and to trust its work. To that end, I will draw upon the structure and tools of a traditional public relations

plan, while acknowledging the tensions and special concerns that arise within nonprofit and social movement organizations.

This literature review moves from focusing first on internal sense-making in a social movement organization, to the implications of the process of communication, and finally to the targeting of that communication to particular publics. First, I will define identity and image and their interactions using literature drawn from communications studies and management studies journals. Second, I will examine organizational identity and image as discussed in the context of social movement organizations to understand the techniques and implications for creating identity and image in a nonprofit organization like RAFL. This literature explores the way social movement organizations use identity and image to connect with and mobilize publics. Third, I will review literature that addresses the role of communications in creating legitimacy and accountability in a social movement organization. Fourth, I will turn to more traditional public relations literature by presenting James Grunig's (1989, 2000) situational theory of publics in order to set a foundation for effectively segmenting RAFL's stakeholders.

### ***Organizational Identity and Image***

Organizational identity traces its roots as a method of scholarly inquiry to the work of organizational communication researchers Stuart Albert and David A. Whetten (1985), who defined organizational identity as a composite of claimed central character, claimed distinctiveness, and claimed temporal continuity. Central character comprises the stated core elements of an organization, those which define it as a distinct entity. Claimed distinctiveness consists of the qualities that set an organization apart from others. Claimed temporal

continuity happens when an organization maintains the appearance of a continuous, permanent presence in the face of variability. In other words, an organization's identity is defined by the central, distinctive, and enduring aspects of an organization's character (Hatch & Schultz, 1997).

Management scholars Dennis A. Goia, Majken Schultz, and Kevin G. Corely (2000) argued that an organization's external image and its identity are inextricably connected; feedback from external publics prompts members to re-inspect their own organization's identity. Communication studies scholar Philip Gerard Aust's (2004) definition of organizational identity as “an organization's distinctive character discernible by those communicated values manifest in its externally transmitted messages” (p. 531), confirmed this connection between identity and external image. Management scholars Suzanne G. Scott and Vicki R. Lane (2000) also emphasized this connection, arguing that organizational identity is created mutually by managers and stakeholders through the process of communication. These scholars defined organizational identity as, not solely the existence of core meanings, but the explicit communication of those meanings. They established the importance of public relations in the creation of a coherent and compelling organizational identity.

Goia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) explained image as a conception of the organization that is projected to external stakeholders. It consists both of the construction of the image for external publics by an organization's members and the reception and interpretation of those images by those external publics. Marketing researchers Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz (1997) defined organizational image as “a holistic and vivid impression held by an individual or a particular group towards an organization and...a result of sense-making by the group and

communication by the organization of a fabricated and projected picture of itself” (p. 359). Image and identity are both created in part in the interaction and communication between group members and external publics. However, identity is also dependent on interaction between organizational members and is defined by their internal understanding of the organization. Image is dependent on the interactions between members of external publics is defined by their external understandings of the organization.

Goia et al. (2000) also pointed out that postmodern analysis sees identity and image growing from understandings between publics, not from any substantive bases. Image and identity are ultimately constructed understandings, not monolithic realities. Understood in this light, identity and image have the potential to disconnect from an organization's actions. An organization may have multiple identities or multiple images. Goia et al. also observed that an organization's image and identity may be quite disparate. Managers need to decide whether differences between images, identities, and practice are beneficial or harmful to the organization. Management researcher Samia Chreim (2005) noted that some scholars see uniformity of image and identity as a sign of a strong, healthy organization, while others claim that a multiplicity of images and identities shows that the organization respects the voices and opinions of diverse publics.

Chreim (2005) disagreed with earlier scholars who saw stability of identity as critical for organizational health. She asserted that, unlike individuals, organizations function best when their identity tends towards a duality of continuity and change, which she terms “confluence” (p. 587). Rather than viewing identity as the solid, stable core of an organization, Chreim saw it as “continually constituted in narrative texts that may be reflexively woven by organizational authors” (p. 569). Goia et al. (2000) also found that

identity does not remain stable throughout time. Goia et al. defined healthy identities as existing in a state of “adaptive instability,” (p. 74) because inherent instability allows the authors of organizational identity to adapt an identity effectively to environmental demands. This constant creative state allows organizations with healthy identities to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances.

External factors may be stimuli for change in identities, but Goia et al. (2000) argued that environments also require identities to maintain some semblance of stability. Individuals generally prefer to maintain a familiar environment, so they discourage radical shifts in the identities of organizations in which they have a stake. Therefore, the symbols used to communicate an organization’s identity need to remain constant through time, even as their meanings change. These symbols may be words, images, or stories that are open to changing interpretations. As an example of these competing pressures, Chreim (2005) found that although the values at the heart of identities change, the words used to communicate key values remained the same. For instance, in Chreim's study of a Canadian bank, the concept of “first” changed from connoting age to connoting innovativeness. This transformation allowed the bank to adapt as necessary to its environment yet maintain a sense of continuity, stability, and security that enabled employees and customers to accept the changes more easily. This explanation fits well with Goia et al.'s (2000) assertion that identities may maintain continuity without remaining static.

This change of the meanings of symbols also extends to a change in the narratives an organization tells about itself. Chriem (2005) defined narratives as the “stories, excuses, and myths [that] organize our experience and the memory of human happenings and thus constitute reality” (p. 570). When organizations embark on a change of image or identity,

they reinterpret the meanings of their historical narratives (Goia et al., 2000). This new view of history may emphasize the need for change. Chreim found that an organization may also change the meanings of its past in order to frame its current actions as a logical progression from past actions, thereby assuring its publics that past successes could only be repeated in present endeavors. For example, as the bank in Chreim's study sought to change its image from connoting age to connoting innovation, bank executives selectively drew episodes from the bank's history in order to depict it as having blazed the trail into many new territories, from its founding to its digging a canal to its contemporary expansion into the United States.

Identity helps an organization reconcile its understood central characteristics with the reality of the organization's work. Identities are ideally fluid and adaptable entities that nonetheless maintain a sense of continuity. They allow publics to carry their past relationships with the organization forward into a changing present. Another function of identity in social movement organizations is to involve members and access power for an organization.

### ***Image, Identity, and Social Movement Organizations***

The literature above illuminates the ways that identity flows from an organization to external publics in order to create the organization's image. The organizations discussed in this body of literature are social movement organizations, a category that includes many nonprofits. Social movement organizations were defined by communication scholar John Lofland (1996) as “associations of persons making idealistic or moralistic claims about how human personal or group life should be organized that at the time of their claims-making, are marginal or excluded from mainstream society” (p. 3). Not all organizations incorporated as

nonprofit organizations under United States law are social movement organizations, and not all social movement organizations are nonprofit organizations. RAFI, however, fits into both categories, as do many other organizations. Therefore, the literature applying image and identity theories specifically to social movement organizations can help illuminate the specific ways that image and identity work intersect with RAFI's work.

Ethnologist Daniel D. Martin's (2002) study of weight-loss and fat-affirmative groups suggested that organizations' members align their personal identity with their organizations' identity. As Martin explains,

As the language of the organizations becomes meaningful to individuals for explaining lived experience and is adopted in sense-making activities, that language becomes a vehicle through which individuals become tied to organizations. (p. 200)

Therefore, the language and symbols used to communicate an organization's identity become powerful tools when they connect with the language and symbols that the target audience uses to explain itself.

Sociologists David A. Snow, E. Burke Rocheford, Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford (1986) referred to this type of connection between organizational and individual interpretive frameworks as frame alignment. For instance, if RAFI wished to use frame bridging, it might talk about farm preservation to environmentalists using rhetoric about preserving open space and preventing urban sprawl. Frame amplification might help convince political conservatives of the need to support farmers in order to help preserve their values and way of life. Frame extension might ask activists who work on issues surrounding global warming to create local food systems that require less fossil fuels in production and in transportation. Frame transformation might target conventional grocery shoppers and ask

them to think of local or organic food as higher in quality, and therefore worth buying, despite higher prices.

Sociologist Eric L. Hirsch (1990) argued that compelling frames establish the injustice of the situation being mobilized around, establish the possibility of change through action and the necessity for participating in that action, and identify and polarize the key actors into protagonists and antagonists. Hirsch's research showed how organizational identity can mobilize action among both uninvolved and already active publics, and will help to apply organizational identity theory to the strategic construction and targeting of public relations campaigns.

Sociology researcher Joshua Gamson's (1996) study of collective identity in two New York gay and lesbian film festivals illustrates the ways that tension between various organizational stakeholders can shape organizational identity, especially in social movement organizations. He argued that organizations experience tension between institutionalized, or “downward” influences, and “upward” influence from grassroots stakeholders. He argued that organizations can easily detach their image and identity from those stakeholders who do not directly provide resources, meaning that, over time, the grassroots constituents often have less and less influence in creating the image and identity of an organization originally intended to support them. The need to connect with funding can lead organizational images and identities away from the original mission of the group.

This literature establishes organizational identity as a dynamic construction that can enable an organization to connect with key publics. Organizations must respond to the environment and stakeholders through their image. In this dynamic interaction, identity and image shape each other, ideally conveying the reality of the organization's practice by using



symbols and stories that resonate with internal and external publics. Gamson's (1996) work shows that creating and maintaining a nonprofit's organizational identity involves negotiating competing demands as well as responding to pressures. The literature surrounding legitimacy and accountability in social change organizations offers a way to define and explore this tension.

### ***Balancing Act: Legitimacy, Accountability, and Nonprofit Communications***

Nonprofits organizations must communicate with an array of stakeholding publics, acknowledging that the beneficiaries of programs and advocacy are different from funders, board members, and other decision-makers (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Hudson, 2001; Lewis, 2001; Van Rooy, 2004). Nonprofit organizations experience tension between the needs and understandings of stakeholders who support them and those of stakeholders whom they support. The former provide organizations with legitimacy in the form of funding and political influence, while serving the latter is crucial to organizational missions (Ganesh, 2003). Communication scholar Shiv Ganesh defined legitimacy as the ways that an organization's existence is supported by its environment and accountability as the ways an organization justifies its existence to its environment. The concepts closely parallel Gamson's (1996) downward and upward influences. Accountability and legitimacy exist in complex relation to each other, but both are vital to the survival of the organization and the fulfillment of its mission.

Often, legitimacy ends up being privileged over accountability (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Ganesh, 2003; Lewis, 2005). In other words, as Gamson (1996) suggested, organizations often find themselves meeting their funders' and regulators' needs rather than

the needs of the publics they claim to serve. The reasons range from pressures to compete for funding; hierarchal structures; short-term, quantitative goals set by funders; and the increased professionalization of the nonprofit field. In order to avoid privileging funders over beneficiaries, or vice versa, organizations should consciously and carefully manage the tension between accountability and legitimacy (Trethaway & Ashcraft, 2004).

Organizational leaders can make intentional decisions to help manage this tension. Perceived accountability can be critical to maintaining legitimacy (Hudson, 2001; Van Rooy, 2004). By making accountability an integral part of the program's image, an organization creates a dependent relationship between legitimacy and accountability. This constructed relationship may help the organization successfully negotiate this tension by assuring that accountability remains a priority, even when the organization is interacting with those from whom it seeks legitimacy. For instance, if an organization tells donors that it partners with communities in India, the organization should be able demonstrate that it involves those communities in decision-making processes and provides them with useful resources and information if it wants donors to invest in its work. Communication becomes a key process through which, ideally, accountability and legitimacy are constructed and created.

The literature surrounding accountability and legitimacy does not directly address the implications of theory for public relations practice, but applying it to the specific processes of nonprofit communication shows that the concepts have deep implications for nonprofit public relations. The conflicts between accountability and legitimacy may be reconciled, or at least managed, through strategic communication. So far, this literature review has laid out the implications of an organization's identity and of the process of communicating that identity to diverse stakeholders in order to facilitate their construction of the organization's image. Of

course, RAFI cannot interact with every foundation, every farmer, and every activist. The last section will explore using the literature the situational theory of publics in order to illuminate the process of segmenting RAFI's stakeholder publics so that communication can be effective and efficient.

### ***Situational Theory of Publics***

As public relations scholars Sam Dyer, Teri Buell, Mashere Harrison, and Sarah Weber (2000) recommended, the work of good nonprofit public relations needs not only a better understanding of the implications of communications, but a clearer understanding of whom the organization is contacting. Hirsch (1990) and Snow, et al. (1986) suggested that the relationship of a public's identity to an organization's identity can help move people to action and create strong ties between stakeholders and organizations. This literature indicates that finding and using the intersections of personal and organizational identity may be a more powerful tool for targeting a campaign than demographics or other segmenting techniques. James Grunig's (1989) situational theory of publics applies this idea within the structure of public relations theory and scholarship. This theory has been applied to activist scenarios in several studies, and provides insight into the particular ways a nonprofit organization can mobilize its members and stakeholders.

Public relations scholar James E. Grunig's (1989) situational theory of publics proposed three independent variables regarding the behavior of publics: problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement. Problem recognition occurs when a person identifies a situation as problematic and considers what might be done to solve the problem. Constraint recognition occurs when a person perceives obstacles to his or her ability to solve

the recognized problem. Level of involvement is the extent to which a person feels connected to and invested in the problem. Audiences can be segmented by determining whether each of these three independent variables is high or low. Grunig (1989) claimed that segmenting publics based on the three independent variables was likely to lead to a more effective campaign than segmenting publics based on demographics. Problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement predict how an individual will respond to and communicate about a message. Although demographic and psychographic information divides people into groups, those groups do not predict communication behavior about a certain issue.

Public relations researcher Peter K. Hamilton (1992) condensed the various segmenting possibilities based on these variables. He segmented publics as constrained, characterized by high problem recognition and high constraint recognition; problem facing, characterized by high problem recognition and low constraint recognition; fatalistic, characterized by low problem recognition and high constraint recognition; or routine, characterized by low problem recognition and low constraint recognition. Each of these four categories can either have high or low involvement. Eight distinct segments result from this approach, and each group may be expected to respond differently to a campaign. For instance, when targeted by an appeal, problem-facing publics, who see a problem and believe they can solve it, would be much more likely to act than fatalistic publics, who do not see a problem and believe that they have little influence into the situation.

Grunig (1989) also defined two dependent variables, information seeking and information processing. Information seeking occurs when a person intentionally searches for information about a problem or its solutions. Information processing occurs when a person happens across information about the problem or its solutions and stops to consider that

information. Information seeking is generally active and requires significant effort on the part of the target audience, while information processing is relatively passive. Information seeking often involves non-mediated organizational materials while information processing is more likely occur through mass media use (Clark & Kline, 1974).

Situational theory has been widely used and critiqued by scholars. Hamilton's (1992) study applied situational theory to media use among publics during an election season. High-active respondents, who used media the most, engaged with that media on a deeper emotional and cognitive level, were more likely to take personal action, and were more likely to move beyond their accustomed media choices to find information, which confirmed Grunig's (1989) model. Researcher Ann Marie Major (1993) refined the theory by suggesting that problem recognition is the key determining factor for the level of communication activity for environmentally concerned publics. This finding is particularly useful in light of the contention that mediated communication is better at creating awareness than changing attitudes. Media coverage helped create a greater recognition of an environmental problem among publics who did not consider themselves personally involved in the problem. This finding also suggests that individuals may perceive problems as affecting their communities even when they are not personally affected.

Mass communication scholars Connie Roser and Margaret Thompson (1991) further refined Grunig's (1989) theory. They found that, when exposed to a fear appeal in the form of a short film about an accident at a nearby nuclear power plant, publics who had no previous exposure to the issue processed messages more deeply than those already involved in the issue. However, active publics experienced a more-intense emotional reaction than inactive publics.

These authors use their refinements to offer specific recommendations for practice in an advocacy organization. Major (1993) suggested that demonstrating possible solutions for problems is important to reach publics with high constraint recognition, especially in an environmental advocacy organization. Her study found that fatalistic and other highly constrained publics often had pro-environment attitudes, but felt that environmental problems were impossible to solve. Major suggested that demonstrating solutions lowers perceived constraint and can transform these publics into problem facers. Roser and Thompson (1991), on the other hand, found that fear appeals are effective in increasing involvement, perceived threat, perceived harm, and efficacy in environmental communication, even if specific recommendations for effective action are not suggested. Their film offered no recommendations about how students could lower danger from the nearby nuclear plant, yet their post-test surveys showed an increase in their feelings that a threat existed, affected them, and could be solved.

Several researchers have challenged Grunig's (1989) downplaying of demographic data. Robert L. Heath, Shu-Huei Liao, and William Douglas (1995) contended that individuals' level of involvement corresponds with the perceived level of economic impact in the individual's community. The researchers asked community members about a proposed chemical plant. Respondents who stood to benefit or suffer financially from the plant showed higher levels of involvement in the issue. By showing that basic factors such as income and geography could significantly affect involvement, Heath et al. suggest that demographic variables may correspond quite accurately in certain situations with publics' responses to a message. Similarly, Hamilton's (1992) study showed a strong correlation between an individual's media use and active communication activity level with the demographic

variables of age, education, and income. This finding suggests that, although demographics do not offer a complete understanding of a public, they may be a useful tool for organizations to understand how to best reach a target audience.

Furthermore, Hamilton (1992) suggested that Grunig's (1989) basic assumption that people communicate and gather information in order to resolve a problem may not completely explain when and how a public chooses to get information. Hamilton's participants continued watching and discussing election coverage even after deciding who to vote for. He suggested that individuals communicate to resolve uncertainty, and that that sense of uncertainty leads to more energetic, active communication.

