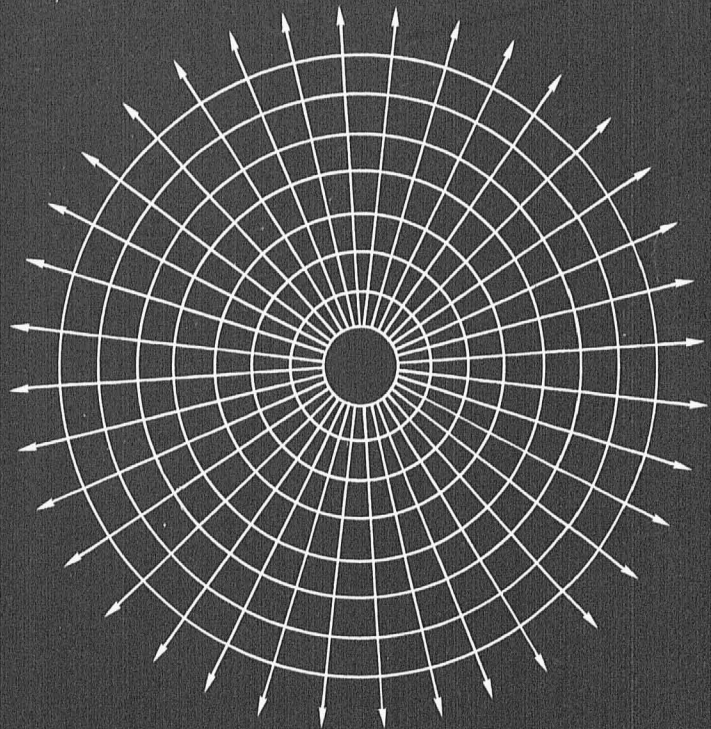


COMMUNICATION IN A VOLUNTARY PROMOTIONAL ORGANIZATION

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Communication in a Voluntary Promotional Organization

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Voluntary Promotional Organizations in the American Society

Americans traditionally have held a strong belief that the organized way will achieve almost any goal. For this reason, Americans, especially those in the middle class, probably belong to more formal organizations than people in other cultures.

Farmers have shared this belief in organizations.

Throughout the history of modern American agriculture, cooperative organizations have played an important role. Farm operators have turned to them as a method of achieving a wide variety of goals. In recent years, special types have been on the increase. These can best be described as voluntary, promotional organizations: Voluntary in membership with promotion as the basic purpose. Large numbers of such organizations are found in the American society.

Many such organizations have developed in the area of farm commodities in the past two decades. During this period the producers were subjected to economic pressures and promotional organizations developed as a means to combat them.

Each of such commodities as milk, potatoes, meat, citrus fruits, and coffee has a specific organization designed to promote it. As the promotional organizations grew in size and took on bureaucratic characteristics, problems of membership relations, education, and communication multiplied to the point that they became a threat to the achievement of the purposes for which the organization existed.

Research in Communications in Voluntary Promotional Organizations

Communications research, which has abounded in industrial firms, agriculture, education, and more recently in medicine, generally has by-passed voluntary promotional organizations. Because of the important roles they perform, considerable need exists for a description of the communications system in such organizations.

If an organization is to conduct a successful, long-term program it must have the continuing support of its members. Such support can come only through a knowledge of and belief in the organization, presumably engendered through communication with members.

Numerous studies have been made of the attitudes, knowledge, and actions of members in formal organizations, but again, these have not included voluntary promotional organizations. Rather, they have examined organizations where membership is more active and where relationships are subject to more precise study and observation. A notable exception has been Sills' study of the structure and behavior of voluntary workers in a national voluntary health organization.*

Purpose and Structure of the Organization

The organization selected for study was the National Promotional Organization (NPO), a pseudonym, which has as its primary purpose cooperative non-brand promotion. The membership is organized into district, state, and national units with the lower levels successively selecting delegates to represent them at the upper levels. The state organizations are semi-autonomous, and most authority resides in these units.

The state and national organizations are staffed with professional workers but in both, the professional staffs are limited in size. The amount of personnel available for conducting a systematic communications program to the vast membership is limited. Although the specific number of members is unknown, it is probably in the hundred thousands. The structure of the organization will be discussed in more detail later in the bulletin.

Purpose of this Bulletin

This publication describes the process of membership communications within the NPO and assesses its affect on membership relations. More specific purposes of this bulletin are:

1. to trace the flow of formal (printed) membership communications from the national organization through selected state organizations and "intermediaries" to producers;
2. to examine the role in the membership communication process of intermediaries outside the NPO who are involved in the process between the national and state organizations and the producers;
3. to examine the attrition of communication input as the flow progresses toward its destination (producers);
4. to see if product promotion programs of an advertising nature have a latent communications effect among the intermediaries and producers; and
5. to ascertain the consequences of the NPO communications by briefly examining the attitudes and knowledge producers have about the NPO.

In brief, an attempt will be made to systematically examine the communications process in the NPO. Before this can be attempted, however, the history, goals, and organizational structure must be described in order that the communications program may be more fully understood. Then the organization's communication program, including the results of two national surveys, will be examined.

Description of the Organization

Goals of the Organization

The purpose of the NPO as stated by the organization is

... to promote the interests of the ... industry of the United States, to promote the use and consumption of ... products; to conduct or promote research work for the purpose of developing and discovering health, food, dietetic and industrial uses for products

*of ... or its derivatives which will promote the consumption of products.*¹

A vast variety of promotional efforts were used in attempting to increase the sale of products. Some of these were beneficial to all segments of the industry. Others were selective in their efforts; for example, a promotion designed to increase the sale of product might not result in any change in the market for products Y and Z.

