

## A Study of University of Idaho "Ag News" Published by Idaho Newspapers in 1984 and 1985

Marlene A. Fritz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/jac>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### Recommended Citation

Fritz, Marlene A. (1987) "A Study of University of Idaho "Ag News" Published by Idaho Newspapers in 1984 and 1985," *Journal of Applied Communications*: Vol. 70: Iss. 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.1589>

This Research is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Applied Communications* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact [cads@k-state.edu](mailto:cads@k-state.edu).

---

## **A Study of University of Idaho "Ag News" Published by Idaho Newspapers in 1984 and 1985**

### **Abstract**

In 1984-86, the University of Idaho Agricultural Communications Center evaluated the extent to which news releases are used by Idaho newspapers and attempted to determine whether any of the variables used to describe a story enhanced its use.

Fritz: A Study of University of Idaho "Ag News" Published by Idaho Newsp

# A Study of University of Idaho "Ag News" Published by Idaho Newspapers in 1984 and 1985

by Marlene A. Fritz

## Abstract

*In 1984-86, the University of Idaho Agricultural Communications Center evaluated the extent to which news releases are used by Idaho newspapers and attempted to determine whether any of the variables used to describe a story enhanced its use.*

*A similar study in 1983, based on clippings provided by the Idaho Newspaper Association, was described in the January-March 1985 issue of ACE Quarterly ("Publication of Idaho Ag News Releases by Idaho Daily and Weekly Newspapers in 1983," Vol. 68, No. 1.)*

*For the 1984 and 1985 study, the number of variables used to describe the stories was increased. Many of the results conflicted from one year to the next, and no firm trends could be reported. It appeared that editors prefer stories about crop pests and animal diseases to most other subjects and that long stories (up to seven pages) can be quite acceptable.*

*The author doubts that the number of clippings retrieved is an adequate measure of a news release's effectiveness. Stories used less frequently may have just as much or more impact in a narrower geographic area or among a smaller interest group than stories for which many clippings are retrieved.*

*A much more meaningful measure would be the proportion of actual-to-intended impact upon carefully defined reading audiences. This would require developing a far more elaborate method and access to considerably more material resources than are available to the author, currently.*

## Methodology Involved Statistical Center

A recent study, developed to research variables affecting use of University of Idaho agricultural news releases by state newspapers, was conducted from 1984-86. DBASEIII+ was used to examine the information drawn from the 503 stories. Indexes of use were derived by dividing the number of releases in each category into the number of clippings retrieved.

---

The author is an ACE member and communications specialist, University of Idaho College of Agriculture.

The University of Idaho Statistical Consulting Center also performed one-way chi-squares on the data collected, testing the hypothesis that the number of clippings received in each category was proportional to the number of releases in that category. Although the cells were quite small for many of the variables, in a considerable number of cases the observed frequencies differed very significantly from the hypothesized proportions.

Altogether, 2,384 clippings were obtained in 1984 and 1985 from the Idaho Newspaper Association's clipping service—1,342 in 1984 and 1,042 in 1985. Stories were clipped from 16 Idaho dailies and those in border cities of Spokane, Washington, and Ontario, Oregon. In 1984 56 weeklies were clipped; 51 in 1985.

Fewer clippings were received in 1985 than 1984, in part because the 36 stories released in August and September 1985 were not included in the analysis. Clippings for these stories could not be located at the University of Idaho News Bureau, which collects them, because of a change in that office's personnel and operations.

In 1983, 5.7 clippings were collected for each story; in 1984, 5.2; and, in 1985, 4.2.

In 1983, Idaho and border-city dailies used an average 43 "Ag News" releases a year; in 1984, 34; in 1985, 24. For Idaho weeklies, the averages were relatively stable—15, 14 and 13, respectively. (The average numbers of stories used in 1985 probably are artificially low because of the missing clippings for August and September.)