Despite the disagreements and uncertainties that arise in literature exploring the situational theory of publics, an overarching theme emerges: A person's interaction with an organization's message changes significantly based on his or her prior relationship with the organization and the issue. As RAFI constructs an image and decides how to communicate that image to specific publics, it should define those publics by exploring their relationships with its image. Before RAFI can define those publics, it needs to explore what images emerge from the work it already does. The assessment of the literature leads to the formation of research questions, discussed in the following section.

### **Chapter 3: Research Questions and Method**

#### *Research Questions*

Although this project is a professional thesis, not a work of academic research, developing research questions can help define the directions of the primary research that I will undertake, as well as focus the intention of the final professional plan. This project will determine:

- What is the overarching identity of RAFI as an organization?
- Who are the target publics RAFI needs to reach?
- How can image be communicated in order for RAFI to connect effectively with its publics?

These questions will set the foundation for developing a communication plan, described in the method section that follows.

#### *Method*

This project creates a strategic public relations campaign to strengthen RAFI's image as a tool to further its ability to connect with key publics. Public relations scholar Robert Kendall's (1992) definition gives a clear idea of the relationship between general public relations practices and a campaign:

Public relations seeks to build mutually beneficial relationships with constituent publics. When activities attempt to improve public relations with...any of the many publics on which an organization's wellbeing depends, the effort is public relations. When a collection of those activities is structured into an organized effort, it becomes a campaign. (p.6)



Kendall specified that a public relations campaign must focus on creating relationships, not just conveying a message. This project will present a structured plan for RAFI to use communication strategies to create an image that strengthens the target publics' relationships with the organization and vice versa.

The recommended steps in a public relations plan vary from scholar to scholar, but the basic ideas remain the same. For example, public relations researcher John Marston (1963) used research, action and communication, and evaluation, abbreviated as RACE, for his plan, while Jerry Hendrix and Darrell Hayes (2006) used research, objectives, programming, and evaluation, abbreviated as ROPE. Kendall (1992) suggested research, adaptation, implementation strategy, and evaluation, abbreviated as RAISE. The basic elements of these formulas are an initial research stage, followed by a stage of planning and action, followed by an evaluation period. For this project, I use Kendall's formula.

The first stage of Kendall's (1992) formula for a public relations campaign is research. Research data help develop an accurate picture of the situation within which the campaign will take place, resulting in statements of the problems that the campaign will address. Public relations research can be qualitative or quantitative and primary or secondary. For this plan, a communication audit makes up the research stage. A communication audit is a comprehensive review of an organization's communication strategy. Business scholars, including Cal Downs and Alyson Adrian (2004) and Owen Hargie and Dennis Tourish (2000), have discussed communication audits as a general management tool to increase organizational effectiveness. These authors use communication audits to examine how individual employees receive information and communicate with coworkers as well as looking at external communications.

Barbara Diggs-Brown and Jodi Glou (2003) addressed communication audits from a specifically public relations perspective. Diggs-Brown and Glou use communication audits to evaluate the effectiveness of communication programs and products, and suggest audits as guides for new strategies and campaigns. Their formula for an audit includes an organizational history; a description of existing organizational issues, such as economic or political pressures; a situational analysis dealing with the problem the campaign will address; the organization's products or services; the organization's distribution or implementation methods; and its systems and strategy, including goals and evaluation process. The resulting audit, according to these authors, should evaluate the organization's message quality and delivery, the quality of the organization's relationships with stakeholders, and the audience interpretation of the message. Communication audits as described by Diggs-Brown and Glou are comprehensive and time-consuming projects.

For this project, I adapt Diggs-Brown and Glou's (2003) outline to specifically examine identity and image in a nonprofit organization. My data comprise an assessment of RAFI's written materials and interviews with staff and external stakeholders. I analyzed RAFI's written material to see what themes and images arise. In in-depth interviews with staff, I asked about their perception of the organization's image, the audiences they need to reach with that image, and the pros and cons of the ways they currently convey their messages. The final audit provides information on the consistency of RAFI's identities and images, the efficacy of the ways that RAFI communicates about its image, and how its stakeholders interact with that image. From this picture of the current situation, I articulated the problems that the rest of the campaign addresses.

I approach this analysis from the viewpoint of someone with a deep investment in

RAFI and the issues on which it works. My initial enthusiasm about RAFI's work rose out of a lifetime of learning about environmental concerns; my mother had an admitted plot to turn me into an environmental activist from an early age. I quickly realized that RAFI's work also tapped into social justice issues, which have been my passion since the beginning of my undergraduate career. Over the last year, my relationship with RAFI has deepened. After hundreds of hours of work, both with and without payment, my investment in RAFI's work is greater than ever. When I talk about RAFI to strangers, I use the pronoun "we."

To some extent, this attachment biased my findings. I have bought into RAFI's values and into its stories about itself. These findings are those of an insider, not a dispassionate observer. While my findings may not be as objective as they would be were I a detached researcher, they also contain insights that I would not have had without the experiences of the last year. I have gotten past my initial, hero-worshipping view of RAFI to a deeper, more gritty understanding of the frustrations involved in its work, as well as a richer appreciation for the importance of that work. I also understand more about the issues surrounding RAFI's work. This lived experience of RAFI as an organization will mean that these findings will be far from objective, but it will also allow me to find connections and importance in places that a less involved researcher might overlook.

The second step of Kendall's (1992) formula for a campaign is adaptation. In this stage, Kendall suggested that the campaign planner articulate achievable and measurable goals for the campaign, prioritize target publics, and evaluate the resources and limitations that affect the organization's ability to achieve the goals and reach the publics. This step highlights one of the challenges of planning a campaign for a nonprofit organization in that resources such as staff time and funding are limited. In this step, I set the goals for the

campaign. I segmented RAFI's target publics by superimposing the categories that arise from Grunig's (1989) situational theory of publics (i.e., constrained, problem facing, fatalistic, or routine, each with high or low involvement) to the target audiences that RAFI staff suggested. Finally, I evaluated the resources that might help RAFI reach those publics and list any available funding and staff time.

The third step of Kendall's (1989) formula is developing an implementation strategy. This step comprises the selection of communication strategies and supporting tactics, the calendar, and the budget for the campaign. In this step I enumerated the strategies that RAFI should use to improve the effectiveness of its image, and listed specific tactics for each strategy. I paid special attention to how each strategy affects RAFI's target publics. Enacting these strategies is beyond the scope of this project, but I provided a few example materials. I also include timelines and a budget. The timeline includes immediate actions as well as long-term policies. The budget indicates which strategies fit RAFI's current budgetary restraints, but includes strategies that may enhance the campaign if additional funding can be secured in the future.

The final step of Kendall's (1989) formula is evaluation. For this step, I created a process that allows RAFI to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign. This research allows RAFI to learn which strategies work best for connecting with its key publics. The evaluative process will lead to the strengthening of RAFI's program as a whole, since the evaluative research for this campaign can lead into initial research for new and ongoing communication campaigns.

The final product of this project is a document outlining a campaign that identifies RAFI's key publics and strengthens RAFI's relationships with them through enhancing

organizational image. I used a communication audit to assess the current strengths and areas for improvement for RAFI's organizational image and to locate the key external publics that RAFI can connect with. I proposed a detailed plan for enhancing the organization's image in order to most effectively reach those publics, and lay out evaluation methods. The final project gives RAFI a tool for immediately enhancing its relationships with its stakeholders and for creating new and stronger relationships for the years to come.

## **Chapter 4: Communication Audit**

### *Introduction*

I conducted a communication audit as the research segment of this plan. I began with RAFI's primary printed and electronic materials: the brochure, the 2005 *Annual Report*, and the Web site. I also reviewed other materials, including mailings to donors, professional publications, and the e-bulletin. These materials are more targeted. Some of them, such as publications, stem from the work of one specific program and are intended to meet the need of a specific public attached to that program. For instance, the guide to peanut contracts is targeted specifically at peanut farmers in the United States. Appeal letters to donors are written by the director, and usually include personalized, handwritten notes for each recipient. The e-bulletin is not as targeted as these materials, but it has not been produced for over a year. I focused my analysis on the three current primary means of communication by RAFI as a whole organization to a broad audience. The Web site, the brochure, and the annual report are all currently used by RAFI, all represent RAFI as a whole instead of a specific program, and all target a diverse range of publics. These documents offer the richest data about RAFI's overarching identity.

The final section of this audit consists of analysis of interviews with RAFI staff. As I analyzed these data, I looked for themes that gave rise to an identity for RAFI. Interviews with staff members from each program and the administrative team yielded information about the range of work that RAFI's identity must encompass and about the ways that staff members envision their work and values fitting into RAFI as a whole. I also asked staff what

communication needs they perceived. Printed and electronic materials illustrate part of RAFI's projected identity, but interviews with the staff gave information about the ways that RAFI's identity is experienced by internal stakeholders, and the frustrations and successes involved in trying to convey RAFI's work to external stakeholders.

### ***Brochure***

RAFI's brochure is printed in green and black on a creamy, textured quintuple-fold, 8.5- by 18.5-inch paper. The front panel shows a black-and-white farm scene with the organization's name in the center, set off by a green rectangle. Over the green rectangle, the words "Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA" appear in an elegant serif font with a large, swooping "R" in "Rural." The brochure opens to two green pages, one completely covered in small white text, the other featuring a picture of a smiling, middle-aged couple in work clothes, presumably farmers, and a quotation about the invaluable role of small farmers in America, attributed to Thomas Jefferson. Unfolding the brochure further, a reader encounters an overleaf with the kinds of work RAFI does listed on a green background. The inside panels of the brochure have a plain cream background with descriptions of RAFI's work, black-and-white pictures and more quotations, in green. A final inside section invites readers to donate or request information about RAFI.

The pictures alone convey a several themes. The old barns, steep fields, and woods on the front cover invoke the tradition and history of American farming, specifically in the Southeast, and place conservation of the farming landscape as central to RAFI's work. The smiling couple on the first overleaf places working families as a key aspect of RAFI's work.

One of the larger pictures on the inside flap shows a pair of work-roughened hands

cradling fresh blueberries. The picture simultaneously conveys an almost tender care for the bounty of the land, in the gentle cupping of the hands, and sense of the hard work that farming demands, alluded to by the subject's callused palms and muddy fingernails.

The next, smaller photo shows a box of gleaming eggplant with grass or hay in the background. The box, on which the word “farms” is just visible, infers that RAFI works to protect food itself, not just the people that produce it. The eggplant is perfectly shaped, obviously fresh-picked, and still at the farm, reminding the viewer that food ultimately comes from farms, not grocery stores.

The third picture, as large as the first, shows a young girl in a flowery dress and a feed cap, leaning over a large basket of squash to reach a tomato at a roadside fruit stand. A box of green peppers is in the foreground and more boxes of tomatoes take up the background of the photo. This photo again showcases beautiful fresh food, but here at a stand, where a customer would have a direct relationship with the farmer. Whether the girl is a farmer's or a customer's daughter, she reiterates the importance of RAFI's work in the lives of families, and introduces the concept of nurturing the future by protecting farming heritage and a safe food supply.

The final picture on the inside shows a farmer in a chicken house, carrying a bucket of feed. In the background, broiler chickens blanket the floor of the building. The farmer dominates the picture, and looks down at the chickens from beneath his feed cap. Although the broilers are not as tightly packed as they would be in most photos of industrial poultry operations, they are clearly not the idyllic pastured chickens commonly associated with family farms. The picture invites respect for the farmer's work, and also demonstrates RAFI's dedication to family farmers, regardless of whether they operate small organic farms



or contract poultry operations.

On the back panel of the brochure, an African American farmer carefully balances an egg on top of a full egg crate, a slight smile on his face. In the background, hens cover the floor and perch in nest boxes. The background shows that the farmer is not a conventional poultry farmer, but not someone with a small, pastured flock of heritage hens. The picture repeats the themes of stewardship and care seen in the photo of the blueberries and the photo of the other poultry farmer. It also shows a minority farmer as representative of RAFI's work.

The quotations about farmers span 200 years, and show respect and care for farming families as continuous throughout American history. The first quotation, by Thomas Jefferson, reads,

The small landholders are the most precious part of a state. Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens, the most vigorous, most independent, and most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds.

The second quotation, by Wendell Berry, a contemporary American writer, reads,

In the country...there is work to be done. This is the inescapable, necessary work of restoring and caring for our farms, forests, rural towns, and communities – work that we have not been able to pay people to do for forty years and that few people any longer know how to do.

The third quotation, by Edward O. Wilson on the importance of genetic crop diversity for future generations, adds the idea of safe food and future generations to the construction of RAFI's work. It reads, “One process that will take millions of years to correct is the loss of genetic diversity...the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us.”

The rest of the text defines RAFI's work and its staff. Some of this text provides information about RAFI that is fairly unrelated to RAFI's work. For example, the first sentence on the first overleaf reads, “The Rural Advancement Foundation International –

USA (RAFI-USA) is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Pittsboro, North Carolina.” A few sentences later, readers learn that “RAFI-USA receives support from individual contributors, private foundations, churches, and fees for publications and services.” These facts accurately represent RAFI, but do little to help the reader develop an image of the organization.

Much of the of RAFI description is done through lists of principles and actions that illustrate the scope of RAFI's work, but provide the reader with little concrete information about what RAFI does and little idea of the core concept underlying RAFI's programs. For instance, the second sentence on the first page reads, “RAFI-USA is dedicated to the preservation of family farms, conservation of agricultural biodiversity, socially responsible use of new technologies, safe food and a sustainable system of agriculture.” RAFI's work and values address these issues, but not comprehensively. For instance, “the socially responsible use of new technologies” might extend to the impact of i-Pods on community-building, but that issue would not be at all related to RAFI's work. Another list, prominently displayed on the third overleaf, informs readers that

[T]he Rural Advancement Foundation PROMOTES conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity as insurance against human and natural disasters. EDUCATES farmers, consumers and policy-makers about the importance of sustainable agriculture for rural and urban communities. SAFEGUARDS soil, water, air and rural communities...

and so forth. This list compellingly conveys critical parts of RAFI's work, but does so in a way that does not encourage a cohesive understanding of the organization's identity.

Several statements in the brochure do not describe RAFI, but rather establish the importance of the issues RAFI deals with. These sentences illustrate the principles that the brochure places as central to RAFI's work. The first value is history: “For more than 10,000

years farmers have worked with the environment to create new plants, fiber and food to sustain life all over the earth.” The second value is diversity: “Diversity, like a music or a dialect, is part of the community that created it.” The third value is sustainability: “Sustainable agriculture is agriculture that depletes neither land nor people.” The fourth value is fairness: “Fairness is essential for a healthy food production system.” These sentences also invoke the values of community and health.

The brochure lists several concrete actions RAFI has taken, but these examples focus on action instead of on its results. For instance, the brochure states that RAFI staff wrote the official document for the United Nations Food Day and that RAFI's *Poultry Grower News* reached 25,000 growers. These examples show RAFI as a recognized authority and as a broad-reaching resource for farmers and policy-makers alike but do not show how these activities affect the publics it serves. Further, these examples contrast with the emphasis on individual farms and farmers reflected in the photographs.

The current RAFI brochure is slightly out-of-date. It reflects RAFI's past emphasis on protecting genetic diversity in crops, an issue that now shares program space with organic standards and social justice labeling in the Just Foods Program. The brochure also states that RAFI does not accept government funding, which stopped being true when RAFI got a grant from a state-funded foundation for the Tobacco Communities Project several years ago. RAFI still does not accept federal funds, since the bulk of the organization's policy work is done at a national level.

The brochure does not present the reader with an accessible, cohesive identity for RAFI. It does, however, bring to light some of the key aspects at the heart of RAFI's work. The photos and text present a diversity of images, all of which center around farmers and

farming. Complementary values include history and heritage, the welfare of future generations, health, community, environmental and social sustainability, and justice. These values influence RAFI's work when they apply to farmers, farms, or farm products. In this publication, the farming comes across as the heart of RAFI's work. Farming acts as a nexus where issues of sustainability, justice, and community meet, where the past is honored and the future nurtured.

### ***Annual Report***

The *Annual Report* is the only informational document sent to donors. The *2005 Annual Report* 12-page booklet comprises a letter from the board president; a letter from Betty Bailey, the executive director; updates on each of RAFI's four programs; remembrances of Nancy Taylor, a deceased donor; a profile of Benny Bunting, RAFI's Farm Advocate; a biography of Tom Tratham, the incoming board president; financials; and a list of donor organizations. Individual donors are not listed. Interspersed in the document are text boxes with quotations about farming from a variety of sources, appeals for donations, and bulleted lists of major program goals. The publication provides detailed information about RAFI's work in 2005, but does not present a cohesive identity for RAFI.

Several themes emerge from the publication. The first is RAFI's work as a continuation of history. For instance, in the letter from Helen J. Vinton, the board president who stepped down at the end of 2005, she states "I...want to share with you only a few steps of my own trip down memory's lane during the 10 years I have been privileged to be RAFI-USA's president" (p. 1). The rest of the letter sums up the last decade of RAFI's work. On the next page, the first six paragraphs of Betty Bailey's letter recall RAFI's history. Bailey writes, "Looking back, I am proud of RAFI's track record in predicting the changes in agriculture. I

am glad that RAFI, like good farmers, was prepared for adversity and ready to seize opportunities” (p. 2). She then lists some of the ways RAFI has identified and targeted emerging issues throughout its history. The description of RAFI's 2005 work begins, “As you read this 2005 report, you will recognize familiar themes of our work.” Later, Bailey writes, “As you read this report you will see the new twists on old problems and recognize the sustained effort needed to make any fundamental change” (p. 2).

