

## Use of Agricultural News by Metropolitan Newspapers

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## Use of Agricultural News by Metropolitan Newspapers

### Abstract

News has been defined in many different ways. It is a relative concept, changing with time, place, and social conditions.

County staff members also filled out questionnaires relative to staff time spent on the teaching centers.

A total of 786 questionnaires was collected from center users. However, only 253 of these were used in the final analysis because the others indicated group usage. The study was only interested in testing the merit of self-teaching centers used by one or two people at a time.

Responses were highly favorable, with 81 percent of the users rating the self-teaching centers as a "good" or "above average" way to present information. About the same number rated the information they received as "above average" in usefulness or "very useful."

When given a choice of projection systems, 90 percent of the users chose the video cassette system. A third of the viewers said the main reason they used the center was to learn a process. Participants spent an average of 10 to 15 minutes using the centers.

The study indicated that three variables were significant in determining the degree to which clients will use self-teaching centers in county Extension offices. Twenty-six percent of the variance could be attributed to county populations and traffic flow in the Extension office, while 28 percent was attributed to publicity alone. The two counties with the most regular publicity and promotion effort had the largest number of center users. Radio, newspaper, and newsletters were the most common vehicles for promoting the programs.

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## **Use of Agriculture News by Metropolitan Newspapers**

News has been defined in many different ways. It is a relative concept, changing with time, place, and social conditions. The importance of farm news was obvious when a majority of the people of the United States made their living from agriculture. Today, with only a small percentage of people living on the farm, agricul-

tural news probably is seen to be much less important by most urban editors.

Melvin Mencher, in his book, **News Reporting and Writing**, defined news as "information that people need to make rational decisions about their lives." Given the fact that the production of food and fiber affects the lives of everyone, would that not make agricultural news important to urban readers as well as those directly associated with agriculture? How do large urban newspapers treat agricultural news?

In a pilot study, students in an agricultural communications independent study course at the University of Illinois conducted content analyses of randomly selected issues of three big city dailies in an effort to find some answers to questions like these.

Newspapers selected were the **Chicago Tribune**, the **Los Angeles Times**, and the **Washington Post**. The study covered February, March, and April, 1980.

Five of the 11 selected issues of the **Times** were found to contain nothing that could be identified as agriculture or farm news. Another five issues had one agriculture story each, and one issue had two. None merited front page; placement ranged from page three to page 20.

In the **Post**, eight of the dozen issues studied had no agriculture news. The four others had one story each--one of these reporting the death of a U.S. Department of Agriculture official. One story was on page one.

The **Tribune** proved most fruitful. Two of 12 selected issues had one agriculture story each, three others had two stories each, and one issue had three stories. One story received front page placement.

What types of agriculture or farm news did the metropolitan dailies use? The type found most often had economic implications. Examples from the **Times** included "Heavy Rains affect Strawberry Farmers" (Feb. 21) and "Japanese to buy Grain from U.S." (Mar. 21). Other **Post** stories concerned environmental issues and "impact" stories such as an Iowa grain elevator scandal.

In the **Post**, all agriculture stories except the death notice related to economic issues. Most important (as indicated by placement) was a front page article on the economic crisis faced by Maryland tobacco farmers.

Another was a story on the Commodities Credit Corporation appearing in the business section, while one story reported the effect of higher food prices on consumers.

Three of the 11 **Tribune** stories were found in the "Agriculture/Commodities" columns of the business section. Each of these dealt directly with the national farm economy and covered such things as the Soviet grain embargo, land prices, and inflation. Several other stories reported on food prices and clearly were aimed at the consumer rather than a farm audience. An example of the latter was "Poultry, Pork: Consolation for Beef, Produce Prices" appearing in the food section (Mar. 6).

It is expected that this modest study will be repeated and that, with the accumulation of sufficient preliminary data, hypotheses will be developed for testing through more extensive research activity.

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