

Gen Z: Get Them On Your Team

Welcome and embrace this generation's presence and contributions.

by Kim Holt

Generation Z, or Gen Z as it is more often referred to, is here. Its constituents might include members of your family and, likely, may already be at work on your farm or ranch.

These young people bring new ideas and overall expectations of how they approach and view work. As a new generation returns, old school meets new school, so to speak, and this is no truer than on ag operations.

Get to know Gen Z

Generationally defined as young adults born from 1997 through 2012, the oldest members of Gen Z were 25-26 years old in 2023.

This generation is the first of our family members who have grown up with wireless and mobile technology while being raised with social media. Consider that 98% worldwide have a smartphone and 52% use messaging apps for more than three hours per day (see Fig. 1).

The Center for Food Integrity (CFI) reports this generation accounts for 20.67% of U.S. consumers and nearly one-third of the global population. Gen Z's economic power is the fastest-growing across all generations. Their income is predicted to increase fivefold by 2030, surpassing

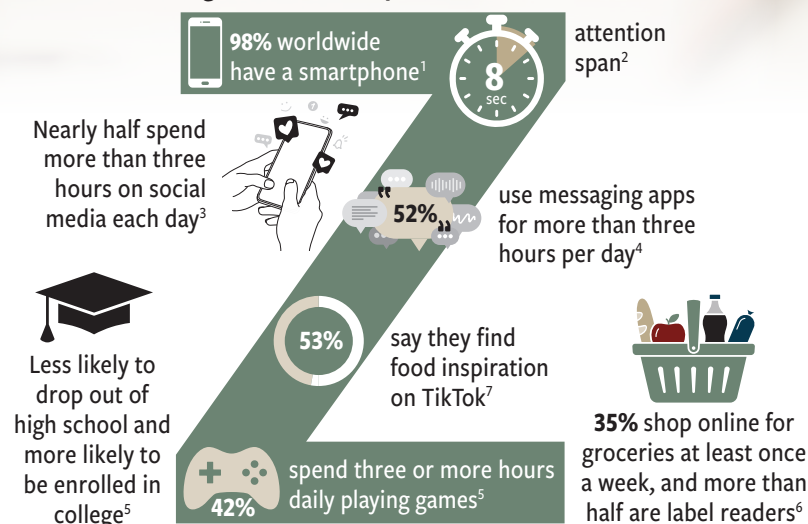
millennials' incomes by 2031.

This younger generation is also the most racially and ethnically diverse. They set themselves apart from other generations by craving immersive experiences, demanding transparency and the ability to engage. They are cause-driven and want to make a difference.

Insight into Gen Z

These characteristics help paint a better

Fig. 1: A Gen Z Snapshot



SOURCE: Engaging Gen Z, The Center for Food Integrity, <https://foodintegrity.org/engaging-gen-z-to-earn-trust/>.

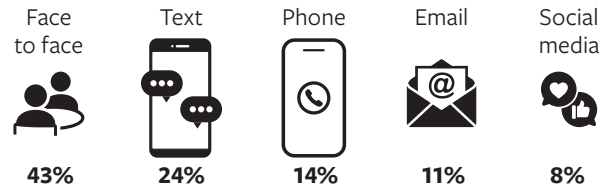
¹GlobalWebIndex Report. ²IAB UK. ³Insider Intelligence. ⁴Think with Google. ⁵Pew Research. ⁶IFIC 2022 Food and Health Survey. ⁷Progressive Grocer.

picture for what sets this generation apart from others, notably millennials, with whom they can be regularly confused.

- ▶ Gen Z is financially focused.
- ▶ They are entrepreneurial.
- ▶ This generation's members are all

Face-to-face communication preferred

According to an XYZ University (<https://www.xyzuniversity.com/>) study, Gen Zers prefer to communicate through:



about technology, since they've been immersed in it since birth.

- ▶ They are competitive, but do enjoy other people.
- ▶ Gen Z welcomes change and believes people are just people; diversity doesn't register with this generation.
- ▶ Gen Z members prefer independence, especially for work, but want to be heard.

Sarah Sladek explains that Gen Z members are highly visual learners. Raised with social media, "they're used to things being very instantaneous, having the world at their fingertips."

She says they expect organizations they work for to be highly accessible and highly responsive.

Sladek is the founder and CEO of XYZ University, one of the nation's only firms focused on generational research and the development of inclusive, intergenerational workplaces.

How we are informing and communicating with this highly visual-learning generation, she asks. "Are we visual? Are we text? Are we allowing people to have a voice?"

"Gen Z has been raised having a platform (social media) and a way to express their opinions, ideas," Sladek continues. "They want to know that whatever they are a part of, that organization aspires to create something better."

They also want to know how their workplaces are helping them acquire new skills and information, and they want to see results.

Sladek explains this generation grew up

with dashboards and apps. For example, they could check a dashboard to see how they were performing in school.

"They're going to want to know 'What's in it for me?'" But also, "How does my participation make a difference for greater community good or a greater cause?" Sladek says. They are not afraid to speak up to demand change and results.

"Results and speed are incredibly important," she adds.

Gen Z is in a place where they're looking for jobs, as well as learning and mentoring opportunities, because of education gaps. Students are coming out of school and going into the workforce, but there are key skills they are missing, whether that's software or soft skills, Sladek says.