According to an analysis of clipping-service accuracy presented in 1986 by Gary Beall, communications specialist with the University of California's Cooperative Extension Communications unit in Davis, the service, which he evaluated, accurately located only about 55 percent of the releases used by dailies. For weeklies, Beall found no correlation between clipping-service returns and actual usage.

Lorraine Christensen, manager, Idaho Newspaper Association's clipping service, estimated accuracy at +90 percent or more.

## Results and Conclusions

In 1983, 3.5 percent of stories yielded 16 or more clippings (Table 1). In 1984, this figure was 4.4 percent; in 1985, 2.4 percent.

What stories made the "greatest hits" list? In 1984, in descending order, the most popular stories were about health problems associated with chemical-containing firewood, junior high resource camp (announcement), agricultural outlook for the following year, "College Days" classes (announcement), agricultural legislation, potato disease outbreak, farm safety, 4-H

Table 1. Frequency of news release use.

No. of Clippings	Percent of releases (no. of releases)		
	1985	1984	1983
20+	1.2 (3)	1.6 (4)	1.0 (3)
16-19	1.2 (3)	2.8 (7)	2.5 (7)
11-15	9.7 (24)	9.1 (23)	10.9 (31)
6-10	19.4 (48)	26.6 (68)	30.6 (87)
4-5	15.0 (37)	17.5 (45)	20.8 (59)
2-3	25.5 (63)	20.2 (52)	16.9 (48)
1	13.4 (33)	8.2 (21)	9.2 (26)
0	14.6 (36)	14.0 (36)	8.1 (23)
Total	100.0 (247)	100.0 (256)	100.0 (284)

Congress (announcement), quick test for identifying potato bruise during harvest, weed contamination in grain seedlots, and a calf disease.

In 1985, "winners" were about potato breeding, Plant Protection Workshop (announcement), financial stress in agriculture, soil preparation for gardens, 4-H Congress (announcement) and a tax letter-study course (announcement).

### Results by Variable

Using the one-way chi-squares to test the null hypothesis of proportional use, we found that, in 1984, stories datelined as to Aberdeen R&E Center and Idaho Falls were used more frequently than expected (68 observed uses compared with 45 expected clippings, and 65/45, respectively). In 1985, stories with Aberdeen datelines were again selected for (45/23), along with stories with Caldwell R&E Center datelines (71/47), but stories datelined Idaho Falls were selected against (10/28). Results were very significant ( $P=0.00$ ).

The Aberdeen stories probably were popular among editors because many of them are about potatoes, as are a disproportionate number of Idaho Falls stories. Other Aberdeen stories are about grains, and, in 1984, both grains and potatoes were selected for commodity. In 1985, general livestock and alfalfa hay were selected for—both commodities receiving considerable attention at the Caldwell R&E Center.

### Subject (Tables 2 and 3)

Pest management, economics/computers and home economics scored among the top five subjects for both 1984 and 1985, while 4-H/youth, administrative, honors, and classes offered/ag education were consistent low scorers. In 1983, honors were also near the bottom of the list.

Running the one-way chi-squares for use-by-subject, we confirmed that, in 1984, pest management (194/138), economics/

computers (*Journal of Applied Communications*, Vol. 78, Iss. 3 [1987], p. 5) economics (113/97) and livestock management (122/97) were selected for—and 4-H/youth (121/185), administrative (101/169), honors (47/87) and classes offered/ag education (22/56) were selected against.

**Table 2. Use by subject in 1984.**

Subject	Releases			Total
	(no.)	Dailies	Weeklies	
Pest management	27	3.0 (81)	4.2 (113)	7.2 (194)
Economics/computers	19	2.9 (55)	4.3 (81)	7.2 (136)
Crop management	22	3.0 (67)	4.1 (91)	7.2 (158)
Home economics	19	1.8 (34)	5.2 (99)	7.0 (133)
Livestock management	19	2.9 (56)	3.5 (66)	6.4 (122)
Producer schools	47	2.1 (99)	3.1 (148)	5.3 (247)
Horticulture	4	2.0 (8)	3.2 (13)	5.2 (21)
4-H/youth	36	1.3 (47)	2.1 (74)	3.4 (121)
Administrative	33	1.6 (52)	1.5 (49)	3.1 (101)
Honors	17	1.6 (28)	1.1 (19)	2.8 (47)
Classes/ag ed	11	1.0 (11)	1.0 (11)	2.0 (22)

Note. Results are presented as use index, followed by number of clippings in parentheses. The use index is derived by dividing the number of releases in each category into the number of clippings in that category.

