Why communicate animal genetics research

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Why communicate animal genetics research for? to? with? non-specialists
The big picture

'A scientifically educated citizenry and a concerned scientific community is the price of our collective survival.'
1 Communicating is fun/energizing.

2 Communicating is empowering.

3 Communicating is the single thing, other than the research itself, that will make the biggest difference to our making a difference.
The bad news

1 Neglected
Animal genetics is a neglected topic.

2 Ignorance
Animal genetics is difficult to communicate.

3 Non-sexy
Most people assume that this topic is non-sexy and—further—hard to understand.
The good news

1 Neglected
You have a fresh story.

2 Ignorance
People actually like to learn new stuff.
(They just don’t like to experience pain in learning new stuff.)

3 Non-sexy
You can surprise people.
This is actually a very ‘hot topic’.
What we want to do here is help put animal genetics in and for Africa ‘on the map’.

What map?
Where, and how, do we want to go?
How we answer these questions—how we approach communications (for? to? with? with whom?)—will be as important as what we have to say.
Imagine we’re highly successful in using communications to raise the profile of animal genetics for Africa.

Then what?
What will/should we do with the greater attention?
Is all this communicating simply to get the funds and acceptance to do this research?
Do we/should we have a larger ambition?
Is there something even bigger at stake here?

‘In science, dollars are helpful but ideas are decisive.’
Three principles

1 BUILD BRIDGES
People have a right to be worried.

Especially of new stuff. Especially this new genetics stuff. Geneticists are getting their hands on the molecular levers of life itself. We can already slice and dice the building blocks of life. We'll soon be doing this very fast and at very little cost. The implications are profound, and largely unknown.

Our job is to help lay people steer a course through lots and lots of ideological posturings—from fear to worry to concern to thoughtful responses to advanced genetics.
Three principles

2 BUILD TRUST
Let people know you share their values.

Long before you give information, give people an understanding that you share their basic values.

You, too, want a safe and healthy world. You, too, worry about the fate of your children. You, too, worry about possible scientific mistakes. You, too, see that this research is just one part of a much larger picture.
THREE principles

3 BUILD VISION (1)
Agricultural development does not have to be a zero-sum game
(My loss is your gain, and vice versa.)

While we must manage expectations, we should not forget to build big visions.

We're working on some of the biggest challenges humanity is facing. We're working to liberate people from the deadening weight of hunger and poverty.
THREE principles

3 BUILD VISION (2)
Our resources are just as big.

The energy and potential of Africa’s animals are prodigious. Africa's farmers are radically practical as well as humanity's very first experimenters. Africa's investors are deeply committed to great African futures. Africa's scientists have the future in their bones—they ask questions they think they have a hope of answering.

―Lewis Thomas
Together, farmers, investors and scientists have created miracle crops like corn, and miracle ‘super cows’ like the Holstein.

Together, farmers, investors and scientists have eliminated famine in India and China. It’s Africa’s turn.

It’s a big continent.
Build a big vision.
better lives through livestock

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