The importance of context emerges as the second theme. The program descriptions each begin with an explanation of the wider issues that inform its work. For example, the Tobacco Communities Program article begins with a description of the economic factors that influenced tobacco farmers in 2005. The farm sustainability program describes the impact of hurricanes on Southern farmers in 2005. The Just Foods program's article begins with an overview of the changes in organic agriculture and marketing in 2005. Only the Contract Agriculture Reform program's article talks about RAFI's work in the first paragraph, but the paragraph begins with a quote from Martin Luther King, “The moral arc of history is long, but it arcs towards justice” (p. 5). Likewise, highlighted quotations about farming and activism emphasize the issues rather than RAFI's work on them.

The third theme is an emphasis on work, not results. For instance, a description of the *Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Report* describes the content and formation of the report but not its findings. In the Farm Sustainability article, readers learn that RAFI held workshops for farmers affected by hurricanes, but do not learn the impact of those workshops. In part, this emphasis is a reflection of the reality of social change work. Real change takes time, and enumerating measurable accomplishments in the span of one year is often difficult. When clear numbers are available, such as the number of jobs created by the

Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Fund, those numbers are highlighted. Still, the list of actions gives the impression of tireless work but not of effective leadership.

The last major theme that emerges is the importance of staff members' personal contributions. Pictures and biographies of staff feature prominently in several articles. Each article begins with a highlighted box with the lead program staff member's reflections on the year. Photographic head shots of Scott Marlow and Becky Ceartas complement articles on farm sustainability and contract agriculture. Benny Bunting, the farm advocate, and Tom Tratham, the incoming board president, also have portraits in the report. Bunting is shown counseling a farmer, and Tratham is shown on his farm. Hence, the photos at least tie back to RAFI's work. This emphasis on individual staff has the potential to fragment RAFI's personality into individuals, especially considering the way the programs are structured around one or two staff members. In general, the report should focus on the heart of RAFI's work, not the individual people who are doing it.

However, the last three articles, a remembrance of Nancy Taylor, a profile of Benny Bunting, and a biography of Tom Tratham, use these people to explain the essence of RAFI's work, mission, and leadership through the perspective of individual farmers. They represent a tie between the themes of the report and an image of RAFI as an organization that works with farmers. The article about Taylor shows the reasons one woman chose to remember RAFI in her will and the direct results that her donation had on RAFI's work. The title, "The feel of grain in your hands" (p. 9), provides the reader with a vivid image of connection to the land, agriculture, and the fruits of hard work. The article recounts Taylor's involvement in family farming and interest in organic agriculture, fair contracts, and biodiversity. It shares how Taylor's bequest helped RAFI pay off its mortgage and start a matching-gift campaign.

The article about Bunting has a similarly intimate feel and also manages to bring in wider issues of importance to RAFI. The article includes quotations from individual farmers about the ways Bunting saved their farms. It asks the reader to imagine being in those farmer's positions, with nowhere else to turn. It also shares concrete results through numbers: 90% of farmers who work with Bunting achieve their goals, and Bunting has helped save farm families an estimated \$46.2 million in 20 years of work. In this article, readers learn about the hard work of a RAFI staff member, but the focus is on the way this person's work sustains farms and farm families. It measures this impact in both personal and financial terms, discusses both action and results, emphasizes the way RAFI works alongside farmers, and invites the reader to make an emotional connection to the work.

The final piece is a biography of Tom Tratham, a dairy farmer who transitioned from conventional to organic, grass-fed farming with RAFI's help. It ties in many of the themes that run through the report. For instance, the idea of history and heritage appears this way: "It sounds a bit ironic – that feeding cows on pasture is a progressive thought. How far we've come from the basics" (p. 10). This timeline carries into the future in the last sentence, a quotation from Tratham, "I hope to pass along not only my land but my philosophy to my children" (p. 10). Similarly, the short article sums up the connection between RAFI's work with farmers, its emphasis on sustainability, and its work with food. Similarly, the article emphasizes leadership and innovation by stating, "Tom is one of the pioneers in farming who is bringing back a healthy, wholesome environment for the animals and the land, and offering consumers better choices in their food selection" (p. 10). A highlighted box enumerates Tratham's past awards and accomplishments in farm support and advocacy.

These three articles do an excellent job of conveying an image of RAFI that includes

the varied issues addressed its program work, the major themes running through RAFI's printed materials, and the experiences and influences of staff, donors, and farmers. They provide an example of the kind of integrated messaging that will help RAFI convey a coherent and compelling image.

### ***Web Site***

RAFI's Web site, <http://www.rafiusa.org>, is designed and maintained by a contractor. The page provides an overview of RAFI's work, opportunities to donate and subscribe to the e-newsletter, and PDFs of RAFI's publications and fact sheets. Some of the links on the site lead to other organizations' sites, or documents composed by other organizations' staff. For the purposes of this research, I will restrict my analysis to materials on the home page and the pages directly linked to that page, all of which were composed by RAFI staff.

### ***Home Page***

The main page of the site consists of simple text, one picture, and a frame that links to the deeper layers of the site (Appendix A). The background is a pale pink color similar to adobe or manila folders. In the upper left corner, a dark green logo reads “The Rural Advancement Foundation International.” The font and layout of this logo are identical to that found on RAFI's current brochure, but do not match the letterhead or the logo displayed on current publications. The serif, all-capitals font lends a professional tone to the logo, broken only by the use of a more organic font with sweeping lines that is used for the “R” in “Rural.”

An olive-green image on a light-green background stretches across the top of the



page, drawn in a primitive style reminiscent of a petroglyph. The drawing shows corn, tomatoes, peas, bananas, a cartoon-like cow and running chicken, a barn, a hill covered in crops or trees, and the silhouettes of two men with an exaggerated step. The drawing repeats twice across the top of the page, with a large flower drawn in a similar style in the center.

The frame on the left side of the page is in yet another shade of green, with text in a sans-serif font in a color that matches the background dark green used in the logo directly above it. The frame provides links to the rest of the site, broken into groups with headings, which are in larger type and are underlined in olive green. Under the “About Us” heading, a visitor may follow links to “Our 'Green' Buildings,” “Staff,” “Board of Directors,” and “Directions.” The “What's New” heading is a link, and does not have any links beneath it. The “Programs” heading has “Overview” written beside it in a smaller font size. The heading links to an overview page. Beneath it are links to program pages: “Contract Agriculture Reform,” “Tobacco Communities Initiatives,” “Farm Preservation,” “On-Farm Research,” and “Just Foods.” The last four headings, “Publications,” “Conference Center,” “Search,” and “Home,” are all links and do not have sub-headings. Beneath these, small black type informs visitors of the date of the last site update, March 12, 2007. Beneath this date is a black button with lettering in a different font that invites visitors to “Donate Now: Secure Donations by Groundspring.org.” Following this, small green type provides a link to the “Privacy Policy.”

In the center section of the page, beneath the drawing, is a sans-serif heading that reads “Welcome to RAFI-USA,” underlined by an olive-green bar. Beneath this bar, a short paragraph, written in black, sans-serif font, reads:

**RAFI-USA** is dedicated to community, equity and diversity in agriculture. While focusing on North Carolina and the southeastern United States, we also work

nationally and internationally. RAFI-USA is playing a leadership role in responding to major agricultural trends and creating a movement among farm, environmental and consumer groups to:

- Promote sustainable agriculture
- Strengthen family farms and rural communities
- Protect the diversity of plants, animals and people
- Ensure responsible use of new technologies.

Beside the list of goals is a picture of the RAFI building, with the caption “Learn about our 'green' buildings – our office and conference center.” “Green buildings” and “conference center” are links, written in a green that matches the green of the petroglyph-drawing's background. The picture's placement causes the text of the goals to wrap, so that the goals appear in a column:

Promote sustainable  
agriculture

Strengthen family farms  
and rural communities

Protect the diversity of  
plants, animals and  
people

Ensure responsible  
use of new  
technologies.

Under this paragraph, a green box encloses the announcement of a:

NEW PUBLICATION "The Farmers Guide to Peanut Contracts" is intended for farmers who are considering growing peanuts for the first time and for those who are deciding whether to expand their operations and investment in equipment based on contracts in the United States.

An olive green link offers the opportunity to “Download the Guide.” At the bottom of the page is another narrow, olive-green bar with tiny gray text beneath it, which reads “RAFI-USA is a private non-profit organization based in Pittsboro, NC dedicated to community, equity and diversity in agriculture.”

The main page provides the most comprehensive permanent public face of RAFI. People who learn about RAFI from meeting an individual staff member or reading a news story will most likely learn about only one aspect of RAFI's work. The Web site provides an opportunity for a visitor to access detailed information about each program, but also gives RAFI the chance to present the organization as a whole. RAFI's newest staff member, Robin Iten Porter, and I both first learned about the organization by finding the Web site.

The main page clearly states the main goals and geographic range of RAFI's work. It provides clear entrances into more in-depth information about RAFI's programs. Its colors invoke the greens of growing things, which is consistent with an organization centered around agriculture.

However, when it comes to presenting a unified picture of the organization that clearly portrays RAFI's identity, the page falls short in several ways. First, several factual inaccuracies need to be corrected. The page lists five programs, but RAFI currently has only four. The on-farm research program recently merged with the farm sustainability program. Also, the most recent publication, *Farmer and Lender Project: Strategies to Sustain Agriculture and Enhance Rural Development in North Carolina*, is not listed at all.

Second, the page does not present a unified visual front. Green appears multiple times on the page, but in four distinct shades. The formal font in the logo does not appear anywhere else on the page. The organic style of the picture at the top of the page is also distinct and is not echoed elsewhere. RAFI staff are justly proud of the passive-solar building, but, as the only photo on the main page, the picture of the building provides little information about the work of the organization. Its placement puts it visually in conflict with the list of RAFI's goals, which is arguably the most important part of the page.

Third, the identity of RAFI does not come across clearly from on this Web page. The page makes claims about RAFI's goals and lists RAFI's programs, which provides some information about RAFI's characteristics. Likewise, the page describes RAFI's "leadership role," which places RAFI in relationship to similar organizations, thereby giving some idea of what makes RAFI distinct. The page should provide information that clearly conveys the central characteristics of RAFI's work as a whole. It should clearly show what makes RAFI's work unique. Finally, it should convey some sense of RAFI's history and continuity of mission and work.

#### *"About Us" Pages*

The first page under the "About Us" section is entitled "Our 'Green' Buildings." The page shares the details of the construction of RAFI's offices, a passive-solar complex built with materials from a deconstructed farmhouse that stood on the site. The building was the first Energy-Star Certified commercial building in North Carolina. This building ties into many themes that may be relevant to RAFI, including respect for history, environmental responsibility, partnership and community, and care for staff. However, the page does not explicitly refer to any of these themes. It sticks to technical details of the process. This page could be very useful to people interested in green building but does not showcase the core of RAFI's work in a way that would merit top billing on the Web site.

The staff and board of directors' pages are simply lists. The staff page provides name, title, and e-mail address for each staff member. RAFI's address and phone number are listed at the top of the page. The board page lists the name, title if appropriate, and occupation of each board member. The staff page provides a good resource for contacting RAFI, but

neither page illustrates the experience, history, or expertise of RAFI's staff and board.

The final page under “About Us” gives directions to the RAFI offices. The top of the page reads “Dan Pollitt Conference Center: Directions to the Center.” The page would be more at home under the “Conference Center” heading. It tells readers little about RAFI, its people, or its work.

#### *“What's New” Page*

The “What's New” page has its own heading. The text takes the form of a list of news. The list is dominated by RAFI's publications. It announces five publications, a grant opportunity, available office space, conference center rental opportunities, online donation capacity, and the brick fundraising campaign. Some of the news dates back more than a year. This page shows RAFI as an organization that principally issues publications, issues grants, and asks for money. It does little to further the idea of RAFI as a leader in addressing current issues in agriculture. The list of publications does give an overview of some of the issues RAFI addresses, but that information is available on the “Publications” page.

#### *“Programs” Pages*

The programs section starts with a link to an “Overview” page. This page lists each program and gives a one-to-two sentence description of each program, but the page does not make any attempt show how these programs interconnect. The program pages themselves also do not reference the wider work of RAFI. However, they do provide good resources for exploring the specifics of some of RAFI's work.

The main page for each program provides a description of the program's mission and

the main actions it takes to achieve that mission. On the right side of each page, a highlighted box provides links to resources about each issue. These resources include RAFI publications, publications by other organizations, fact sheets, and other pages on the RAFI site. With rare exceptions, results, accomplishments, and the experiences of target publics are not mentioned, or are not highlighted. For instance, the Tobacco Communities Initiatives page has a list of results from the grant program, but the numbers are out of date. The resources box on that page, one of many links in a list, reads “program impacts.” This link takes the reader to another page with the story of one farmer who participated in the grant program, along with up-to-date numbers.

The program pages share some themes. Several pages mention RAFI's breadth of experience throughout many years. For example, the Farm Preservation page touts RAFI's “two decades of fighting to keep farmers on the land” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/FARMPRESERVATION.html>), and the contract agriculture page mentions RAFI's “15 years of supporting contract poultry farmers” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/CONTRACTAG/CONTRACTAG.html>). These statements give a sense of RAFI's depth of experience and commitment.

Another theme is farmer empowerment as a primary value. For instance, the On-Farm Research program page talks about “assist[ing]... farmers in...doing their own research and sharing information,” and says that “[T]he solutions that farmers need to survive and prosper will be found on the farm, and that the experience of farmers is integral to innovation” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/ONFARM.html>). The Just Foods program, according to its page, “works for ways to add value to farmer stewardship practices...” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/JUSTFOODS.html>). The Tobacco Communities

Initiatives page says the program is designed “to enable farmers and community groups to put their own ideas to work” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/TOBACCO/TOBACCO.html>). The Contract Agriculture Reform program's page talks about the program's work, “Empowering farmers by providing critical information...” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/CONTRACTAG/CONTRACTAG.html>). Additionally, the Farm Preservation page discusses the program's work “bringing the experience of family farmers to policy debates” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/FARMPRESERVATION.html>). This sampling of statements about farmer-centered analysis and farmer empowerment shows RAFI's dedication to supporting the work of farmers, rather than telling farmers what to do. They depict farmers' experiences and knowledge as valuable sources of innovation and positive change, and RAFI as the agent that enables this creativity and change.

Another theme that runs strongly through these pages is the success and survival of family farms. Each program explains how its work contributes to farms' financial health. For example, the Farm Preservation program page describes how the program “saves and strengthens family farms by providing individual farmers with financial planning assistance, advocating for the farmer to lending institutions and bringing the experience of family farmers to policy debates” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/FARMPRESERVATION.html>). The Tobacco Communities Initiatives page asserts that, “assisting farmers to...develop their farms into viable businesses will help lead to stronger, more stable rural economies and protect family farms” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/TOBACCO/TOBACCO.html>). RAFI programs are depicted as a catalyst for farms' financial success.

The final theme is the pursuit of social and economic justice in addition to environmental sustainability. The Just Foods program page states that a sustainable food and

fiber supply “not only strengthens biodiversity and food security, but also models and supports fairness, justice and equity-based means of producing food and fiber” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/JUSTFOODS.html>). The Contract Agriculture Reform page describes the program's work to “insure [sic]...contract arrangements between individual farmers and processors are fair and equitable” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/CONTRACTAG/CONTRACTAG.html>). The On-Farm Research page states that, “Economic, environmental and community sustainability are complementary rather than mutually exclusive” (<http://www.rafiusa.org/programs/ONFARM.html>). The program descriptions make it clear that RAFI's work is predicated on the belief that the best interests of the land and the best interests of people are the same.

From the program pages, the beginnings of a coherent and dynamic identity emerge. RAFI works with farmers on their terms, values their knowledge, ensures their survival, and encourages their prosperity, which in turn leads to greater environmental sustainability and social justice. This relationship is depicted as reciprocal: social justice and environmental responsibility are shown as prerequisites for a prosperous and sustainable agricultural system.

### *“Publications” Page*

The “Publications” page provides links to PDF files of all of RAFI's publications, including fact sheets and e-bulletins. The 19 publications that are available online are arranged by release date, from 2000 to 2007. Following this list, readers find a list of publications that are available in hard-copy format from the RAFI office. The publication descriptions were each written at the time of release and give no indication of the kind of credibility or acclaim that each publication received. However, they do provide a



demonstration of the vast knowledge and resources that RAFI produces. Each publication is aimed either at informing farmers or informing other advocates and policy-makers. Two of the Just Foods publications are offered in Spanish and one in French, reflecting the program's international focus. The publications show RAFI as an educator and advocate for farmers, but do not show any involvement with consumers, donors, or rural community members.

#### *“Conference Center” Page*

The Dan Pollitt Conference Center is the focus of the last substantive page listed on the RAFI home page. The page touts the center's atmosphere, green buildings, and natural setting. It also mentions that the center is run by RAFI, and that all profits garnered from its rental go to the organization. The page provides links to nearby inns, local visitors' bureaus, and driving directions, and describes the shops and dining available in Pittsboro. It also invites readers to call Kathy Zaumseil, the facilities manager, to make a reservation. The page includes two photographs, one of the outside of the building and one of a meeting inside the day-lit main hall. The page emphasizes the harmony with nature and its potential as a fruitful meeting place and celebrates the natural beauty of the setting and the building. This emphasis fits with RAFI's work in that appreciation of farming and farmland involves appreciation of rural settings, natural beauty, and nurturing growth.

#### *Materials Audit Overview*

RAFI's Web site, brochure, and annual report provide a scattered and often vague picture of RAFI's work. However, woven into these materials are threads of a coherent identity. History and context ground RAFI's work. It works with farmers on a personal and

policy level. It values farmers' knowledge and respects their work. It works for their success on both financial and environmental terms.

In addition to assessing the program materials, I conducted interviews with staff members. The following section describes the topics and themes that emerged from these interviews.

### ***Interviews Introduction***

In in-depth interviews, important themes emerge that are shared across programs. I also asked staff about their communication practices and improvements that they would like to see. In the following section, I discuss the 10 thematic trends first, then the five communication needs that staff identified.