**Table 3. Use by subject in 1985.**

Subject	Releases			Total
	(no.)	Dailies	Weeklies	
Horticulture	15	1.3 (19)	7.9 (119)	9.2 (138)
Pest management	22	1.5 (34)	4.2 (93)	5.8 (127)
Producer schools	52	1.9 (97)	2.9 (149)	4.7 (246)
Economics/computers	31	1.9 (58)	2.6 (81)	4.5 (139)
Home economics	10	1.4 (14)	2.8 (28)	4.2 (42)
Crop management	31	1.3 (40)	2.8 (87)	4.1 (127)
Livestock management	15	1.3 (19)	2.5 (37)	3.7 (56)
Classes/ag ed	5	2.0 (10)	1.4 (7)	3.4 (17)
4-H/youth	22	1.3 (28)	2.0 (43)	3.2 (71)
Administrative	21	1.2 (25)	1.0 (22)	2.2 (47)
Honors	18	1.4 (26)	0.4 (7)	1.8 (33)

Note. Results are presented as use index, followed by number of clippings in parentheses. The use index is derived by dividing the number of releases in each category into the number of clippings in that category.

In 1985, pest management (127/95) and horticulture (138/65) were selected for, while 4-H/youth (71/95), administrative (47/90) and honors (33/78) were selected against.

These results were highly significant ( $P=0.00$ ). The popularity of pest management, with the threat of agricultural epidemics, is not surprising. 4-H/youth, honors and administrative stories were probably selected against because of their limited geographic appeal.

In 1984 and 1985, crops stories performed slightly better than livestock stories—but this was reversed in 1983.

When individual commodities were examined using the one-way chi-square analysis, the 1984 data ( $P=0.00$ ) indicated that potatoes (107/77) and grains (109/83) were selected for, and lentils/peas (5/12,) vegetable seed (5/12) and timber (5/24) were selected against.

In 1985 ( $P=0.00$ ), selected-for commodities were fruit (22/10), alfalfa hay (32/20) and general livestock (24/15). Those selected against were timber (23/35) and horticulture (0/5).

**Table 4. Use by commodity in 1985.**

Commodity	Releases			
	(no.)	Dailies	Weeklies	Total
All crops	47	2.0 (96)	2.9 (138)	5.0 (234)
All livestock	24	1.6 (38)	3.3 (79)	4.9 (117)
None specifically	175	1.4 (245)	2.7 (470)	4.1 (715)
Fruit	2	2.5 (5)	8.5 (17)	11.0 (22)
Alfalfa hay/seed	4	1.3 (5)	6.8 (27)	8.0 (32)
General livestock	3	3.3 (10)	4.7 (14)	8.0 (24)
Beans	1	1.0 (1)	6.0 (6)	7.0 (7)
Sugarbeets	3	3.3 (10)	3.7 (11)	7.0 (21)
Pork	2	1.5 (3)	5.0 (10)	6.5 (13)
Rapeseed/oil	2	2.0 (4)	4.0 (8)	6.0 (12)
Sheep	2	3.0 (6)	3.0 (6)	6.0 (12)
Horses	1	2.0 (2)	3.0 (3)	5.0 (5)
Grains	11	2.1 (23)	2.6 (28)	4.6 (51)
Potatoes	14	2.3 (32)	2.2 (31)	4.5 (63)
Dairy	7	1.3 (9)	2.7 (19)	4.0 (28)
Beef	9	0.9 (8)	3.0 (27)	3.9 (35)
Timber	7	2.0 (14)	1.3 (9)	3.3 (23)
Turfgrass	1	2.0 (2)	0.0 (0)	2.0 (2)
Vegetable seed	1	0.0 (0)	1.0 (1)	1.0 (1)
Horticulture	1	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)

Note. Results are presented as use index, followed by number of clippings in parentheses. The use index is derived by dividing the number of releases in each category into the number of clippings in that category.

