

## Radio Use of Urban-Agricultural Public Service Announcements

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## Radio Use of Urban-Agricultural Public Service Announcements

### Abstract

In 1862 when President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act establishing land grant colleges, 66 per cent of the United States population was rural.

# *Radio Use of Urban-Agricultural Public Service Spot Announcements\**

CLIFFORD W. SCHERER

IN 1862 WHEN President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act establishing land grant colleges, 66 per cent of the United States population was rural. Fifty-two years later when the Smith-Lever Act created the Cooperative Extension Service, more than one-fourth of the population still lived on farms. So it has been quite natural that traditional extension audiences are rural.

In recent years, however, colleges of agriculture and the extension service have been called on, more and more, to serve nonfarm audiences. There have been, basically, two reasons: first is that colleges of agriculture and the extension service have usable information for the nonfarm audience. This is information that can help urbanites in their complex living situation. For example, making better use of their food dollar, avoiding credit trouble, controlling pests, improving lawns, gardens, and the home. The second reason for reaching the urban audience is that colleges of agriculture and extension may have some obligation to inform the tax paying citizens about what is happening in agriculture.

The first assumption for this study was that extension and colleges of agriculture do want to reach the general urban or nonfarm audience.

This paper will deal with one method for reaching the mass audience. That method is radio public service spot announcements.

When broadcasters are given a license to operate a station, they must promise the public agent, the Federal Communications Commission, that they will operate in the public interest

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\* Presented at the 1969 AAACE meeting, Columbia, Missouri, July 1969.

by maintaining balance in their programming. This generally includes agricultural and educational material.<sup>1</sup>

One method radio station managers use to meet this obligation is to air, at no cost, spot announcements from nonprofit public service organizations.

A review of research suggests that colleges of agriculture and extension are not yet using public service spot announcements to the best advantage. Judges of the 1967 AAACE public service radio contest said that only one of the 17 entries was produced in the true concept of a public service spot announcement.<sup>2</sup>

For purposes here, public service spot announcements are defined as highly produced program segments of 60 seconds or less, suitable for multiple airings, in time segments donated by the radio station management.

Public service organizations appear to expect that their radio material will be treated as a second class citizen. They accept the fact that their material will generally be given poor time segments not sold to advertisers. The undisputed fact is that public service material cannot compete with paying commercials.

But the real question that needs answering is, "Can properly produced public service spot announcements function as programming aids to station management, rather than compete for commercial time?" If we can find the answer to this question, then public service organizations, such as colleges of agriculture and extension could develop a tremendous avenue to the mass urban audience.

### *The Study*

Two different groups were surveyed by mail questionnaire. The first group included public service organizations cooperating with the advertising council; the second was managers of all radio stations serving Illinois.

Included in the list of public service organizations surveyed were: Keep America Beautiful, Inc., Peace Corps, U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Department of Justice. Each of these organizations spent between \$30,000 and \$70,000 in one year to conduct, through the Advertising Council, a public service cam-

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<sup>1</sup> Report on Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licensees, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1946.

<sup>2</sup> American Association of Agricultural College Editors. Report of 1967 Annual Contest for Radio Public Service Spot Announcements. Urbana, June 1967.

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paign. Yet, not one of the nine public service organizations surveyed, nor the Advertising Council, indicated any extensive research on conducting an effective public service campaign.

With this background in mind the second questionnaire was designed for radio station managers.

Questions that would need answers included:

1. What type of public service spot announcements are broadcasters interested in receiving? Would they like to receive informational spots? In other words, material designed to actually help their audience. Or would they prefer public relations material similar to many spots they now receive? Or, do they prefer general human interest material?

2. Are broadcasters interested in receiving urban-agricultural public service spots? These would be subject matter based in agriculture, but usable by the urban audience.

3. Many technical questions need to be asked: Whom would broadcasters like to voice the spot? Is the supplying organization important? How do managers go about selecting spots for the air?

The two-page, booklet style questionnaire went to 188 managers of radio stations serving Illinois audiences. Seventy-six per cent, 143 managers, responded.

The first question in the booklet gave a list of 15 possible urban-agricultural public service topics. At random, in the list, were five topics that could be considered informational, five public relations, and five human interest. Station managers were asked to rank each topic on a scale of five from "would definitely use" to "would definitely not use."