### ***RAFI Themes***

Ten themes emerged from the interviews. These are: (1) relationships with farmers, (2) building bridges, (3) RAFI as community organizer, (4) challenges of diverse programming, (5) equity and justice, (6) helping keep family farms in business, (7) good food, healthy food, (8) expert educator, (9) working with farmers where they are, and (10) organizing coalitions. After each theme is discussed, I present an overview of how these themes relate to aid in developing a cohesive identity for the organization.

#### ***“Farmer-centric”: Relationships with farmers***

All of RAFI's staff members mentioned the connection to both policy and farmers and something that sets RAFI apart from similar organizations. They were emphatic in describing RAFI's connection to farmers as giving their work value. One person described his work as

“farmer-centric and farmworker centric. It's about the rights of farmers and the rights of farmworkers.” Another said,

The first thing that makes RAFI distinct is our groundedness. The fact that we have Benny Bunting on our staff and that a huge amount of our work is grounded in his work or similar work. Our contract work is different from other people's contract work because Mary [Clouse, a founding member] was a poultry farmer and she sat with other poultry farmers for ten years...[A]ll of our policy comes directly out of that individual experience.

Another staff member said RAFI was unique because, “RAFI is more farmer-centered...,the focus is on the farmer.”

Staff members described how contact with individual farmers helped spark program ideas, spur the writing of guides and reports, and influence decisions on policy positions. The reason RAFI's work has been able to continue over decades, one interviewee said, is because, “[W]e've been so centered and had as our grounding place and testing ground these relationships with farmers of all types...” Clearly the idea of the farmer is the heart of RAFI's identity.

### *“Helping them make that transition”: RAFI as a builder of bridges*

Although RAFI's materials stress the importance of heritage and continuity, RAFI staff mentioned that agriculture was constantly changing. Part of RAFI's work, they said, is to help farmers meet the demands of the times. One person explained it this way:

[W]hat people realized was...that this form of agriculture that they've been doing for a long time, their time in that form of agriculture is running out. ... [F]or guys who are young and getting into this, they're gonna have to figure out a different way to be in the world. ...[W]hat does that bridge look like? Lots of people push 'em off the cliff and see if they can build a parachute on the way down...Most farmers are barely hanging on. They don't have the credit, they don't have the ability, they don't have the room to make those transitions. How do you get them the room...and then how do you help them make that transition? Helping them make that transition is what I do. Because we think that is the last best chance for family farmers to make it.

Otherwise, we're gonna lose 'em all.

Being able to anticipate the next challenge and helping farmers make the changes necessary to negotiate it with integrity was something staff said they prided themselves on.

This transition is not a short-term proposition, several people said. To illustrate, one person told the story of a farmer who worked with Bunting to avoid bankruptcy after Hurricane Floyd. When that man passed away, Bunting helped his son find a way to inherit the farm. Now he is working with that son and his wife to develop a cattle operation, with the idea that eventually they can raise antibiotic-free, pastured beef and return to farming full-time. If RAFI had not been with this family at any stage, the storyteller said, the farm would have disappeared. Instead, it is on its way to being a successful, sustainable family farm.

This story also illustrates the aptness of the respondents' metaphor of a cliff versus a bridge. By working with farmers at all stages of the process, RAFI staff felt they made the transition process stronger. One remembered being at a meeting with farmers he had known for almost a decade. In the beginning, the staff person did not want the farmers he worked with to know about RAFI's work on organics or genetically modified seeds, because they used those seeds and pesticides. This time, he said,

I'm standing out with some guys who are left over from the peanut project, who are going, you know, this GMO shit is gonna kill us. We can't get seed anymore...We've been using Roundup Ready like crazy, we're now looking at resistance in our plants, it's only a matter of time, they're gonna come out with new stuff, its gonna cost us more, we're not gonna be able to afford it...So now, all of a sudden, they are talking about those issues. And we've got the farmers who are saying, you know, can I make more money on organic?...I need to look for options. [Organic] is now one of those other things.

Because RAFI was working on preserving heritage crops in the public domain and setting the groundwork for organic production and marketing decades ago, staff members believe it can help those farmers make the transition now that it makes sense for them to do so. “You have

to create openings and let people take those openings as it makes sense,” one person said.

“You know, I think that's a little bit of the beauty of RAFI's work.”

*“We're not in the forefront”: RAFI as community organizer*

Staff members admitted that RAFI is not skilled at putting itself or its work in the spotlight. This weakness, however, also represents what they described as one of their greatest strengths. The earliest RAFI staff, and much of the current staff, came from community organizing backgrounds. One staff member explained,

In the classic organizing model which our staff comes out of, you are never the one who's up front, you are never the one who's quoted in the newspaper and doing the publicity. You facilitate the people you are organizing, you facilitate your community being up front, because by being up front you are developing their leadership. So our culture is...much more likely to facilitate somebody else being up front that to facilitate us being up front.

Another staff members offered similar explanations and noted that this tendency runs deeper than simply a technique. One person described it as “our way of being in the world,” while another said, “[W]e work so much collaboratively and we work to some extent like organizers so that we're not in the forefront....We share credit all the time, as a way of life....” Staff members believe that, by staying out of the spotlight, RAFI maintains its genuine dedication to farmers and communities above its dedication to itself.

*“The many faces of RAFI”: The challenge of diverse programming*

The diversity of RAFI's work often makes it difficult for staff to describe it. As one staff member put it,

When we're asked to describe what we do, there's the easy one: RAFI works for community, equity and diversity in agriculture...Whereas to go further than that, I think all of us kind of fall back on, well, let's see, we have the contract ag program,

and in the contract ag program, this is what we do, and then there's the tobacco communities program, and this is what we do so then we start breaking apart the work into the programs to describe what it is we do, and then you're into a half hour...

Another staff member agreed: "I will say that that is that hardest thing when someone says "so, what is RAFI?" It's like uuuuh, which side?" Another staff person, who said the way he describes RAFI depends on who he is addressing, said that it was difficult to "be able to say something that's honest yet generic enough to cover everything." One person even thought that the board members seemed to only know about one aspect of the organization. This confusion demonstrates that staff has a hard time articulating RAFI's work as a coherent whole.

Some staff members felt that this multiplicity of identities was sometimes an asset. One said that choosing how to describe RAFI "depends on who I'm talking to. Big time. That's the other piece of RAFI's dilemma, is...it's not just that sometimes we talk about the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing, it's like, well, if the right hand understood what the left was doing, they'd be really pissed off." Several people cited examples, such as,

Historically, we used to joke about the many faces of RAFI...I didn't want my farmers to know that I was working with on the peanut project to know, because they all grow GMO seed, I didn't want them to know that we were working on GMOs over here and trying to stop them.....

Staff members believe that these multiple identities simplify RAFI's work in some ways and complicate it in others. The idea was articulated this way in one interview: "And so sometimes we kinda want to ... not draw attention to everything we do with everybody. It's one of the ways we succeed and we have a broad reach." RAFI staff members expressed fear that including all of RAFI's work when communicating with all audiences might harm relationships.

One interviewee had the opposite concern. He found that partners were hesitant to

work with RAFI because they misunderstood RAFI's work. "It's difficult for folks to understand why we do things if they don't understand the whole nature of what we do," he said. For instance,

If Michael showed up at a meeting of farmers in North Carolina and said, 'We gotta stop this GMO thing,' people would look at him like he was a freak from nowhere. And if they attached it to everything that RAFI does, like, 'Oh, this is the same organization that gave so-and-so down the road money to do this thing, and the same organization that when that farmer who's growing GMOs gets in financial trouble, they give RAFI a call and someone shows up and helps them out,' I think they would perceive that message differently.

From this view, not correctly conveying all of RAFI's work to every audience is more than a hassle for staff. This staff member believes it prevents RAFI's relationships from staying strong, and hinders stakeholders' understandings of the real goals and values that shape RAFI's work.

*"We work for equity and justice": The importance of justice as a value*

Every staff member I interviewed reiterated the idea that justice was central to RAFI's work. One person said that the most-important thing someone should know about RAFI is "that we work for equity and justice in the agricultural and rural community." Another noted that "[justice] is a crucial piece of RAFI's work and always has been." Another said a key theme that tied her work together was "justice, doing what's right, or doing what's good." The concept of justice is a central part of RAFI's identity.

In these discussions, the staff believe that justice was about fair treatment for farmers, and an equitable system of power and payment among all levels of agricultural production. As one interviewee said, justice "means that farmers ... have rights and should not be abused by contracts or farmworkers shouldn't be abused by how things go." Another explained that

RAFI began working with contract poultry farmers because of the injustice of the contract system, “always recognizing that if you allowed the injustice of contract ag to go unanswered it would spread to other pieces of agriculture.”

This work for justice was often spoken of as “speaking truth to power” and representing the underdog. One person said his first impression of RAFI was that “RAFI was truly looking out for farmers, in cases where the predominant practice was unfair, and at great odds, taking on issues.” Some staff mentioned minority farmers and immigrant farmers as suffering particular injustices, such as relative lack of resources.

In these discussions, interviewees believed greater justice for farmers leads to greater sustainability. Several staff members mentioned organic and social justice labeling as ways to assure that farmers who put in the extra work, risk, and investment to protect the environment and treat workers equitably receive fair rewards for their efforts, since consumers are willing to pay a premium for those foods.

*“Helping keep family farms in business”: RAFI as a financial advocate*

RAFI's role in keeping farms in business emerged as more than just one of three requirements for sustainability. Several staff members mentioned the financial health of farms as a key concern. As one said, “Helping keep family farms in business, that's kind of our core....” Another agreed, “I think the way that [RAFI staff members' work] all ties together is that we are all trying to create the opportunity for family farms to be successful....RAFI's primary goal has always been to allow farmers to make a living.” This endeavor is tied to the idea of both sustainability and justice. “A farmer should have the



ability to stay in business,” one person said, “The best shot possible. It is in our interest for farmers to stay in business.”

*“Good food, healthy food”: The connection between farms and food*

Although farms are at the center of RAFI's work, several staff members mentioned that RAFI had a role in protecting food. As one person said,

“[A]udiences that are more removed from farming go, “well, what does farming matter to me?” What matters to them is food. In fact, I can say with all honesty, a goodly part of what we do is all about there being good food, healthy food, access to food, land that still grow food, people who still know how to grow food...”

The connection between farms and food is not necessarily intuitive to most of the general public, another person said. “Because we live in an urban society,” he said, “people don't pay attention to agriculture, don't realize where they'd be without farms.”

This tie came across especially strongly when staff discussed the Just Foods program, which explicitly addresses food as well as production. They described it as “looking at the whole supply chain,” making sure that food production was sustainable, in all three senses of the word, from farmworker to consumer.

*“Here is what you need to know”: RAFI as expert educator*

Because of the many levels at which it works and the variety of its partners, RAFI serves as an expert educator for farmers and organizations alike. This education takes place partly through publications. For instance, *The Non-Work Guide to Understanding Federal Commodity Payments* was designed to teach sustainable agriculture advocates about the practical role commodity payments play in the lives of farmers. One interviewee said,

There was no understanding in the movement of either commodity agriculture or

southern agriculture. Part of what I do is trying to get our side of the river to understand....I think where we've been very good is that kind of working through them as partners to set the terms of the debate, to deepen understanding and to inform what goes in.

Because of its unique work with both individual farmers and policy, RAFI staff saw their organization as being able to educate the policy community about the real concerns in farmer's lives.

Similarly, RAFI educates farmers about large policy and structural issues that affect their work. RAFI staff have written guides for farmers on topics including genetically modified crops, signing contracts, and getting loans for non-traditional enterprises. One staff member noted, "I consistently hear from people who come back [that] our written stuff is practical, easy-to-understand, and out in front of the issue." These guides grow out of conversations with farmers, and the research process often includes interviews with farmers and other stakeholders about what information needs to be included. Interviewees believed this kind of practical information can lead to deeper understanding and change as well. As one staff member said,

We did the publication for tobacco farmers signing tobacco contracts, and no where in there does it say contracting is bad....But by creating that document, not only did we give individual farmers that ability to better understand their contract and figure out what their benefits were, but providing them with that information and having them think about their contracts in a different way has built support for a policy agenda. Even though the policy deals with poultry, we have now got tobacco farmers saying "man, I don't want to see binding arbitration in my contract....I've got to stop this before it spreads."

Through guides and personal contact, RAFI staff feel they help farmers access the skills and knowledge they need to survive and prosper.

Because RAFI works with such diverse techniques and such diverse groups, it is in a position to educate tobacco farmers about national policy by pointing out what is happening

to poultry farmers, or to explain to policy-makers and advocates why farmers make the decision to grow commodity crops. As one staff member said, “What I do is connecting [Benny's] level of individual work with policy...and back and forth.” They feel that RAFI's diversity allows it to serve as an expert and a conceptual translator in support of both farm and policy work.

*“We work with farmers where they are”: Supporting farmers of all types*

RAFI works with all kinds of farmers: immigrants and seventh-generation North Carolinian, conventional contract and small organic, Black, White, Hmong, Latino, and Native American. Staff see this diversity as a sign that RAFI genuinely understands and respects farmers. “One thing that was drilled in to me early on was that RAFI doesn't tell farmers what to do,” someone recollected. Another the staff member told me that standing by while conventional farmers went bankrupt and then encouraging other people to become sustainable farmers was reinventing the wheel, and a waste of centuries of accumulated wisdom and knowledge.

This willingness to work with many types of farmers was seen as setting RAFI apart from other agricultural organizations. As one person said,

The other piece of it in terms of RAFI's uniqueness is that we work with farmers where they are....When we work with farmers who are devastated by a hurricane or a disaster, we don't ask whether they're organic or they're conventional or whether they're, you know, a contract pork producer. We've helped all of them.

Staff feel that meeting farmers on their own terms is an integral part of allowing RAFI to connect with and assist them. As one person succinctly put it, “RAFI meets farmers where they're at and tries to help them get to a better place.”

*“The center of swirling vortexes”: Organizing coalitions*

As befits an organization with its roots in community organizing, RAFI has spent much of its time organizing coalitions of organizations to address issues like contract agriculture reform, organic standards, social justice food labeling, and biotechnology. As one staff member said, “We share a lot with other organizations....[W]e put a lot of emphasis on adding value to what other people around us can do.” Another noted that, “RAFI leads by pulling together partners and networks.” This work, many interviewees said, takes a considerable amount of coordination, time, e-mails, and phone calls. One staff member described the process as standing in the “center of...swirling vortexes.” The process also necessitates “being very respectful of everyone's participation...[and] keeping everyone happy while still speaking truth to power.” In other words, RAFI not only coordinates these coalitions, but staff believe it is also important to keep participants feeling appreciated and invested and takes responsibility for the integrity of the results.

*“The three pillars of sustainability”: Linking people, the environment, and the economy*

One of the basic principles underlying RAFI's work is that economic, ecological, and social sustainability are all co-dependent. As one person explained,

[T]here are three pillars...economic sustainability, being able to stay in business; there's environmental sustainability, it does not degrade the environment; and there's social sustainability, which is it doesn't degrade the people or their communities.... [L]ong-term and economically sound agriculture also does not degrade the people or the environment or it won't be economically sound over time. And a truly environmental agriculture has to be economically viable and it can't degrade the people.

This core concept helps explain why RAFI's work is so diverse. As another interviewee said,

[A]lthough RAFI has a goal of promoting sustainability,...our mechanism for judging

sustainability includes issues beyond environmental benefit. Therefore RAFI works on issues that other organizations that work on quote unquote sustainable agriculture might choose not to. Issues related to social justice, not just how is the land treated and how is the water treated, but how are people who are working the land treated, and that that's as vital a piece of the definition of sustainability as the environmental piece. How are the profits generated from that land distributed? Is there equity from that distribution?

Staff used this concept to explain why RAFI's diverse work makes sense. A

sustainable system of agriculture can not allow farmers to be caught in unfair contracts any more than it can encourage over-use of pesticides. Building sustainable agriculture, in this view, requires creating strong and mutually beneficial relationships between farmers and the land, farmers and communities, and farmers and consumers.

### *Overview of themes*

These ten themes show the range of RAFI's work. They also begin to show the concepts and values that lie at its center. RAFI's work is first and foremost in support of farmers. The themes of farmer relationships, working for justice, working with farmers where they are, and helping farmers stay in business all make clear that farmers' experiences and welfare are guiding forces in the staff's conception of RAFI's work. However, RAFI works with farmers for a purpose. That purpose is creating a sustainable food system, as the themes of the three pillars of sustainability and good and healthy food illustrate. To this end, RAFI also ensures that the infrastructure of a sustainable food system is built to allow farmers to benefit. RAFI educates farmers and partners, forms and guides coalitions that work on policy, and works directly with farmers in order to facilitate the transition to a sustainable food system. The themes show that RAFI grounds its work in the experiences of farmers, and then works with those farmers towards a financially, socially, and

environmentally successful future.

### ***Communication needs***

In addition to discussing themes that helped formulate an identity statement, the staff members also identified six communication needs. These needs are: (1) publicizing, (2) building community, (3) a coherent Web site, (4) adapting to new challenges, (5) easier access to information, and (6) better internal communication. Each communication theme is discussed below.

#### *“Going big with it”: Self-promotion*

Many staff members were candid about the fact that RAFI does not strategically seek publicity. As one person said, “[E]veryone’s saying we should be better publicizing our stuff. We suck at it. We all know that. We are also totally out to lunch in terms of press relationships; we don’t take advantage nearly enough of opportunities that we have, much less create new opportunities.” Another put it more gently, “I think that some people will say about us that we hide our light under a basket.” One person said “[Talking to wider publics] really suffers in general with RAFI. We need to do a better job of promoting ourselves, getting our name out there, getting a look out there.” Staff felt this wider reach was needed not only to create more awareness of the issues, more grassroots support for policy changes, and new customers for projects like the social justice label, but to attract much-needed funding. As one said, “I think we lose a lot of funding because other people are better at taking what is in essence historically our analysis and going big with it. And they attract a lot of funding and attention, and they eat our lunch.”