### Geographic Target

Story usage increased with the breadth of the target across all three years, with the exception of nationwide stories in 1985.

Using the one-way chi-squares, we found that, in 1984 and 1985, Pacific Northwest stories were selected for (195/169 and 371/312, respectively). In 1984, state-of-Idaho stories were selected for (846/743), while region-of-Idaho stories were selected against (251/333). Local stories were consistently selected against (15/16 in 1984 and 14/35 in 1985).

These results were highly significant ( $P=0.00$ ) for both years; they were also basically intentional, as narrowing targeting leads to the pickup of fewer clippings.

Commodity	Releases			
	(no.)	Dailies	Weeklies	Total
All crops	54	2.5 (137)	3.6 (203)	6.3 (340)
All livestock	32	2.7 (86)	3.0 (97)	5.7 (183)
None specifically	169	1.9 (318)	2.0 (47)	4.7 (788)
Potatoes	13	3.2 (41)	5.1 (66)	8.2 (107)
Grains	14	2.7 (38)	5.1 (71)	7.8 (109)
Dairy	8	2.9 (23)	3.9 (31)	6.8 (54)
Alfalfa hay/seed	4	3.0 (12)	3.8 (15)	6.8 (27)
Sheep	7	3.0 (21)	3.0 (21)	6.0 (42)
Beef	7	2.9 (20)	3.0 (21)	5.9 (41)
Fruit	9	2.8 (25)	2.8 (25)	5.6 (50)
Sugarbeets	3	2.0 (6)	2.7 (8)	4.7 (14)
General livestock	7	2.1 (15)	2.0 (14)	4.1 (29)
Pork	2	1.0 (2)	2.0 (4)	3.0 (6)
Poultry	1	3.0 (3)	0.0 (0)	3.0 (3)
Lentils/peas	2	0.5 (1)	2.0 (4)	2.5 (5)
Vegetable seed	2	2.5 (5)	0.0 (0)	2.5 (5)
Turfgrass	1	0.0 (0)	2.0 (2)	2.0 (2)
Timber	4	0.8 (3)	0.5 (2)	1.2 (5)

Note. Results are presented as use index, followed by number of clippings in parentheses. The use index is derived by dividing the number of releases in each category into the number of clippings in that category.

Table 6. Use by commodity in 1983.

Commodity	Releases (no.)	Clippings (no.)	Index
All crops	76	406	5.3
All livestock	37	251	6.8
Dairy	6	55	9.2
General livestock	6	49	8.2
Potatoes	23	164	7.1
Sheep	11	74	6.7
Grains	22	138	6.3
Beef	8	49	6.1

Note. Index is derived by dividing the number of releases in each category into the number of clippings in that category.

### Emphasis

In 1984, research stories outperformed extension stories (an index of 6.0 clippings per story compared with 5.2). The reverse was true in 1985, but only slightly (4.5 clippings compared with 4.8).

The one-way chi-squares bore this out ( $P=0.00$ ). In 1984, research stories were selected for (240/205); in 1985, they were selected against (88/143) while extension stories were selected for (803/718).

In both years, "other" stories—those about teaching, special events, foreign programs and awards—had significantly less appeal to editors than stories about extension or research (3.4 clippings in 1984 and 2.1 in 1985).



A story's being related to an event appeared to hurt its use substantially in 1984 (an index of 3.9 clippings per story compared with 6.1) and again in 1985 (3.7 compared with 5.0).