Forty-two per cent of all stations responding said they would probably or definitely use these 15 topics as public service spot announcements. This appears to be quite high considering that some of the managers responding said they never use any public service spot announcements. They meet their FCC commitments in other ways.

Looking at the three types of topics, 47 per cent of all stations said they would use informational topics, compared with 40 per cent for human interest and 39 per cent for public relations.<sup>3</sup>

The most popular topics were: helps for the home gardener; what makes food prices?; keeping insect pests outside; tips on buying meat; and caring for your shade trees.

<sup>3</sup> A more detailed station breakdown is presented in the table.

Among the least popular topics were: heart research on animals and developing a new flower variety.

Another part of the questionnaire dealt with the actual selection of a spot for the air. Station managers were asked to react to a list of nine potential items that might influence a decision concerning whether or not to air a specific public service spot. They were to indicate whether the item was very important, important, might consider, not very important, or not at all important in influencing their decision.

The most important items were: appropriate for station format, appropriate for audience, and timely.

PER CENT OF STATIONS INDICATING USE OR PROBABLE USE OF URBAN-AGRICULTURAL PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Group	Use, by type of announcement		
	Informational	Public relations	Human interest
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
All stations <sup>1</sup> .....	47	39	40
Out of state <sup>2</sup> .....	50	34	31
All AM stations <sup>3</sup> .....	56	45	43
All FM stations <sup>4</sup> .....	33	30	37
AM stations with FM facilities.....	49	41	36
All commercial.....	52	41	39
All noncommercial.....	41	34	51
Under 25% urban <sup>5</sup> .....	87	87	53
25-50% urban.....	58	49	48
50-75% urban.....	59	33	43
Over 75% urban.....	40	38	47
Day and night AM.....	50	34	38
Day only AM.....	61	54	47
250 watts AM <sup>6</sup> .....	56	43	35
500 watts AM.....	69	46	53
1,000 watts AM.....	54	45	43
5,000 watts AM.....	42	33	33
50,000 watts AM.....	24	36	20
Under \$6.00 <sup>7</sup> .....	50	47	37
\$6.00 to \$9.99.....	61	35	57
\$10.00 to \$17.99.....	51	33	36
\$18.00 and above.....	38	40	26

<sup>1</sup> AM and FM stations operated by the same management are counted as one.

<sup>2</sup> Only out-of-state stations which serve a large Illinois audience.

<sup>3</sup> Does not include AM stations with FM facilities.

<sup>4</sup> Does not include FM stations with AM facilities.

<sup>5</sup> According to county of station location. Per cent urban population by county from C. L. Folse. *Illinois Population Highlights from the 1960 Census*.

<sup>6</sup> All AM stations, including those with FM facilities. Based on daytime power only. *Broadcasting Yearbook*.

<sup>7</sup> Cost of one minute of air time at 9 a.m. weekdays according to *Spot Radio Rates and Data*.

Least important items were: length, availability of air time, form (disk, tape, or written), production method, and number of other spots received.

Station managers were then asked for their preference for the person voicing the announcement. Without exception, every radio station responding listed as first choice a professional radio announcer. Second choice was generally the college specialist, followed by a movie or television star, the dean of the college, and finally a political figure.

In an effort to assess the true interest of station managers, they were asked if they would like to receive public service spot announcements similar to those listed in the first part of the questionnaire. Seventy per cent of the stations said they would like to receive them, 14 per cent said no, and 16 per cent said they did not care.

### *Conclusions*

Four conclusions can be drawn from this study.

1. A high percentage of all stations would like to receive and will use urban-agricultural public service spot announcements produced and distributed by the University of Illinois College of Agriculture.

2. Radio stations located in urban areas indicate less interest in urban-agricultural announcements than rural stations, but the indicated usage by urban stations still remains high enough to reach large groups of presently unreached audiences.

3. Urban-agricultural public service spots of informational nature offer the University a tremendously efficient avenue for reaching the mass audience.

4. The ideal urban-agricultural public service announcement would be of an informational nature, sponsored by the University of Illinois College of Agriculture, with a subject acceptable to the audience, timely, suitable to the station format, produced on either magnetic tape or sound disk, voiced by a professional radio announcer, and available as both 30- and 60-second spots.

Whether this study applies to other states or areas is still a question. But it does tell us that if colleges of agriculture and the cooperative extension service decide that the urban audience is, in fact, an important audience, then radio public service spot announcements may be a tremendously efficient method of reaching that mass audience.