Although some staff recognized that wide publicity was not necessarily always beneficial or worth the effort, all of the interviewees wanted RAFI to be able to have the capacity to have a broad reach when necessary.

*“Building community”: Local support*

Several staff feel that RAFI needed to have more of a relationship with Pittsboro and Chatham County publics. “People still don't know what RAFI does, or know that there's a conference center here,” one person said. Another said RAFI needed to do a better job “engaging with the public and building community around what we do.” They felt that having local support would allow RAFI to build strong relationships with volunteers and other supporters and help RAFI rent the Dan Pollitt Center more often. Local publics, one person pointed out, can be reached effectively and easily at street fairs and festivals, at sponsored events, and with print materials.

*“A much more coherent Web site”: A more effective Internet presence*

Many staff members expressed frustration about the Web site. They complained that it did not show up in search engines or on sites linked to agriculture or environment resources. One person said, “I think that we're babies as far as electronic communications go, we could do just so much more outreach that way, and we could have a much more coherent web site....” Another was more emphatic:

Our Web site is terrible....It's just horrible at integrating things. You open up the front page and there's a picture of our green buildings. We are not a green building....Our offices are located in green buildings, but our organization is not about green buildings at all, but that's the focus of the first page of our Web site. So we have never tried to integrate our message....

Staff felt the Web site did not adequately convey RAFI's core values. Most referred to the sentence "RAFI-USA is a nonprofit dedicated to community, equity, and diversity in agriculture," which appears on the site, as the defining statement of the RAFI's work, but were unable to easily articulate what the sentence meant. They were concerned that the site did not generate enough online donations. In general, the staff felt that the Web site was disorganized and not adequately visited. However, the staff also recognized it as asset that would help with everything from generating letters to members of Congress to attracting major donors.

*"A quick turn-around": Fast and adaptable responses*

Because RAFI helps farmers meet the demands of a changing agricultural landscape, several staff members said that communications tools should help RAFI adapt quickly to meet new challenges. One person referred to this in terms of an organizational trait that needs to be applied to putting out new guides and reports: "[A] certain amount of who we are is fly-by-the-seat-of-our-pants...and that's part of our strategy. I don't know what's gonna happen in the spring...or, you know, what opportunities are going to fly out. How do you build in a...very quick turn-around putting stuff out?" This person believes that current resources and practices simply do not allow that kind of speed. Other staff people mentioned the need to quickly respond to the media. One interviewee saw adaptability as one of the most-important traits for RAFI's survival. He said, "Historically, we have been somewhat niche-less on purpose. As a small organization one of our strengths was being able to turn our attention to what was critical at that moment."



*“A very powerful database”: Access to information*

The need to better collect and share information came across in many of the interviews. The kinds of information differed widely. One person said that RAFI's writing needs to be better documented, and that a library or database of useful statistics and research, or better yet, a staff researcher, would be invaluable. Another said he could use “a very powerful database of e-mails” so that finding contact information for project stakeholders went faster. Another said, “We need case studies, pictures of real people who we have helped.” The general trend was that staff members felt they could do a better job if they had quicker access to relevant information. As one person put it, “Part of the challenge of what I do is doing 14 things on 4 -5 fronts.” Staff members feel that accessing information quickly may allow them to take on new projects and handle current ones more effectively.

*“Letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing”: Better internal communication*

Staff frequently mentioned the lack of organized internal communication as something that negatively affects external communication. “[O]ne of the challenges is we have silo-ed staff, all of whom are stumbling over each other in so many different ways,” one staff member said. He recalled walking into RAFI's shared copy room to fax a request to visit with a North Carolina Congressperson, only to encounter another staff member faxing a request to the same person for the same day. Several staff members used the expression, “The right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing.” In general, staff members believe that not understanding the other programs' work makes explaining RAFI's work as a whole much more difficult for everyone.

### *Communication needs overview*

The interview data identify six communication needs. The need for better internal communication and for easier access to information show that staff have trouble getting the information that they need to develop messages and strategies. The needs for community, a better Web presence, a quicker response time, and more publicity show that, once staff creates messages, they still perceive barriers to effective communication. They do not feel they can get their message out to the people who need to hear it. These needs show that a communication plan will need to ensure easier access to information about internal and external issues and then create easy-to-use tools that help get RAFI's messages to the right audiences.

### ***Conclusion***

Although RAFI's communication materials and articulated image are fragmented, a closer analysis of the materials and in-depth interviews with the staff uncover a core set of values, a sense of distinctiveness, and a sense of continuous history that can set the groundwork for a coherent identity. I will discuss what that identity looks like in the next chapter, *Adaptation*. The materials and interviews also turned up possibilities and suggestions for improving RAFI's communication capacity. Some of these can be undertaken with a relatively small investment in materials or time. Others require a significant investment in materials, services, or staff time. The limitations and strengths of RAFI's communication capacity will also be discussed in the next section.

## **Chapter 5: Adaptation**

In this section of this plan, I lay out a suggested coherent and comprehensive identity for RAFI and enumerate the publics that RAFI needs to reach with this identity. This chapter also evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of RAFI's communication capacity.

### ***Identity***

The materials audit and interviews with staff illustrated the diversity of RAFI's work. They also revealed a core identity that can encompass all aspects of RAFI's work: RAFI sustains family farms. It has decades of experience working at levels from individual farms to national policy. It respects farmers. Although staff expressed some concerns about revealing all of RAFI's work to all publics, they also saw the need to be able to communicate clearly and comprehensively about RAFI. The identity articulated below consciously mentions all aspects of RAFI's work. This approach has several advantages. First, it cultivates transparency, which is necessary if RAFI is to be truly accountable to the publics it serves. Second it ensures that publics who might be put off by some aspects of RAFI's work have a chance to encounter the parts of that work that they can connect with. Third, it allows RAFI to educate publics about the interrelated and interdependent nature of all of the issues it works on, leading to an understanding of the elements and benefits of an economically, ecologically, and socially sustainable food system.

### *Claimed central character*

Claimed central character is made up of the elements that define an organization as a distinct entity (Albert & Whetten, 1985). RAFI's central character comprises its values and a central set of assumptions. RAFI is a nonprofit organization that sustains family farms.

Whether farmers are conventional or organic, recent immigrants or seventh-generation North Carolinians, small-scale or on hundreds of acres, RAFI believes they all represent a valuable heritage and a vital resource for the future. RAFI works on the principle that economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and social justice are interdependent. Economically sound agriculture, it argues, cannot degrade people or the environment, or it will not survive over time. Environmentally sound agriculture has to be economically viable and benefit the community. In order to ensure a sustainable food system, farmers need to be supported.

### *Claimed distinctiveness*

Claimed distinctiveness is that which sets an organization apart from other organizations that do similar work (Albert & Whetten, 1985). The scope and variety of RAFI's work set it apart from other organizations that address similar issues. RAFI works directly with farmers as well as at the national and international level of policy. RAFI's tools for the creation of a sustainable food system include national policy change, coalition building, education, development and improvement of food labeling, and support of individual farms through counseling and micro-loans. Because of this diversity of levels and tools, RAFI is uniquely situated to bring the voices and concerns of farmers to the policy arena and to educate farmers on markets and policy.

### *Claimed temporal continuity*

Claimed temporal continuity comprises the narrative that organization uses to explain its origins and history (Albert & Whetten, 1985). RAFI's work grows out of the experience and wisdom of farmers. It respects their rich heritage of working the land. RAFI can trace its roots back to the 1930's. Its founding staff were farmers and farm advocates who worked during the farm crisis of the 1980's. Because it has walked with farmers through decades, RAFI recognizes the continuous changes and challenges that farmers face, and takes pride in anticipating those challenges and finding solutions. Because of its respect for the past, its awareness of the future, and its grounding in the realities of farmers' experience, RAFI is uniquely situated to take a leadership role in carrying farming's heritage into the future.

### *Identity Overview*

Identity is defined in the literature as that which is claimed as central, unique, and enduring about an organization. The values of agricultural sustainability, justice, heritage, and respect are central to RAFI's work. The holistic approach to change, as demonstrated by RAFI's range of work, sets it apart from similar organizations. Its historical narrative includes the 17 years since its founding, but extends back to the 1930s and to millennia of farming traditions. In the next few sections, I will discuss the target publics to whom RAFI needs to convey this identity.

### ***Target Publics***

RAFI staff mentioned several groups that RAFI currently communicates with. Below is a listing of these groups, including an evaluation of how RAFI currently communicates

with them and how they might be segmented using the situational theory of publics. Using the situational theory of publics will allow RAFI to direct its communication to the places where it will do the most good.

### *Farmers*

Farmers are the public at the heart of RAFI's mission. Communication with farmers informs program choice, policy recommendations, and mission. Reciprocal and comprehensive communication with farmers ensures accountability to this key group. However, RAFI cannot and should not attempt to communicate with all farmers, everywhere. In 2000, the United States was home to over two million farms, and close to three million farm workers, according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (2002).

RAFI's on-farm programs focus on farmers in North Carolina. This geographic segmentation allows staff to meet face-to-face with farmers, get word out to farmers about the programs, and monitor wider trends in agriculture through in-depth knowledge of specific farms and farming communities. There are exceptions to the North Carolina focus. For example, the contract agriculture program and the farm sustainability program currently provide support for Hmong contract poultry farmers in Arkansas.

RAFI does not work with corporate farms, but otherwise works with farmers of various races, incomes, farm sizes, and crops, and who use various farming techniques. Therefore, in order to determine the high-involvement problem-facers among farmers, the publics need to be segmented for each particular program and action. For instance, the Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Fund appealed to farmers who grew tobacco, who lost substantial income when tobacco prices fell, who live in North Carolina, and who were

looking for entrepreneurial enterprises to keep their farm afloat. The Farm Sustainability advocate program appeals to farmers who are in dire financial straits, who are in immediate danger of losing their farms, and who want to keep farming on their land. Therefore each program must determine the audience with the highest level of involvement, the most perception of efficacy, and problem recognition. When evaluating potential programs, RAFI's target farmer publics should be those with prior knowledge of RAFI's work or those who are likely to be in the target public for a proposed program. Continued environmental scanning among RAFI program participants can help determine when new issues arise.

#### *Individual Funders and Supporters*

RAFI currently targets individual funders through appeal letters and cards, according to Nancy Simons, the donor records administrator (interview, March 6, 2007). The mailing list comes chiefly from people who have signed up at events or who have had relationships with RAFI over the years. Bailey signs the appeal letters by hand, and often writes notes to funders who she has worked with over the years (Bailey, interview, March 5, 2007). This focus on personal relationships has built a strong donor base over the years. However, as people on this appeal list move away, die, or change interests, new funders need to be found.

Situational theory (Grunig, 1989) suggests that people who already recognize the issue of farm sustainability as important, who believe they can make an impact on farm sustainability, and who see farm sustainability as directly related to their lives will be the easiest to reach. RAFI needs to make sure these publics know about its work and can easily contribute to its success.

Secondly, because of the popularity of issues such as organic and fair trade food consumption, environmental sustainability, and micro-loan-based development, RAFI may work to bring publics that recognize these issues into its donor base. This work will involve some frame alignment (Snow, et al., 1989) in order to bring publics' awareness of one issue into an awareness that encompasses RAFI's holistic work. For instance, RAFI could make sure environmental activists understand the environmental benefits of local food and organic food, then lead them to an understanding of how nurturing farmers of all types can lead to greater environmental sustainability. For these publics, RAFI may restrict itself to those who already have high problem recognition, low constraint recognition, and high involvement with their respective issues. It needs to make sure those publics find information about RAFI when looking for information on their issue, whether they are using a search engine or reading a magazine article. They should also be able to easily access information about how RAFI's holistic work ties into their particular interests.

#### *Partner Organizations and Coalition Members*

First, all programs work with partner organizations. Staff expressed pride in RAFI's leadership role in forming coalitions, keeping them together, and informing their work through the representation of farmers' experiences. They also expressed a frustration at the immense amount of work required to shepherd these coalitions, the lack of external recognition of RAFI's role in facilitating their work, and the lack of partners' awareness of the scope of RAFI's work.

The time and effort required to facilitate coalition work is to some extent inherent in the job. RAFI works with numerous organizations around the United States and the world.



Time and budget constraints prevent face-to-face meetings on a regular basis, so the bulk of communication occurs through phone calls, conference calls, and e-mails. Deciding how much of this type of communication to engage in, and with whom, is a strategic decision beyond the reach of this communication plan. However, maximizing awareness of the entirety of RAFI's work and providing exposure for its identity is within this plan's scope.

RAFI's partners and potential partners are plentiful. When RAFI staff brainstormed a list of organizations working on issues similar to RAFI's, the list numbered 68 groups, some of which were broad categories, such as "organic groups," and "farmer groups." The situational theory of publics suggests that the easiest and most-effective groups to target will be groups with high problem recognition, high perception of personal involvement, and a feeling that they can effectively create change (Grunig, 1989). These groups will already appreciate the importance of acting the issues RAFI addresses, and will be likely to seek out the kinds of information and resources that RAFI provides. Because of the large number of organizations that fit into this category, RAFI can afford to focus on this easy-to-reach group.

This group is complex for several reasons. First, RAFI works on many diverse issues, each of which will have its own distinct group of high-involvement problem-facers. Groups invested in organic certification rarely overlap with groups concerned about the survival of conventional peanut farms. Second, RAFI's coalitions often draw groups that are not high-involvement problem-facers before joining the coalition. For instance, the steering committee for the Farmer and Lender Project included banks and other rural lenders. Committee members from these organizations did not regard the barriers to small, unconventional farm projects' funding as a problem before joining the Project.

These complexities should be acknowledged, but need not change the heart of the

plan. First, all of the various issues RAFI works on connect to the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of farms. All partner groups, therefore, have an interest in some part of this issue. By communicating about farm sustainability as a cohesive issue, RAFI can ensure that partner groups feel invested in its work, and also help raise awareness of the ways in which issues affecting farms and farmers connect to each other. Second, members of coalitions who were not involved in issues before being recruited create a stake for themselves simply by joining the coalition. RAFI programs may work to bring in partners who were not formerly high-involvement problem-facers, but the communication plan treats these groups as involved as soon as they become partners. RAFI should prioritize communication with partner groups that already have a high level of awareness, investment, and perception of efficacy for RAFI's issues. Although treating all partner organizations as one group might overlook some of the complexities of their individual identities, it will allow RAFI staff to conserve the time and effort that might otherwise prove prohibitive in communicating more fully with partners about the core of RAFI's work.

### *Government Officials*

RAFI works with both elected and appointed government leaders. To some extent, RAFI staff can choose to work with officials who share their views on issues. However, in general, RAFI must work with officials who are in positions relevant to their work. For instance, RAFI needs to work with members of Congress on agriculture committees, commissioners of agriculture, and so on. It may choose a friendly senator to write a piece of legislation, but in general, it needs to focus on persuading government officials who have power they need to access. Information for government officials should use frame bridging,

frame amplification, frame extension, or frame transformation, as described by Snow, et al. (1989). These techniques use frame alignment help raise problem recognition and involvement by aligning the language and symbols used to communicate RAFI's message with those used to communicate about issues used by the target public. For example, using frame transformation, which reinterprets the meanings of existing frames (Snow, et al. 1989), RAFI may argue that a senator concerned with protecting children should be concerned about sustainable agriculture because it provides safe food for children and maintains the financial and social stability of rural communities. Constraint recognition does not need to be prioritized, since officials are in a position to affect policy by virtue of their post.

### *Media*

RAFI currently has no centralized system for contacting or targeting media. Some staff members have their own spreadsheets of media contacts. Because many programs focus on North Carolina, its in-state media contacts are the most extensive. However, RAFI staff have been cited in national media as well, and press contacts often extend to other states. For instance, the staff of the Contract Agriculture Reform Program often contact media in states whose federal Congressional representatives sit on the agriculture committee. Publications on organics, GMOs, and commodity contracts are relevant to farmers and consumers around the country, and should be publicized and cited on a national scale.

Situational theory (Grunig, 1989) suggests that, in addition to geographics, RAFI staff should consider a journalist's awareness of, involvement in, and relative constraint recognition in relation to agricultural issues. This means scanning databases and the Internet for articles on issues RAFI addresses, including independent agriculture, organic agriculture,

and rural economic development, and then adding the authors to RAFI's list of contacts. It also means keeping track of journalists who cite RAFI's work in their articles and editors who choose stories based on RAFI's news releases.

### *Foundations*

RAFI gets a large portion of its funding from public foundations. The development officer's job includes identifying and targeting foundations that might fund RAFI's work. Situational theory still applies to an extent, since foundations fund programs that fit their criteria. If a foundation's criteria matches RAFI's work, its board members arguably already qualify as high-involvement problem facers for issues similar, if not identical, to those RAFI addresses. Deciding which foundations to target and writing grant proposals, however, involves more than this communication plan can address. This plan is better able to address how to provide general information about RAFI to current and potential funders in an efficient and effective manner.

### *Target Publics Overview*

RAFI needs to reach partner organizations, farmers, government officials, media, individual supporters, and foundations. Some of these groups, such as partners, farmers, media, and individual supporters, may be most effectively segmented using J. E. Grunig's (1989) situational theory of publics. RAFI should target members of these groups who think their issues are important to address, feel they can address them, and feel that the issues affect them personally. Others, such as government officials and foundations, must be targeted for other reasons. For these publics, frame alignment techniques (Snow et al. 1989)

may be used to raise awareness of the problematic nature of the issues and the ways they affect the targeted publics personally.