The one-way chi-squares indicated that this was the case ( $P=0.00$ ). In both years, these stories were selected against (441/583 in 1984 and 466/550 in 1985), while stories not related to an event were selected for (862/720 in 1984 and 604/520 in 1985).

Because our news releases are mailed only twice a week, it is possible that the event-related stories miss their timing. Another possible explanation is that stories related to an event may succumb to greater-than-anticipated geographic or interest-group limitations.

### Delayed Release

Stories with delayed release dates outperformed other stories in 1984 (8.0 compared with 5.0) but not in 1985 (3.8 compared with 4.4).

The results of the second statistical analysis were not significant for 1985. However, for 1984, delaying release was selected for very significantly (112/72;  $P=0.00$ )—possibly an indication of the greater news value of the type of story that is assigned a delayed release date.

### Lead Length

While the shortest leads (fewer than 10 words) did seem to inspire the largest percentage of acceptances, no other conclusions could be drawn from the indexes reported in Table 7.

Although, in 1984, the more ponderous leads (41 or more words) generated the least amount of enthusiasm among editors, in 1985 their clippings-to-story index was second-highest! Thus, results are inconclusive.

The chi-squares analysis confirmed that, in 1985, the shortest leads were selected for (27/17). This result, however, was only marginally significant ( $P=0.03$ ) and, in 1984, none of the findings were significant.

### Page Length

Table 8 shows that, both in 1984 and 1985, the longest stories yielded the greatest number of clips. Both stories—seven pages in 1984 and five in 1985—were the introductory pieces to the year-end ag outlook series, a perennial favorite. The popular six-page story in 1984 honored 24 4-H winners.

The one-way chi-squares confirmed that the longest stories were selected for (21/5 in 1984 and 11/4 in 1985;  $P=0.00$  and  $P=0.02$ , respectively).

In 1984, two-page stories were also selected for (717/604), while one-page stories were selected against (487/609).

**Table 7. Use by lead length.**

Length of lead	1985	1984
1-10 words	6.8 (27/4)	5.5 (22/4)
11-20 words	4.3 (216/50)	4.4 (153/35)
21-30 words	4.0 (463/115)	5.4 (678/125)
31-40 words	4.6 (297/65)	5.2 (383/74)
41 + words	5.2 (67/13)	4.2 (75/18)

**Table 8. Use by page length.**

Number of pages	1985	1984
Seven	— (-)	21.0 (21/1)
Six	— (-)	6.0 (6/1)
Five	11.0 (11/1)	3.5 (7/2)
Four	3.0 (3/1)	3.5 (7/2)
Three	4.6 (83/18)	5.1 (88/13)
Two	4.3 (511/118)	6.1 (717/118)
One	4.2 (462/109)	4.1 (487/119)

Note. Results are presented as use index, followed in parentheses by numbers of clippings/number of releases. The use index is derived by dividing the number of releases in each category into the number of clippings in that category.

The indexes show no trends. Resorting to one-way chi-squares, we found that, in 1984, July (174/133) and December (170/118) were selected for, while June (75/118), August (55/87) and October (98/149) were selected against ( $P=0.00$ ).

In 1985, March (208/130), April (105/82) and May (140/82) were selected for, while July (84/130), October (44/130), and November (47/78) were selected against ( $P=0.00$ ).

### Day of Mailing

The University of Idaho News Bureau mails "Ag News" releases on Tuesdays and Thursdays, barring holidays, or issue-related need for off-day mailing.

Thursday releases received notably higher index ratings with weekly editors than did Tuesday releases.

### Size of Mailing

The stories in the largest packets had the highest use index. In 1984, the big winner was the 8-piece year-end ag outlook series (9.9). In 1985, it was a 12-piece garden series (9.4).

In 1984, one-story packages were also selected for (168/133). In 1985, two-story packages were selected for (215/165), but in 1984 they were selected against (224/261).

Three-story packages were selected against in 1985 (137/191), as were four-story packages in both 1984 (119/143) and 1985 (131/186).