THE FEAR FARMERS FIELD GUIDE



YOU CAN

SPOT THE FARMING.

PAUSE. CHECK. CHOOSE.

A practical guide to recognizing fear-driven messages, understanding their influence and making informed decisions.

Disarming Fear with Facts, Not Fire.

Fear is real. But is the message telling the whole story?

Fear can protect us. It alerts us to danger, motivates preparation and encourages precautions. Yet fear can also affect our judgment. When a message makes us feel threatened, anxious or angry, we may react before examining the evidence.

Some messages deliberately use this response. Others spread widely through ordinary reactions, repetition or incomplete information.

Fear Farming is the deliberate creation, shaping or amplification of fear and anxiety to influence perceptions, direct behaviour or achieve a desired outcome.

Intent matters

Not everyone who likes, forwards or shares frightening information is a Fear Farmer. A person may amplify fear without intending to influence others. This guide examines both deliberate fear farming and how messages can spread through people and platforms without the same intent.

The three-move reset

01 SPOT IT

Notice urgency, dramatic threats, emotional language, scapegoating or pressure to share before checking. What is this message trying to make me feel or do?

02 STEADY YOURSELF

Create space between the message and your response. Resist pressure to click, share, buy, argue or react immediately. Does this really require an immediate response?

03 CHECK & CHOOSE

Find the original source, compare independent evidence and separate verified facts from speculation. What do I actually know, and what still needs checking?

Take the concern seriously. Don’t automatically accept the conclusion.

How to spot fear farming

Fear farming does not always involve an obvious lie. Influence may come from how information is presented, emphasized or omitted. These signs are prompts to investigate — not proof of intent, deception or falsehood.

01 **Urgency without a clear reason**

“Act now,” “Share before it gets deleted,” or “They don’t want you to know” create pressure before a claim can be checked.

02 **A threat made personal and immediate**

A broad, uncertain or distant risk is presented as though it will certainly affect you right now.

03 **A simple villain and a simple solution**

A complex problem is blamed on one person or group; nuance and legitimate questions are dismissed.

04 **Emotional overload**

Shocking imagery, anger, humiliation, disgust or repeated alarming language dominate the message.

05 **Certainty beyond the evidence**

Sweeping predictions or absolute conclusions are asserted without sufficient support.

06 **Anecdotes presented as proof**

One vivid story or viral clip is made to stand for an entire population or trend.

07 **Missing context**

Dates, locations, sources, comparisons, sample sizes or limitations are omitted.

08 **Pressure to choose a side**

Questioning the message is framed as disloyal, ignorant or unacceptable.

09 **A commercial or political payoff**

The message leads toward a product, donation, subscription, vote or loyalty demand.

A frightening message is not automatically false. A calm message is not automatically true.

From reaction to reflection

Recognizing an emotional reaction does not mean ignoring it. Fear and anger can be appropriate. The goal is to prevent emotion from becoming the sole basis for a decision.

Pause the feed

Put your phone down or step away from the post. Avoid sharing or responding while feeling highly activated.

Slow your breathing

Breathe in comfortably for about four seconds and out gently for about six seconds. Repeat a few times; do not force deep breaths or hold your breath. Return to normal breathing if uncomfortable or dizzy.

Name the feeling

Try: “This message is making me feel anxious, angry or threatened.” Acknowledge the feeling while recognizing that the claim still needs checking.

Widen the time frame

Ask whether action is genuinely required in the next few minutes. What evidence would justify acting immediately?

Choose a deliberate next step

Close the post, save it to check later, locate the original source or ask someone you trust to help examine the information.

“I can take this seriously without reacting immediately.”

A pause is not inaction

You can take a claim seriously without instantly repeating it. Sometimes the most responsible next move is to gather context and make a deliberate choice.

Check the claim before you share it

When emotional pressure eases, turn your attention to the information itself. You do not have to decide what to believe immediately.

Find the original

Locate the study, public statement, report, full video or dataset rather than relying only on someone else’s summary.

Check the date and context

Is the information current? Is an old event presented as new? Has a quotation or video been separated from its setting?

Separate fact from interpretation

Identify what is directly verifiable and what is opinion, prediction, speculation or inference.

Look for meaningful comparisons

How many cases occurred, among how many people, over what period, and compared with what baseline?

Seek independent confirmation

Look for credible sources using independent evidence rather than repeating the same unverified claim.

Read beyond the headline

Does the article support its headline? Are uncertainties, limitations and alternative explanations acknowledged?

Examine expertise and incentives

Check relevant qualifications, funding, commercial interests and possible political incentives.

Be willing to update

Revise your position if better evidence emerges. Careful thinking is not the same as cynicism.

“I don’t have enough information yet” is a responsible conclusion.

Finding better information

No outlet, institution, researcher or commentator is right about everything. Better understanding comes from comparing credible sources, finding original evidence and acknowledging uncertainty.

Primary sources

Original laws, court decisions, statistics, official advisories, public records, research papers, full speeches and datasets. They still require interpretation and context.

Canadian public information

Statistics Canada, Elections Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, legislative records and relevant provincial or municipal agencies. Review underlying methodology when available.

Established news organizations

Compare original reporting from organizations such as CBC/Radio-Canada, The Canadian Press, Reuters and Associated Press. Look for attributable sources, correction practices and distinctions between news and opinion.

Fact-checking organizations

AFP Fact Check, Reuters Fact Check and other transparent investigators can help assess viral claims. Read the supporting evidence, not only the verdict.

Research and expert analysis

Peer-reviewed journals, universities, professional associations and systematic reviews. Examine study design, size, funding, limitations and corroboration.

Specialist expertise

For medical, legal, scientific or technical claims, consult suitably qualified sources that demonstrate their evidence and acknowledge uncertainty.

Credibility comes from evidence and transparency, not confidence or popularity.

Make the next choice count

Use these quick checks before sharing a claim, forwarding a warning or acting on a frightening message.

The quick source test

ASK	A STRONGER SOURCE USUALLY…
Who is responsible?	Names the author or institution and relevant expertise.
How do they know?	Provides original evidence, documents or methods.
What is missing?	Acknowledges limits, context and uncertainty.
Can it be checked elsewhere?	Is corroborated independently, not merely repeated.
What if it is wrong?	Has a visible corrections or accountability process.

Before you share: the 20-second check

- ☐ Do I know the original source?
- ☐ Have I checked the date and full context?
- ☐ Does the evidence support the claim?
- ☐ Have I looked for independent confirmation?
- ☐ Am I sharing to inform, or because I feel alarmed, angry or pressured?

When action really is necessary

A frightening warning can be legitimate. For immediate danger, follow emergency services or relevant public authorities. For major medical, legal, financial or safety decisions, consult appropriately qualified professionals and authoritative sources. This guide is educational and does not replace professional advice or emergency instructions.

YOU CAN SPOT THE FARMING.
PAUSE. CHECK. CHOOSE.

You are allowed to feel fear, ask questions, seek context and change your mind. The goal is not to eliminate emotion, but to keep someone else’s urgency from making your decisions for you.