### ***Strengths and Challenges***

The analysis points to several strengths and challenges facing RAFI. These are outlined below. The proposed plan takes these assessments into account.

#### *Strength: Deep knowledge and investment in issues*

RAFI staff members' deep commitment to the issues they work on came across clearly in the interviews. Many of the staff have spent decades of their lives advocating for farmers. Their depth of knowledge gives RAFI staff members the chance to be effective expert sources for media, partners, and the general public. Their deep commitment to the issues gives them the ability to be eloquent advocates for farmers' needs.

#### *Challenge: Limited time*

RAFI has a relatively small staff that performs an impressively large amount of work. Many staff members said they lacked the time to finish their current tasks, let alone add new ones. Any new duties that this communication plan suggests will have to be matched with increased efficiency and results in order to make them possible and worth the scarce time of the staff.

#### *Challenge: Fragmented internal communications*

RAFI's internal communications are often fragmented and inefficient. Part of this

problem is due to the fact that staff is often out of the office on business, and that staff members are busy with their own program work, without the luxury of time to explore each other's. Although a comprehensive internal communication plan is beyond the identity-focused scope of this audit, this plan will need to take into account the additional internal communication strategies necessary to develop and illustrate a comprehensive image.

*Strength: Deep relationships*

RAFI has cultivated long-term relationships with farmers, donors, and partner organizations. While achieving a broader reach may mean being open to less-intimate relationships with supporters, RAFI should recognize the value of its in-depth knowledge of the concerns and goals of its stakeholders. These relationships give RAFI the ability to monitor and respond to changes in agriculture and the food system, as well as a source for compelling stories about how its work touches individuals, and how individuals help RAFI in turn.

*Challenge: Limited reach*

RAFI's current outreach to many of its target publics is limited to those people and groups with whom it has a long-standing relationship with. Farmers, consumers, and government officials all need to be more aware of RAFI's message. When it strategizes about communication, RAFI needs to take into account that its communication reach has been limited. One exception to this is partner organizations. Due to its extensive coalition work, many organizations working with agriculture or related issues are already aware of RAFI's work.

### *Strength and challenge: Diversity of issues*

RAFI's diversity of issues gives the organization something to appeal to everyone. Unfortunately, it also makes the work hard to explain, and to some extent also gives the organization a large range of stances for people to disagree with. The long list of issues that RAFI works on gives it an advantage in locating potential target publics who are high involvement problem facers for at least one issue, but it requires that RAFI be prepared to argue compellingly that the success of one issue is tied to the success of all of the other issues on which RAFI works.

### *Strengths and challenges overview*

RAFI has significant strengths in terms of relationships, knowledge, and experience. The challenges it faces are mostly in terms of infrastructure. It lacks a good internal communication system, time to develop strategic communication plans and tools, and resources to convey its message to a broad audience. The strategies and objectives outlined in the following section will take advantage of RAFI's deep knowledge of subjects and convey RAFI's identity within the constraints of time and resources.

## **Chapter 6: Implementation Strategy**

This chapter provides a plan of action for RAFI. This plan will help the organization reinforce the key points of its identity to target publics. The overall goal of this plan is to frame the farms and farmers as the essential element in RAFI's work in a manner easily accessible to target publics while meeting the demands of a limited budget and limited staff time. Each objective, tactic and strategy informs this goal.

### ***Baseline Research***

In order to measure the progress of this campaign in a meaningful way, RAFI staff will need to conduct research that measures the current attitudes of their target publics. The interviews included in the communication audit provide a good understanding of the complexities of RAFI's identity, but the ultimate success of this campaign will depend on the image that results among external stakeholders. A survey of the target publics will help set a baseline measure by which to evaluate its effects.

The survey should measure publics' understanding and opinions of RAFI's work as a whole; their perceived involvement, their problem recognition, and their perceived efficacy; and their access to information about RAFI. For instance, the survey could ask respondents to identify issues on which RAFI works from a list of issues. It should ask whether respondents feel that this work affects their lives, and whether they feel RAFI's work is important. It should ask respondents whether they feel that they personally can create change through RAFI's work. Finally, it should ask them about their experiences gaining information about



RAFI's work, whether they sought that information through personal contact, through the Web site, or through a Web-based search engine. Although some answers may be multiple-choice, most should employ short-answer questions.

Administering this survey to a large, randomly-sampled group is beyond RAFI's resources. However, the survey may be administered on the Web site, at events, and through personal contact. A pop-up window on the Web site should invite visitors to take a few minutes to fill out a survey. A link on the e-newsletter should do the same. A paper version of the survey should be taken along with the staff to site visits and to events where farmers, activists, and other target publics gather. Once participants complete the survey, they should be provided with a document that thanks them for their participation and reveals which of the listed issues RAFI addresses. To increase participation, RAFI should consider offering a simple prize, such as a basket of farm products or a t-shirt.

Using convenience samples selected from people who already interact with RAFI or its issues will allow RAFI staff to gain insight into the attitudes and experiences of people who are already highly invested in their issues. These are the target publics that situational theorist James Grunig (1989) suggests as priorities, as well as the publics that RAFI can easily reach to perform evaluative research.

This research will yield both quantitative and qualitative data. This data will provide a nuanced picture of each respondent's image of RAFI as well as a picture of overall trends. The construction and subsequent tempering of RAFI's image is a process that necessitates a rich, multifaceted understanding of the attitudes and experiences of RAFI's target publics. Qualitative data from short answer questions will yield this information. It will also be

accessible to staff members who have experience with surveys and in-depth interviews, which are used in their program work.

The initial research will provide some insight into subsequent strategic development. The following section identifies objectives and strategies that will serve RAFI's goal of framing the farms and farmers as the essential element in RAFI's work and affect attitudes of key publics who support its work.

### ***Objectives, Strategies, and Tactics***

**Objective:** Develop and convey key messages in order to positively affect attitudes among target publics by April, 2008.

**Strategy:** Create and use messages about the connection between farmers and supporters, including individual donors and foundations, in order to increase perceived efficacy, involvement, and problem recognition among those publics and the government officials who represent them. These messages should represent stakeholder's experiences with RAFI in order to encourage and foster a multiplicity of voices that all support RAFI's chosen identity.

**Tactic:** Provide at least two stories per medium of how RAFI's work affects individual farms and farming families over time as a central feature of the home page, the annual report, and other informational materials.

Quotations, photographs, and narratives will provide readers with an understanding of the way RAFI's work influences farmers' lives. The Web site home page should always show

a photograph of a farm or farmer. Staff may write the stories or invite farmers to submit their own. If appropriate, RAFI can link to featured farmers' Web sites. Farmers should always be asked for permission to use their names in the story. When possible, first-person quotations should be used. The central use of farmers' or consumers' words, stories, and pictures will convey the central, ownership role that farmers play in RAFI's work.

*Tactic:* Tell supporters how they have helped farmers on the Web site, appeal letters, and annual report.

Supporters should feel that they are a meaningful part of RAFI's story. They should be part of RAFI's public face. The Web site and other external communications material are excellent avenues for the message that supporters' generosity enables RAFI's work. For instance, if the Contract Agriculture Reform program were to generate 25 letters to the editor from members, the story should read, "You sent 25 letters," not "RAFI generated 25 letters from members." Supporters should feel as if they each made a difference in the creation of a sustainable food system.

*Tactic:* Feature information about how sustaining farmers directly affects the lives and experiences of consumers on the Web site, annual report, and other written materials as appropriate. This information could be the topic of an article, but may also be presented as a short sidebar or boxed sentence.

Many consumers may not realize the ways that their everyday lives connect to the health of family farms. RAFI's Web site and other materials should list ways that healthy farms and healthy food affect the general public. From prosperous rural communities to

hormone-free milk at the grocery store, almost every person in America could connect on some level to the work that RAFI does. This should be explicit in RAFI's materials.

*Tactic:* Provide resources for donations and to other actions after compelling stories or facts so that readers can take immediate action on the Web site and e-newsletters.

RAFI has the capacity for on-line donations, but has only one link on the Web site. This link should appear in the e-newsletter and prominently on the site. Rather than just informing readers of the potential for donations, RAFI should invite them to personally take action on each issue, whether this means buying food from a local farmer, writing a letter to Congress about organic standards, or making donations. RAFI should make this support as easy as possible for their target publics. Encouraging donations may lead to increased income for RAFI, but, more importantly, it will also allow supporters to feel that they are able to take part in RAFI's work, and will therefore increase perceived involvement and efficacy.

***Strategy:*** Increase recognition and understanding of RAFI among target publics who are not aware of it or the range of its work by creating and using a consistent look for RAFI's work. This visual theme will help reinforce the identity that RAFI presents, and will help target publics perceive RAFI's work as a consistent whole rather than as scattered parts. An improvement in recognition and understanding will occur when surveys reveal in increased ability to recognize RAFI and its issues among target publics.

*Tactic:* Design a logo and use it on all printed and digital materials.

RAFI needs a visually compelling image that invokes its identity. This logo should

appear on all of RAFI's digital and print products. This consistency will reinforce the interrelatedness of RAFI's work to its target publics.

*Tactic:* Use key fonts, colors, and design elements in all materials.

RAFI's print and digital materials should share a similar aesthetic. Colors and visual cues may be taken from the logo. For instance, all of RAFI's materials now feature the color green, but in variable shades. When this tactic is employed, the greens should correspond within and across documents. Employing a design firm or seeking pro-bono work from a firm would be ideal, but, if necessary, a staff member may develop the look and provide guidelines to other staff and the Web mistress to be used in development of future materials.

*Tactic:* Create a template publication, template fact sheet, and a template executive summary and use them for all RAFI publications, including the annual report.

Templates allow staff or the communication director to quickly enter relevant information and pictures into a document without dedicating an excessive amount of time to layout. They allow staff to produce materials with a professional appearance quickly and consistently. A design firm would be ideal for creating the templates, but if the service is not available, the communication director should develop templates and provide staff with guidelines for using them or providing her with materials in the form that she needs in order to easily complete a publication using the template.

*Tactic:* Create relationships with people and institutions that can assist in design work.

Professional design work often involves costs that are beyond RAFI's budget.

Relationships with schools, volunteers, and firms willing to do pro bono work may allow RAFI to present top-quality materials without having to obtain additional grants. For instance, Laura Ruel, a visual communication professor at the University of North Carolina School of Journalism and Mass Communication, has experience working with nonprofit organizations and may be willing to incorporate RAFI's needs into her students' work. Free Range Communications, a graphic design firm with extensive experience in both print and electronic design, donates \$15,000 of free services to a chosen organization every year. RAFI should explore these and other sources of high-quality work that stays within budgetary restrictions.

***Strategy:*** Establish RAFI as a credible and accessible source for reporters. Because asking reporters to fill out surveys may not be practically possible, this strategy may be evaluated by assessing the number and quality of reporters' citations of RAFI's work.

***Tactic:*** Develop a "media" page on the Web site, with biographical information on staff who may serve as expert sources, a one-page description of RAFI's work and accomplishments, press releases, short descriptions of the latest news, and contact information.

A media page should present information on RAFI's history, its credentials, its activities, and its areas of expertise. The page should also contain links to copies of all currently relevant news releases.

***Tactic:*** Send out news and position briefs six times yearly to reporters and publications covering agriculture or food systems and those who have cited RAFI in the past, alerting

press to RAFI work and emerging issues. These briefs should convey RAFI's chosen identity and chosen key messages.

News briefs will keep reporters aware of the scope and depth of RAFI's work without requiring the reporters to read frequent press releases. They will enable RAFI to save press releases for more substantial news while still informing reporters of important issues and events. Each brief sent electronically should contain a link to further information about each subject. Brief features may be drawn from the e-newsletter.

*Tactic:* Make returning media inquiries a priority by designating a staff person to be “on-call” to take questions after business hours for each news release.

When a news release is sent out, a knowledgeable member of the RAFI staff should make themselves available to answer any questions a reporter may have. Usually the program director for the program featured in the release or the executive director will be the correct choice, but more general issues may allow the communications coordinator or other staff person to adequately offer comments and answer questions.

*Tactic:* Develop a system of tracking and responding to press coverage.

RAFI does not have the time or the money to completely or accurately track coverage of the organization and its primary issues of concern. Tracking media coverage is still possible. Staff often receive confirmation of coverage from editors, happen upon articles about issues relevant to their work, and find out about news coverage from search engines of participating farmers. The Web page may also invite supporters to monitor and report news coverage of issues relevant to RAFI or stories that cite RAFI. Staff members should record

reporters addressing relevant issues or citing RAFI on the media list. Staff should also assess the tone of the article. They should follow up with these reporters with a letter acknowledging the article and, if appropriate, introducing RAFI. Letters and the press list will be centrally available, either on-line or on a central server, so this response should take minimal response time for the relative impact.

***Strategy:*** Increase visibility and community in Pittsboro and Chatham County around RAFI's work.

***Tactic:*** Host a booth that explains RAFI's work as a whole and includes key messages at least two community events each year.

Pittsboro and Chatham County host several festivals and events each year that would allow RAFI to set up a booth discussing its work, including the Pittsboro Fall Festival and the spring and fall Shakori Hills Music Festivals. RAFI has hosted a booth at the Raleigh Whole Foods Market Local Foods Day, but cites lack of staff time as a reason for not being able to participate in other events. While at RAFI this summer, I updated the display booth. Inviting supporters to host the booth at events in the event that staff cannot attend gives supporters a way to get personally involved in the organization as well as allowing RAFI to expand its visibility in the community.

***Tactic:*** Host one community gathering at the Dan Pollitt Center each year to raise funds for the organization.

A fund-raising gathering at the Dan Pollitt Center would raise visibility for RAFI and



the Center as well as allowing supporters to develop relationships with each other and the organization. These events can be simple; a potluck with a suggested donation and a few volunteer musicians would be sufficient. Once again, if staff do not have time to coordinate this event, the task can be offered to volunteers. Hosting these events improves RAFI's community relationships by developing a strong volunteer base as well as increasing visibility.

*Tactic:* Submit at least one article each year in local media about RAFI's work (see Appendix D for an example). The article should convey RAFI's chosen, cohesive identity.

The Triangle and Chatham County offer a variety of small local publications who would welcome articles about RAFI's work. For instance, the *Chatham County Line* has expressed interest in publishing articles about RAFI's accomplishments and events. RAFI should cultivate these local media relationships and submit articles and pictures for publication.

**Objective:** Increase target publics' access to information about RAFI's work by designing a Web site that provides up-to-date information and a cohesive identity for those publics.

**Strategy:** Structure RAFI's Web site to provide appropriate and accessible information to target publics.

*Tactic:* Partition Web site by target publics' needs, not program work. This presentation will assure that site visitors reach information that will communicate RAFI's identity in an

effective way.

The Web site side bar should sections should include links to the following sections:

- an “About Us” section containing links to pages on RAFI's history, major accomplishments, mission, staff, and board;
- a “What We Do” section describing the RAFI's work as a whole, which can also link to information about specific programs, and which should include personal stories and examples from farmers
- an “Issues” section, followed by links describing the issues RAFI currently addresses. For instance, the section should currently include facts surrounding the need justice for contract farmers, federal disaster policy, the Farm Bill, agricultural lending, rural economic development, and other issues alongside stories and pictures driving home the impact of those issues on farmers
- a “Take Action” section, with links to online donation, planned giving, action alerts, volunteer applications, and e-bulletin sign-ups
- a “Resources” section with publications and information broken up for farmers, advocates, and policy-makers; a “Conference Center and Offices” section with information about leasing the center and offices as well as information about the building
- a “Media” section with a concise description of RAFI's work and accomplishments, the latest press releases and advisories, fact sheets, program staff biographies and areas of expertise, and high-quality photographs
- an “Information for Funders” section with financial information
- a “Contact Us” section with phone numbers and e-mail addresses for all staff.

*Tactic:* Include educational components in the Web site that provide quick facts and resources for further education or action.

The Web page can and should provide in-depth information on issues, and offer links to full-text copies of publications. However, it should also prominently provide concise descriptions of work and issues. For example, executive summaries of publications should be published on the Web site.

*Tactic:* Set up an RSS feed for the Web site so that subscribers may stay up-to-date on RAFI's work.

RSS feeds are relatively easy to set up, and allow subscribers to get up-to-date information about changes on RAFI's site. Staff should send updates in the appropriate form to the communications coordinator or Web master, who will post them on line at regular intervals. RAFI staff members should all subscribe to the feed. A link to the feed should be posted on the front page of the site, in the "Take Action" section, and in all e-bulletins.

*Tactic:* Issue a monthly e-newsletter (see Appendix B for an example).

RAFI already has a mailing list for its e-newsletter. The e-newsletter should provide information on new resources, current work, analysis of issues, and action alerts. Throughout the year, it should educate and solicit funds or action around certain issues. At least three times a year, it should tell the story of a specific farm or family affected by RAFI's work. The newsletter should be sent to all staff and partner organizations as well as external subscribers. It should invite the reader to learn more, participate, and donate through links.

**Strategy:** Enable staff to update the Web site quickly and easily in order to allow them to provide timely information while working within the constraints on their time.

**Tactic:** Use podcasts to allow staff to communicate quickly about emerging issues. Purchase equipment, train staff, and post the first podcast on the Web site by November, 2007.

Several staff members expressed frustration with their writing skills. Audio recording would allow staff to quickly articulate information on issues or programs. RAFI should obtain a recorder for staff use. Staff can submit podcast files and short descriptions to the communications coordinator or Web mistress for posting on the site. Descriptions should also appear on the relevant program site. In addition, podcasts should be published on iTunes and other appropriate sites.

