

HOSTING CONGRESSIONAL SITE VISITS

Inviting members of Congress and their staff to visit your facilities is an excellent way to continue to strengthen the relationships built when visiting Washington, D.C. Not only does it further establish you as a resource moving forward, it offers the invaluable opportunity for members of Congress and their staff to see firsthand how the seed industry impacts their district. The work ASTA does in Washington, D.C., is enhanced by the important work you do building relationships outside the Capitol Beltway. A site visit by a member of Congress and/or their staff will help further both your company's goals and ASTA's advocacy goals.



ARRANGING THE SITE VISIT

Issue the invitation to your member of Congress and their agriculture staff member for when Congress is out of legislative session and will be in the district for their state work period – better known as “recess.” When they are home, their schedules are often as hectic as they are in Washington, so be flexible and have a few dates in mind. Send an official invitation to the district scheduler at least a month in advance of the proposed visit via their preferred method of contact (typically e-mail). Follow up 24 hours after sending the invitation to ensure it was received. The Congressional calendar is available [here](#). To access the scheduler's contact information, please contact Virginia Houston at vhouston@betterseed.org

Once the visit is confirmed, contact ASTA to let government affairs staff know the meeting is taking place. Talking points, leave behinds, and other documents can be provided for the visit.

If the Member is unavailable, issue the invitation to their agriculture staffer. Relationships with staff are just as important as relationships with the Representative or Senator themselves. Staff members are the issues experts for the Member, and they hold both the trust and the attention of the Member on a daily basis.

If there are other seed companies in the vicinity, you may consider doing a “seed tour” to reinforce the importance of the seed industry to the district.



CONTACTING THE MEDIA

Work with the Member's press secretary or communications director and company communications staff to determine if press coverage is desired. Local television and newspaper reporters can be invited to cover the event if approved by the member's office. When sending out a media advisory, be sure to include the time, date and purpose of the visit. If no media are available to attend, be sure to take lots of pictures and send out a summary of the event afterward. Don't forget to utilize social media to highlight and share the visit!



HOSTING THE VISIT

Prepare employees before the visit by explaining who is coming to visit, why, and what is expected of them. The more prepared your facility is for the visit, the better it will be! Send a reminder of the visit to employees the night before, conveying your goals and reiterating your expectations.

Create an agenda for the visit, including a facility tour, issues discussion, and a light reception with time for Q&A between the member and company employees. They will want to engage with employees as these are their constituents. When covering specific topics, ensure subject-matter experts are present to speak and answer questions. Key points to convey include: number of employees, facility size, regional economic impact such as number of production farms, R&D investment etc. Provide the member of Congress with literature on your company. Be sure that during the site visit you make your request for any legislation supported by ASTA.



AFTER THE VISIT

Send a thank you letter to the Member and any staff who accompanied him on the visit. (To ensure delivery, send the letter for the Representative or Senator to the main staffer who accompanied him/her). Include any photos or press stories from the visit in this email. In your letter, recap the highlights of their visit as well as ASTA's position on any pieces of legislation discussed.



KEEP ASTA INFORMED

Let the ASTA Government Affairs team know how your visit went, and where your Member stood on any issues you may have discussed. This will give the team in Washington additional insight into their positions and helps us identify strong supporters and those that need additional attention or information. This will also help ASTA remember which companies have strong relationships with specific offices, so those relationships can be utilized in future advocacy outreach.



THINGS TO AVOID

You should not make a financial contribution during the visit. However, the Member's fundraising staff may contact you following the visit.

Personal politics should not enter into the discussion. You may have a different political viewpoint than your Member, but please do not let that play a role in their visit to your facility.