

Survey Information Needs of Commercial Family Farms

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Abstract

Large commercial family farm operators think the most important kinds of information are marketing, production technology, weather, and business management, according to the report of a 1978 nationwide survey.

Research Briefs

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Survey Information Needs of Commercial Family Farms

Large commercial family farm operators think the most important kinds of information are marketing, production technology, weather, and business management, according to the report of a 1978 nationwide survey.

The report is the result of a study, "Cooperative Extension Service Programs for Large Commercial Family Farms," conducted at the University of Missouri-Columbia as a special project funded by SEA-Extension, USDA. T.G. Brown and A.J. Collins wrote the report. It is intended as an aid to administrators in planning extension programs.

Economists, administrators, and one engineer, representing eight states across the nation and the USDA, made up the advisory committee.

A sample of 1,639 farms were selected randomly from a Census list of farms averaging over \$40,000 in sales annually. A minimum of 400 were selected from each of the four regions. Forty-eight percent of the farmers responded. In addition to the mail survey, 40 farmers, 10 from each region, were interviewed in depth about their needs for extension assistance. A mail questionnaire was sent to 702 extension personnel (10 percent sample of the 7,020 extension workers with ANR responsibilities).

The three most frequent answers for several of the questions asked and percentages of farmers giving them were:

Information of most value — marketing 26%, production technology 26%, weather 16%, business management 14%.

Information most needed to accomplish goals — marketing

31%, business management 26%, production technology 15%, public policy 13%.

Preferred way of receiving information on marketing — consulting with experts 31%, newspapers, magazines, and bulletins 29%, meetings 19%, television or radio 16%.

Preferred way of receiving production technology information — consulting with experts 34%, newspapers, magazines, and bulletins 28%, meetings 28%.

Preferred way of receiving information on purchasing supplies — newspapers, magazines, and bulletins 34%, consulting with experts 33%, meetings 13%, neighbors 13%. (Under actual sources, however, suppliers ranked first at 44%.)

Preferred sources of information on management — consulting with experts 44%, meetings 29%, newspapers, magazines and bulletins 22%.

Preferred way of receiving farm policy information — newspapers, magazines, and bulletins 32%, meetings 28%, consulting with experts 26%. (ASCS ranked high as a present source.)

Among other findings: Extension employees thought farmers would regard extension programs as a more important source of information than farmers actually did. Meetings fared better than expected as a choice of a place to get information.

Fewer farmers under age 35 than farmers in either the 35-54 or 55-65 age brackets were looking to Extension for information.

The study while revealing some useful insights on current interests of farmers, would have been more useful if a communications specialist had been included on its ECOP planning committee. The same questions sociologists have been using for years were asked: Where do you get information? What information do you want? Which sources do you prefer? And so on.

Quantifying answers to such questions doesn't give us new depth of information that we need to improve communications methods in any particular media channels or to choose more effective combinations of channels.

Copies of the report are available from the University of Missouri in limited supply.

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