**Tactic:** Create “blog-able” Web pages that allow staff to simply enter text in certain areas by April, 2008.

Web pages about specific issues or programs should have some text areas that can be updated quickly and easily by staff members without Web design knowledge. Staff should be responsible for making relevant changes to their respective pages monthly, and for notifying the communications director of major changes that should be announced by RSS feed.

**Objective:** Increase staff members’ ability to strategically convey RAFI's identity to segmented target publics by April, 2008.

***Strategy:*** Provide training to allow staff to better convey RAFI's articulated image and key messages.

*Tactic:* Explain the identity that results from this project in a staff meeting and in writing to all current staff.

A copy of this thesis and a summary of its findings will be made available to RAFI staff immediately. A meeting will give me a chance to present an overview of the findings quickly and to respond to any questions.

*Tactic:* Suggest that staff list target publics and desired results on a brief worksheet before embarking on a publication, press, or publicity project.

This worksheet will simply be a guide to thinking strategically about a media or print project. It will not be submitted to any other staff member, but will be offered as a guide to strategically shaping a message for a specific public in service of a specific goal.

*Tactic:* Develop orientation materials on identity and communication for incoming staff members.

New staff should receive the same information about RAFI's claimed identity and its communication protocols as current staff. This will enable them to immediately begin acting as informed spokespeople for the organization. Current staff should receive copies of the same material for reference.

***Strategy:*** Facilitate staff's access to communication information to help them extend RAFI's identity.

***Tactic:*** Maintain an electronic record of pictures and short histories of exemplary cases so that staff can easily refer to them.

Benny Bunting, Jason Roehrig, and other staff encounter farmers who are deeply involved in RAFI's work should encourage those farmers to give written or oral feedback on how RAFI has affected them and their opinions on RAFI as an organization. This information may be collected by asking farmers to fill out short evaluation forms or requesting that they write a letter following prompts. RAFI staff should also write brief descriptions of compelling stories and keep a list of contact information for farmers who are willing to be interviewed by RAFI staff or the media. Likewise, other staff should jot down stories of successful events or meetings. RAFI should have a good-quality digital camera, and staff should ask to take pictures of meetings, farms, farmers, and other illustrations of RAFI's work. This information should be compiled, either on an internal server or in a file in the communication manager's office. This information will allow development and communication staff to easily survey and select stories and images that convey the core of RAFI's work.

***Tactic:*** Maintain an up-to-date media list, preferably on a central server or Web-based form so that all employees can refer to it, use it, and update it regularly.

All staff press lists should be consolidated into one list. All staff members should have quick access to this list so that they can add to it or use it easily, so it needs to be online

or on a central server. The list should be in the form of an Excel spreadsheet or an Access database, and all staff should receive a quick training in the information it contains and how to edit and use it. Staff should be asked to check the database before updating it to make sure that they do not enter duplicate information.

*Tactic:* Keep standardized letterhead, RAFI boilerplate, and boilerplate statements RAFI on a central server or Web-based form (see Appendix C for an example news release boilerplate).

Staff members should be able to formulate statements about RAFI's work without having to ask other staff members for a copy of the letterhead or having to write a description of RAFI's work from scratch. Boilerplates and letterhead will allow staff to plug their information quickly into a document and send it on its way.

*Tactic:* Where possible, maintain a bank of prepared statements about key issues and programs and keep them on a central server or Web-based form.

When RAFI staff members write descriptions of their work or the key issues that inform it, those descriptions should be saved in a central folder. These descriptions will allow development and communication staff, as well as program staff, to quickly access information about the programs in order to reinforce RAFI's identity. They also enable staff to quickly prepare statements about key issues in order to quickly prepare press releases, letters, and statements.

***Budget***

<i>Tactic</i>	<i>Initial Staff Hours</i>	<i>Staff Hours per Year</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Maximum Resource Cost</i>	<i>Minimum Resource Cost</i>
Baseline research	25	0	Web-based survey designer	\$400	\$0
Stories about RAFI and farmers	20	20	Travel and phone expenses	\$200	\$0
Stories about supporters and farmers	20	20	n/a	\$0	\$0
Connections between farmers and consumers	20	20	n/a	\$0	\$0
Links to donation site	5	5	n/a	\$0	\$0
Logo	20	0	Graphic design firm	\$5,000	\$0
Key design elements	10-60	0	Graphic design firm	\$10,000	\$0
Template publications	10-50	0	Graphic design firm	\$10,000	\$0
Relationships with designers	10	5	n/a	\$0	\$0
Media page	20	30	n/a (included in Web site re-design costs)	\$0	\$0
News briefs	4	20	n/a	\$0	\$0
On-call media staffer	6	15	n/a	\$0	\$0
Tracking coverage	4	25	n/a	\$0	\$0
Hosting booth	3-15	3-15	Printing handouts and booth elements	\$35	\$10
Community gathering	2-20	2-20	Miscellaneous event costs	\$300	\$10
Article in local media	3	3	n/a	\$0	\$0
Design Web site for target publics	100	0	Web designer	\$10,000	\$0
Quick resources on Web site	25	15	n/a	\$0	\$0
RSS Feed	4	20	n/a	\$0	\$0
Podcasts	3	20	Microphone and audio editing software	\$180	\$15
Blog-able pages	0	80	Included in Web site redesign	\$0	\$0



<i>Tactic</i>	<i>Initial Staff Hours</i>	<i>Staff Hours per Year</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Maximum Resource Cost</i>	<i>Minimum Resource Cost</i>
E-newsletter	6	60	Constant contact or other e-news management service	\$65/yr	\$0
Staff meeting	1	0	n/a	\$0	\$0
Worksheet	6	6	n/a	\$0	\$0
Orientation materials	10	2	Printing and binding	\$40	\$10
Electronic record of pictures and stories	15	10	Digital camera	\$300	\$150
Media list	30	10	Central server or Web-based file sharing	\$1,000	\$0
Standardized letterhead and boilerplates	4	1	Included in server or file sharing	\$0	\$0
Bank of prepared statements	20	10	Included in server or file sharing	\$0	\$0
Evaluative research	30	30	Included in initial survey design	\$0	\$0
			<i>Total cost</i>	\$37, 525	\$195

## Timeline

2007												2008			
March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April			
		Begin Web site re-design		Post media page	Main page designed		Donate links complete			Program pages complete		Web site re-design complete			
							RSS Feed goes live								
							Begin using podcasts								
												Staff begins updating blog-able pages			
Begin sending monthly e-bulletin															
			Begin file of farmer's stories					Edit at least three stories for use				Stories feature on Web site and annual report			
			Begin integrating supporters into RAFI's story												
				Begin listing impacts on consumers			Add consumer impacts to materials impinformation to Web site								

2007												2008		
March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April		
			Launch shared press list											
			Place letterhead and boilerplates in shared location											
			Begin compiling statements on key issues											
						Begin logo design process			Use logo on all materials					
					Develop key colors, fonts, and design elements							Use in all printed and electronic materials		
							Begin creating template publications		Begin using templates for all publications					
						Begin sending news briefs								

2007												2008			
March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April			
			Begin as-signing on-call press work	Begin tracking and responding to press coverage											
		Choose and reserve booths at community events													
			Begin planning and recruiting volunteers for event at DPC												
Place yearly article in local media															
	Staff meeting on communication plan														
		Develop publication worksheet	Staff begins using worksheet												

2007											
March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March
				Begin de-veloping orientation materials	Have materials ready for staff use						

2008

April

## **Chapter 7: Evaluation**

The success of this plan can be measured in several ways. Since the completion of this plan lies outside the scope of this project, RAFI staff members will be responsible for the evaluation process. I suggest three evaluation projects, to be carried out in May of 2008. These assessments are designed to require limited time and a limited budget. Together, they will give RAFI leaders an idea of the effectiveness of this plan, and allow RAFI staff to identify what any changes that need to be made before continuing to use these strategies and tactics in the years to come.

First, RAFI should re-evaluate the consistency of staff members' articulated organizational identity and their experiences conveying this message to target publics. A replication of the interviews included in the communication audit will be beyond RAFI's ability, but two simple exercises can yield sufficient data for comparison.

Staff members should each, in a few sentences, send an e-mail to the communication director a synopsis of their image of RAFI. The consistencies between these descriptions and this plan's articulated identity will indicate which parts resonate with staff. If serious inconsistencies appear, RAFI's leadership will have to decide whether to increase staff education about the chosen identity of RAFI or work with staff to articulate a different message. Staff members should then discuss this plan in a staff meeting in May, 2008. They should review together which aspects of RAFI's image, which strategies, and which tactics they found most useful. The results of the e-mail survey will give the staff a starting-place for this discussion. Ideally, staff should be able to articulate key messages that convey RAFI's

chosen identity. They should feel they can easily and effectively educate stakeholders about their work.

Second, RAFI should repeat the surveys that comprised the baseline research. Once again, staff should bring paper copies of the survey to events and into the field, and the Web site and e-newsletter should invite readers to complete a quick survey. Responses should illustrate an increased understanding of RAFI's holistic identity, an increased investment and belief in RAFI's work, and an increased ease of access to information.

Together, these three measures will give RAFI an understanding of the effectiveness of this plan. Ideally, that understanding will be used to help this plan evolve year to year. Staff can make changes to weak spots and dedicate resources to strengths. This evaluation will become the research for the next years of RAFI's communication plan, and will allow this plan to be a living document that can adapt and change to meet future challenges. This evaluative process should be carried out once yearly as long as the strategies and tactics outlined here are in use.

## **Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion**

### ***Introduction***

This project applies scholarly literature about organizational identity, organizational image, and situational theory of publics to a communication plan for a nonprofit organization. I began with an overview of RAFI's complex and diverse set of work. I reviewed literature on organizational identity, organizational image, and the situational theory of publics. A communication audit evaluated RAFI's primary channels of communication and explored the staff's construction of RAFI's identity and communication needs. The implementation strategy chapter provides clear steps that RAFI can take to improve the coherence and effectiveness of its organizational image. Finally, I presented some methods for evaluating the results of the first year of this campaign.

In this project, I explored how the concepts of identity and image play out in a specific nonprofit organization, and how a public relations campaign might strengthen its image while meeting a small nonprofit organization's time and budget constraints. This project includes specific steps and requirements for the next year, but is designed to provide tools and guidance on an on-going basis. Applying scholarly research and theory to a concrete plan had both challenges and rewards. My experience with these is outlined below.

### ***Applying organizational identity and image***

Organizational identity and image are fluid and contested concepts which are none-the-less critical components of both internal sense-making and relationships with external



publics. Organizational identity was defined by Albert and Whetten (1985) as the claimed central character, claimed distinctiveness, and claimed temporal continuity of an organization. Identity is generally conceptualized as internally-created. In other words, identity is what an organization, as embodied by its members, thinks about itself. Image, on the other hand, is what external publics think about an organization.

Nonprofit organizations may rise and fall around specific issues. Nonprofit organizations may also arise around a specific group of stakeholders. For instance, RAFI serves the interests of farmers. While the specific issues affecting farmers may change, RAFI's mission will continue as long as farmers exist and share interests. Likewise, some organizations exist around values as well as issues. RAFI works for sustainability. Issues arising around sustainability may change, but until civilization reaches a completely sustainable level or discovers unlimited resources, the value of sustainability will remain.

Nonprofit organizations must, by their nature and by United States law, claim allegiance to a cause over allegiance to the survival of the organization. However, I premise my work on the proposition that corporations and activist organizations often share the need survive over time in order to serve their purpose. AS RAFI staff pointed out in their interviews, creating sustainable change often requires a long-term investment of time and effort. This requires the long-term survival of the organization and an identity that can meet the needs of both changing and lasting situations. I find that a key strategy for maintaining continuity in image and identity in a mission-driven organization is to create images and identities that center around enduring core values or stakeholders rather than around short-lived issues. This allows an organization such as RAFI to take up new issues as they arise, but still maintain a level of continuity that allows stakeholders to maintain relationships as

the organization changes. This fits with the theory of adaptive instability (Goia et al., 2000) in that the organization fosters identities and images that center around enduring symbols but adapt to changing situations.

Creating images and identities that stakeholders can connect with and create strong relationships to can allow organizations to change, even when they are activist organizations. For instance, RAFI asks conventional farmers to consider switching to organic production, but does so by arguing that organic production offers better financial opportunity in the face of changing markets and provides better long-term security by caretaking the land. It endorses organic methods in the interest of ensuring that farms and farming can continue in centuries to come. RAFI staff could simply criticize conventional methods, but doing so would break with the principle of supporting all farmers, and would not be nearly as effective as using symbols and stories that are consistent with the histories of the organization and of the farming stakeholders it is addressing.

In order to ask publics to trust their judgments as new issues arise, RAFI needs to maintain and foster effective images and identities. As new issues arise, smaller publics may connect with and part from the organization, but the core stakeholders and the core values should take precedence. RAFI cannot afford to make organic production the center of its image and identity, even though activist publics are mobilizing around the issue. It can address organic farming only because doing so is consistent with the core value of sustainability and the interests of the central stakeholders, farmers. Mothers concerned that their children are being exposed to too many pesticides may join RAFI because of its stance on this issue, but they do not define the central characteristics, central distinctiveness, and central history of the organization. The need to prioritize the central, enduring, and unique

aspects of RAFI's work helped guide my choices as I balanced the multitudes of values and priorities held by RAFI's many stakeholders.

Social change organizations need to acknowledge the complex relationship between issues and publics and the complex ways that image and identity relate to issues. In some ways, loyalty to mission above organizational survival makes these organizations, their relationships with their stakeholders, and their images and identities fundamentally different from a for-profit organization. In other ways, nonprofit organizations share the same need as corporations to use the confluence of past symbols and current situations to create long-lasting, trusting relationships between the organizations and their stakeholders.

As I undertook this project, my understanding of the components and complexities of organizational identity and image helped me pinpoint important themes and messages. The mammoth goal of explaining RAFI and everything RAFI does took on a more manageable structure when the task became finding that which was central, that which was unique, and that which was enduring about RAFI. Approaching this project from that angle allowed me to locate the themes that will most effectively convey a picture of RAFI and its work. It helped me choose messages, prioritize publics, and find a way to convey a single identity that could encompass the vast work and diverse stakeholders that comprise RAFI.

### ***Applying accountability and legitimacy***

The multiplicity of stakeholders for most nonprofit organizations, including RAFI, can be generalized into two groups: one group helps the organization, and the other is helped by the organization (Ganesh, 2003). Organizations need to gain legitimacy from the former, since they allow the organization to exist by providing resources such as funding, credibility,

and legal protections (Ganesh, 2003). Organizations should be accountable to the latter, meaning that those whom the organization claims to serve should be able to define and control the organization's existence (Ganesh, 2003). An organization cannot exist without legitimacy, and cannot serve its mission without accountability.

As I designed a public relations plan for RAFI, I designed the tools with which RAFI will foster relationships with its stakeholders. As I worked to foster a coherent and effective identity and image for RAFI, I needed to make sure that one of these stakeholder voices does not drown out the others. I dealt specifically with accountability and legitimacy as they manifest in the discussion about RAFI's identity and image. I had to balance the images of RAFI that I wanted each public to create. I needed to provide each group with appropriate messages, information, and opportunity to be heard while maintaining a cohesive inner sense to RAFI's image and identity.

Informed by the literature surrounding accountability and legitimacy, I emphasized transparency and framed it with a planned identity. This plan conveys a specific identity, but does so in a way that allows the work of each program and the voices of diverse stakeholders to be at home within it. I include the stories of individual supporters and individual farmers in the creation of an overarching story about RAFI. Exposing all of RAFI's publics to all of RAFI's work has the potential to alienate some current stakeholders. Nonetheless, throughout this plan, I chose to err on the side of transparency. If RAFI asks others to believe in its work and claims to be accountable to its stakeholders, it needs to create an honest picture of itself. However, this plan frames that transparency with an overarching articulated identity as a way of assuring legitimacy balances this accountability. RAFI needs to be honest about its work, but it also deserves the chance to explain that work and the values and history that inform it.

Instead of playing the interests of each stakeholding group and each program against the others, I negotiated the tension between accountability and legitimacy by looking for the places where their values and stories overlapped.

This plan emphasizes the way stakeholder groups relate to each other's stories with RAFI's help. The organization becomes a mediator between the groups to that support it and the groups that it supports. To balance the demands of legitimacy and accountability, this mediation should be transparent. The messages communicated by the organization should to resonate with those stakeholders who grant legitimacy and those to whom the organization should be accountable. The organization's identity needs to be one with which funders and beneficiaries alike can identify. An organization like RAFI needs to maintain strong links with its stakeholders, and also create links between those groups. For example, farmers and foundations learn about each other and interact in meaningful ways with RAFI's assistance. Therefore, instead of generating a customer relationship between a foundation and RAFI, RAFI must create a feeling of connection between a foundation and the farmers that its program will help. This connection needs to have enough integrity that farmers can communicate their needs and values through RAFI to the foundations and activists they need to enact change. RAFI should be perceived by both groups as a good mediator. In other words, once supporters decide that they want to work with farmers and vice versa, both groups should also decide that RAFI represents the ideal organization to carry out this work.

The boundary-spanning work of public relations serves a critical role in creating and maintaining the web of relationships and understandings that keeps RAFI and its work afloat. Public relations scholars Jeffery K. Springston and Greg Leighty (1994) defined the public relations practitioner as, "the boundary-spanning person [who] conveys information and

influence between the constituent group and outside groups” (p. 697). In other words, by definition, public relations should convey the ideas and understandings of external publics to internal managers. In the case of a nonprofit organization, this boundary-spanning work also includes representing funders to beneficiaries and vice versa. The organization's boundary-spanning communication practices are the nexus through which the organization creates relationships, not only with stakeholders but between disparate stakeholder groups. RAFI's communicators gather raw information from stakeholders and shape it into messages that will ring true with funders and participants. Then they communicate those messages in a compelling way while still ensuring the integrity of the ideas.