When millennials came of age, it was about the first personal computers.

"We have advanced in a very short period of time," she observes, "and with Gen Z growing up almost completely app-based, it's a very different mindset and work process."

Engaging Gen Z in the workplace

Gen Z is driven by different things contrary to traditional workplace values. These members want more control of how and where they work. They are motivated by money, but also by fulfillment, happiness and stability, and they are concerned about their work-life balance.

Members of this generation seek jobs that provide opportunities for contribution, creation, learning and leadership.

When engaging Gen Z in the workforce,

The Center for Food Integrity offers these recommendations for employers:

Give them a voice in the workplace. It gives them a sense of belonging and a feeling they can effect change, which can likely improve job longevity. Also, offer opportunities to grow through training, promotions and leadership roles as applicable.

Showcase your values. What do you believe in? Are you communicating that vision?

Focus on mental health. Value well-being and offer resources. Build empathy skills and teach the importance of setting boundaries to reduce stress and anxiety levels.

Gen Z is more stressed than other generations. According to a Deloitte Global 2022 survey, one in five Gen Zers doesn't believe their employer takes burnout seriously or is taking steps to address it.

Allow flexibility. Allow for flexible work schedules as much as possible, including remote and hybrid work. This helps allow for a good work-life balance.

Communicate sustainability commitments. While sustainability and climate change may not be top of mind for agriculturally influenced Gen Zers, they are for many in their generation. It never hurts to communicate your commitment to a more sustainable world and to inspire employees to partake in actions, for example, identifying recyclables on the farm or ranch.

Provide technology. If possible, provide the latest technology to enable Gen Zers to

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complete their jobs more efficiently and communicate effectively.

Engaging Gen Z on the farm/ranch

In AgDaily’s “How to employ Gen Zers on your farming operations,” Elizabeth Maslyn writes, “Gen Zers are paving the way for farms to become more efficient than ever.”

According to Maslyn, “The problem is not that Gen Zers lack a work ethic; it is that they think about work differently.”

Differences can be a positive on a multigenerational ag enterprise, fostering a diverse, equitable and inclusive culture that promotes broader thinking.

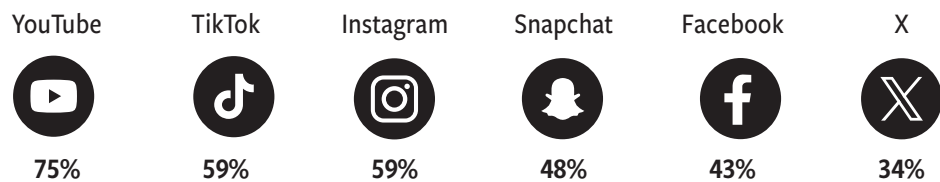
As she points out, Gen Z members learned at a young age how to make computer reports and use phone apps to help with everyday tasks. By employing their spreadsheet skills, tasks such as breeding decisions, herd productivity reports, and related analytics, for example, can be built and tracked for added efficiency and opportunities for a beef business.

Videos are Gen Z preference

Gen Z is the first digitally native generation, meaning Gen Zers have never known a world without social media. According to information in The Center for Food Integrity’s *Engaging Gen Z* report (<https://foodintegrity.org/engaging-gen-z-to-earn-trust/>), 66% of Gen Zers say social media is an essential part of their lives.

In the United States, their preferred channel is YouTube. This is followed by TikTok and Instagram, then Snapchat, Facebook and X (Twitter) (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Preferred channels used at least once a day



SOURCE: Statista, July 2022.

Gen Zers are adept at using their cellphones. Give them the responsibility to research new products and equipment purchases or to carry out the enterprise’s social media.

Nurture involvement. Maslyn, a Gen Zer herself, suggests letting Gen Zers offer ideas to increase efficiency in the workplace. Task them with finding areas of possible improvement in the business, including maintenance of equipment.

Giving employees or family members a say increases loyalty. Employee loyalty is essential for the success of a farm operation, plus giving employees a say can bolster this important component of success.

“I think it’s absolutely critical

that young people, students and young professionals, have a seat at the decision-making table,” Sladek emphasizes. “Start at the top with leadership — it needs to be inclusive of people with all backgrounds and skill sets, from early career to late career, working side by side.”

This fosters learning and teaching from one another, building relationships, she notes. It presents a whole new perspective.

“You’re more responsive and aware of change that needs to happen in the organization. You’re innovating. There are so many positives to doing something like that,” Sladek says.

“Society is moving so incredibly fast,” she continues. “We’re seeing the development of new influences and skill sets and behaviors because of the rapid change.”

We now must figure out how to work as a team, she says. “We need to think like a community and not as a hierarchy. We can’t be afraid of Gen Z; we must welcome them in. We’re better when we’re working and learning and creating together.” **ABB**

Editor’s note: Kim Holt is a freelance writer and cattlegirl from Caldwell, Idaho.

Article sources:

The Center for Food Integrity, *Engaging Gen Z* report, <https://foodintegrity.org/engaging-gen-z-to-earn-trust/>.
You Should Hear This podcast, Jan. 23, 2023, Episode 24: “Generation Z — Who They Are, What They Want Part 1 (<https://bit.ly/40IDtwv>).

TTI Success Insights, blog, 10: “Defining Characteristics of Generation Z” (<https://www.ttisi.com/>).