This interaction points to one of the ways that nonprofit communication differs significantly from for-profit communication. The components of identity presented by the organization are the constructed historical narratives, core characteristics, and distinguishing attributes, not only of the organization, but of the stakeholders it serves and the stakeholders who serve it. (For an illustration of this concept, see Appendix C.)

I found the scholarly literature around accountability and legitimacy helpful in pointing out what was at stake as I created this plan. However, although the literature establishes the need to balance accountability and legitimacy, it does not often move beyond anecdotal demonstrations of how to do this. Applying these principles to a professional plan allowed me to develop a system that helps organizations pursue the needed balance.

### ***Applying the situational theory of publics***

Since organizational image and identity theory suggests that the audience co-creates the meaning of the message, part of sending an effective message is understanding the

audience that the communicator hopes will receive it and tailoring the message to the needs of that audience. Very basic segmentation schemes might use demographics, geographics, or psychographics to define publics (Grunig, 1989). This segmentation scheme might define a group, but it does little to define how they might react to a message (Grunig, 1989). An ideal segmentation scheme would, of course, tailor the message to each individual person (Grunig, 1989). Unfortunately, this kind of campaign is far beyond the resources of an average organization. The next best thing is to tailor messages to publics who are differentially responsive to the message. In other words, a public should be defined by the way it responds to the specific message being sent, both by how it will seek information and by what the result of the message will be (Grunig, 1989). The situational theory of publics (Grunig, 1989) lays out a way to achieve this.

These segments that result help determine audiences who will be the easiest to reach and the most likely to respond. For an organization with limited resources, these audiences are clearly prime targets, especially when many members of these public have not yet been exposed to an organization's message. The literature also helped outline the ways an organization can reach less-than-ideal target publics. The best possible result would be for all publics to become high-involvement problem-facing publics. The segmentation scheme was used to help understand the changes that need to occur before a message has the desired effect.

The approach suggested by situational theory of publics (Grunig, 1989) at first seemed like common sense for an advocacy organization; the publics who are most attracted to the issue will be most likely to do something about it. As I outlined the plan, however, the theory offered both guidance and validation. Of course RAFI would love to have a plan that

reached every person who grows or eats food. However, this is quite obviously not feasible. Situational theory offered guidance on what limits RAFI should set in its outreach efforts and assurance that setting those limits actually increases the chance that a campaign will have measurable results. By eschewing those publics who are least likely to respond positively to the chosen messages, RAFI maximizes its impact. In other words, if RAFI is only able to reach 1,000 people this year, it should reach 1,000 people who will act on its message, not 1,000 people who will ignore or attack its work. In the low-resource, high-stakes world of nonprofit advocacy, this maximized efficiency is essential.

### ***Suggestions for future research***

Few public relations scholars have explored the ways that scholarly literature applies to nonprofit organizations. Even fewer have applied scholarly literature and theory to the construction of a communication plan. Both of these endeavors give rise to unique insights and challenges. More research is called for, both on the peculiar issues faced by nonprofit organizations and on the ways that theory manifests itself in direct practice.

First, future scholarship should acknowledge that nonprofit organizations are more than simply embodied issues, but also that they are distinct from corporations in important ways. Much of the current literature on nonprofit organizations depicts them as antagonistic entities against which corporations must defend. Even the literature addressing nonprofit organizations from their own vantage point tends to depict them as issue-driven, fairly one-dimensional organizations. Future research should explore the complex ways that nonprofits differ from corporations and the ways in which they are similar. It should also acknowledge and investigate the different types of nonprofits, from professional organizations to social



movement organizations, and their specific needs. Because of the way that social movement organizations depend, to some extent, on issues for their survival, theoretical areas that deal explicitly with issues, such as issues management and the situational theory of publics, offer particularly intriguing possibilities for future research.

In this project, I applied theories developed for traditional public relations practice to a nonprofit social movement organization. In many ways, the theories proved invaluable, but they also needed to be modified to match some specific concerns that arise only in nonprofit contexts. The implications of these modifications call for further work. For instance, how does the role of organization as mediator between publics affect models of symmetrical communication and models of issues management? What are other ways that organizations might balance accountability and legitimacy? By seeking out these complexities, future researchers will find a rich range of issues to explore.

Second, more research is needed on how to combine scholarship and practice. Scholarly literature frequently draws from case studies to illustrate its points. However, explicitly explores the way that information moves from theory back into practice much less frequently. Testing theories against past experiences is a vital step. However, testing them in one's current work offers different and equally important insights. This type of action research also offers researchers a way to give something valuable back to their study participants. Sharing the findings of a study with an organization can always be helpful. However, public relations scholars are also professionals who are the best people to help organizations understand how those findings should play out in their day-to-day work. Including a professional element in a scholarly study allows us to make this contribution.

When I first came to RAFI one year ago, I understood very little about what the

organization did, but I knew from talking with the staff that I wanted to stay and find out.

With this project, I have been able to explore and analyze that work. I found that RAFI acts on many levels and in many capacities, but at its heart it supports farms in order to create a sustainable future. I hope that this plan allows RAFI to explain that work effectively and compellingly to new supporters, and that they, in turn, help RAFI prosper in the years to come.

## Appendix A: RAFI home page



Figure 1: A screen shot of the RAFI home page

March, 2007

## RAFI E-Bulletin

The Rural Advancement Foundation International -  
USA

### In This Issue

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2007 Bill](#)

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Conference on  
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[International  
Conference on  
Organic  
Agriculture and  
Food Security](#)

[Benefit for RAFI  
at Raleigh Whole  
Foods](#)

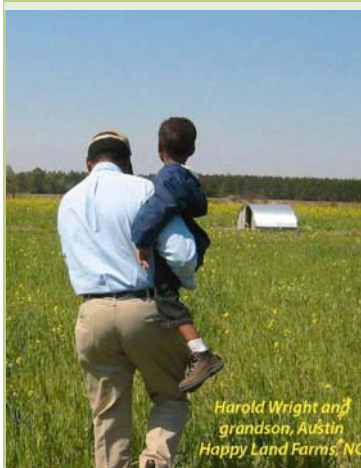
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bulletin to a  
friend or](#)

After a year-long hiatus, RAFI's monthly e-bulletin is back. This year, look for news and information about the 2007 Farm Bill along with updates and stories about RAFI's diverse programs.



### Welcome to the 2007 Farm Bill:

### The Future of America's Farms

We get a new farm bill every five to seven years, and 2007 is one of those years. It's an omnibus bill that covers everything from farm commodities and nutrition to conservation and rural development. Past Farm Bills have not given much support for organic, contract farmers, and small- and mid-scale farms. RAFI's aim is to help create a Farm Bill that:

- Fairly distributes the benefits of farm programs
- Increases support for environmental stewardship
- Addresses flaws in conservation and disaster-assistance programs
- Protects contract farmers, fair competition, and country-of-origin labeling
- Supports organic agriculture through research and certification cost-share
- Increases public plant and animal breeding research
- Supports farm-to-school and farmer's market nutrition programs

To join RAFI's farm bill action alert list, e-mail [communicator@rafiusa.org](mailto:communicator@rafiusa.org). Read this e-bulletin in coming months for news and information about the 2007 Farm Bill.

[colleague](#)

## **A Competition Title in the 2007 Farm Bill:**

### **Fair Markets, Fair Contracts**



Today, a handful of corporations dominate our food supply. Their concentrated power effectively eliminates free market competition, to the detriment of family farmers and consumers.

This year, RAFI, accompanied by a national coalition of more than 200 organizations, is asking Congress to add a new piece to the Farm Bill. The proposed Competition Title will support healthy markets through a comprehensive plan that includes:

- Increasing fairness in agricultural contracts and markets
- Assuring adequate market information and transparency for producers and consumers
- Limiting packer control and manipulation of livestock markets

Senator Harkin (D-IA), the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, has pledged to add this measure to the Farm Bill.

To help ensure that this farm bill includes a strong competition title, email [becky@rafiusa.org](mailto:becky@rafiusa.org). For fact sheets and detailed information about the competition title, visit this [resource page](#) developed by the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, in which RAFI is a partner.

## New Publications and Resources

In the last year, RAFI has published a number of resources for farmers and advocates alike. To download PDF copy of each guide, click on the title.

- [\*Farmer's Guide to Peanut Contracts\*](#). January 2007. This guide, based on interviews with North Carolina farmers and other research, will help farmers make informed decisions about peanut contracts. The guide outlines the pros and cons of peanut contracts and walks the reader through common terms and clauses. It also includes a list of relevant laws and a directory of resources for more information.
- [\*Farmer and Lender Project: Strategies to Sustain Agriculture and Enhance Rural Development in North Carolina\*](#). December 2006. The Farmer and Lender Project report examines the barriers to agricultural finance in North Carolina, and looks toward a system of debt finance that allows lenders to work with innovative farmers. The publication is a resource for advocates, policy-makers, journalists and researchers.
- [\*Issues to Consider Related to Tobacco Contracts\*](#). December 2006. This guide, based on interviews with North Carolina farmers and other research, will help farmers make better informed decisions about tobacco contracts. It outlines the pros and cons of tobacco contracts and explains the laws and legal terms that farmers need to know. It includes a list of resources for farmers and a glossary of important terms.
- [\*The Agricultural Reinvestment Report\*](#). December 2006. This report concludes that RAFI-USA's Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Program is a model of farm-based rural economic development that can be replicated statewide and in other states and regions. The program could make a dramatic difference in preserving farmland and sustaining rural economies.
- [\*Farmer's Guide to Agricultural Credit\*](#). September 2006. Creative ideas, from growing organic produce to grinding corn into grits, offer farms a way to stay afloat in financially challenging times. However, these ideas can be difficult to explain to lenders who are used to dealing with traditional commodity crops. The guide provides step-by-step advice on financing non-traditional farm-based enterprises.

## **Come to the Table: A Conference on Food, Faith, and Farms in NC, April 10, 11, & 13**



RAFI is working with the Rural Life Committee of the North Carolina Council of Churches to sponsor "Come to the Table: A Conference on Food, Faith, and Farms."

Three one-day regional sessions will explore how churches can bring us together to relieve hunger and sustain local agriculture in our communities. The eastern N.C. conference will be April 10 in Goldsboro; the central N.C. conference will be April 11 in Orange County; and the western N.C. conference will be April 13 in Asheville.

To register and get more information, visit [www.cometothetablenc.org](http://www.cometothetablenc.org). The registration deadline is April 2, 2007. To register by phone, call Rose Gurken at (919) 828-6501.

## **International Conference on Organic Agriculture and Food Security, May 3-5, Rome**

RAFI-USA is partnering with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other groups to organize an **International Conference on Organic Agriculture and Food Security**, May 3 - 5 at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy. The conference is open to anyone working in the fields of organic agriculture or food security, and registration is free. For more information please [download the conference announcement](#) (PDF).



## **Benefit for RAFI at Whole Foods Market Raleigh, NC - Tuesday, April 17**

For almost two decades RAFI-USA has been creating healthy choices for families and family farmers.

Now is your opportunity to go shopping and support RAFI's mission of a just, sustainable, and equitable food system. The Raleigh, NC, Whole Foods Market will donate 5% of total sales to RAFI on Tuesday, April 17.

So come join us, bring your friends, shop and support food that's good for you and for those who grow it!

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Appendix C: Boilerplate for News Release

# RAFI-USA

Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA

274 Pittsboro Elem. Sch. Rd. • PO Box 640 • Pittsboro, NC 27312 • Tel: 919-542-1396 • Fax: 919-542-0069 • [www.rafiusa.org](http://www.rafiusa.org)

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: **YOUR NAME**@rafiusa.org

**DATE**

(919) 542-1396

**TITLE**

**INSERT YOUR RELEASE HERE.**

RAFI-USA is a nonprofit organization sustains family farms. To learn more, visit <http://www.rafiusa.org> or call (919) 542-1396.

-30-

## Appendix D: RAFI in the local media

Below is the text of an article published in the April, 2007 *Chatham County Line*.

### RAFI-USA: SUSTAINING HEALTHY FARMS

By Claire Hermann

Down a quiet road near the Pittsboro Courthouse, under the shade of walnut trees, sits an office building surrounded by wildflowers. The building is home to a conference center, several small offices, and an international nonprofit.

That nonprofit, the Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA works to sustain family farms. RAFI acts on many levels, from helping individual farmers to consulting on national policy. Its vision is a just, sustainable food supply.

RAFI traces its roots back to 1930, but got its start as an independent organization in 1990.

Back then, RAFI concentrated opportunities for sustainable agriculture, problems with biotechnology, conservation of public genetic resources, and fair contracts for poultry farmers.

Almost two decades later, RAFI has put biotechnology and contract agriculture on the national agenda and led national coalitions addressing organics and crop diversity.

But it hasn't stopped there. This small office has been home to an array of diverse accomplishments, only a few of which can fit on this page.

RAFI's Tobacco Communities Reinvestment program has so far saved 412 North Carolina farm jobs, created 32 new ones, and modeled 89 creative ways to keep farms in business after the tobacco buyout.

Its On-Farm Research program cut down pesticide use and increased profitability on

thousands of acres of North Carolina peanut fields.

RAFI staff led the writing of the United States Department of Agriculture organic standards and are building a coalition to write the national action plan for organic agriculture's future.

This summer, RAFI will launch a food label that certifies that the entire chain of production, from farmworker to grocery stocker to consumer, is socially responsible.

RAFI publishes guides on topics from commodity crop policy to organic farm ownership.

It stopped cotton from being patented by a private corporation, and helps keep a diversity of crops in the public domain.

One staff member, Benny Bunting, has counseled almost 2,000 farm families who were in danger of losing their farms and saved them an estimated \$42.6 million dollars, all while farming full-time himself.

RAFI works on the principle that economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and social justice are interdependent. Economically sound agriculture, it argues, cannot degrade people or the environment, or it will not survive over time. Environmentally sound agriculture has to be economically viable and benefit the community.

From this viewpoint, RAFI's diverse work makes sense. A sustainable system of agriculture can not allow farmers to be caught in unfair contracts any more than it can encourage over-use of pesticides.

“In order to have good food, safe food, and available food, we need healthy land, and people who know how to tend that land,” said Betty Bailey, RAFI's executive director.

“What sets RAFI apart is our grounding in the experiences of farmers.”

Scott Marlow, the Farm Sustainability program director, says protecting family farmers and safe food is a long-term process. “We can't push farmers off a cliff and expect them to build a parachute on the way down,” he says. “We need to help them stay in business and give them room to make choices.”

To illustrate, Marlow tells the story of a farmer who worked with Bunting to avoid bankruptcy after Hurricane Floyd. When that man passed away, Bunting helped his son find a way to be able to inherit the farm. Now he's working with that son and his wife to develop a cattle operation, with the idea that eventually they can raise antibiotic-free, pastured beef and return to farming full-time.

It's stories like this that Marlow says guide him as he works on national policy recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill.

These farmer's stories make up the history and the future of this organization, quietly situated a few blocks from the heart of Pittsboro, working, as it has for 17 years, for a future filled with family farms, safe food, and a healthy planet.

For more information about RAFI and its work, or to find out how to rent its green-built conference center, visit <http://www.rafiusa.org>.

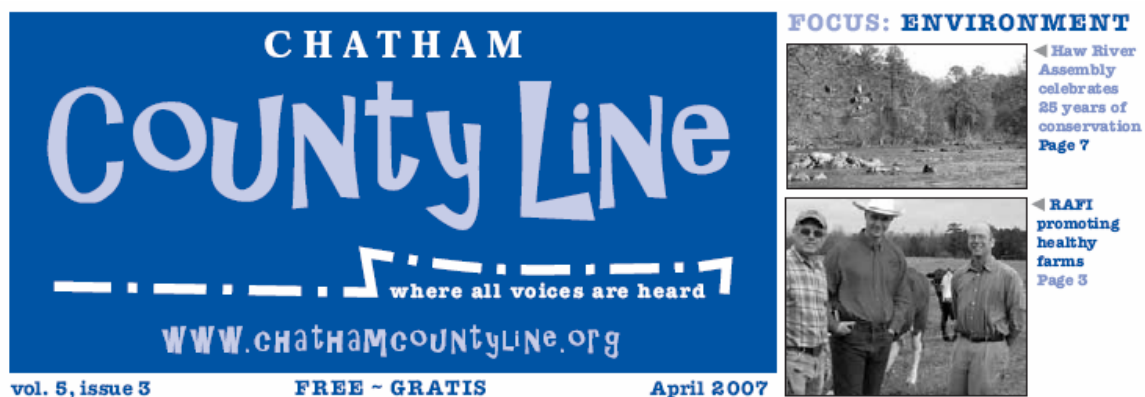


Figure 2: RAFI is featured above the fold

Appendix E: Interactions between organizations and publics in identity and image formation

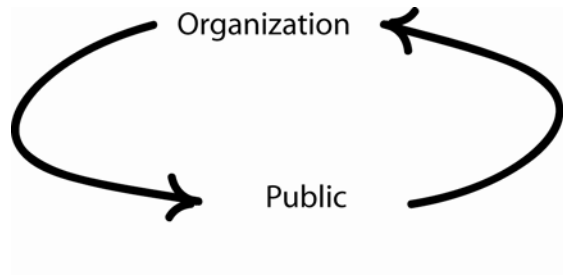


Figure 3: For-profit communications about image and identity: A corporation represents its image to an external public, which in turn forms and conveys an image of the organization.



Figure 4: Non-profit communications about image and identity: A nonprofit organization represents its identity to external stakeholders, which in turn form images of the organization. Additionally, information passes through the organization and allows publics to form images of each other.

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