* Sills, D. L., *The Volunteers: Means and Ends in a National Organization*, Free Press, 1957.

¹ Article I, Section 2 of the Bylaws of the NPO, 1964, Page 1.

Thus, producers of various types of the same products do not always agree on the type of advertising programs needed. This issue is partially resolved by spending promotional money on X or Y products in proportion to the contributions of X and Y producers.

In addition to the obvious functions of the organization are the two vital ones of securing and retaining members. A discussion of these functions appears after a description of the history and structure of the organization.

History of the NPO

In 1964 the NPO celebrated its twenty-fifth year as an organization for promoting use of certain products. This was not the earliest promotion of these products by the producers. They had formed cooperatives since the mid-1800s to seek a better bargaining position for their commodity. Some of the earlier cooperatives were formed in Wisconsin and Minnesota. These earlier cooperative ef-

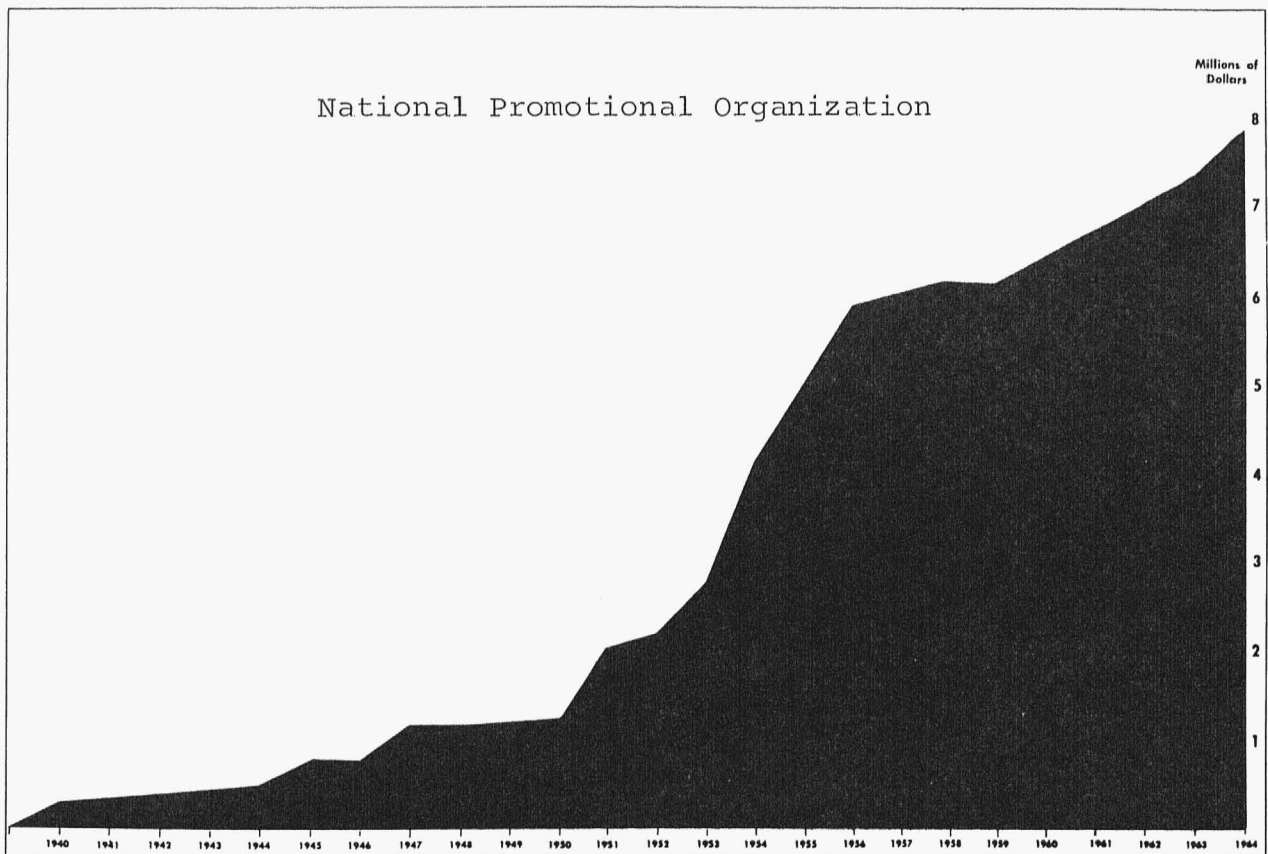
forts were a part of the cultural situation in which NPO was formed.

The NPO was organized in 1940 and included producers in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Washington, Montana, and North Dakota. Four general principles were used as a basic policy for the organization:

1. Non-brand advertising of products was needed.
2. It must be national in scope.
3. It must be producer-financed and controlled.
4. It must be a united action supported by producers in many states.

From 1940 to 1965, the national organizational budget increased from \$250,000 to over 7 million dollars, and the number of participating states increased from 6 to 50. (Figure 1.) Most of the growth in income during recent years has been from the addition of new states to the program. In earlier years the increases were from changes in length and rate

FIGURE 1--GROWTH OF SET-ASIDES RECEIPTS FOR NATIONAL NPO PROGRAMS 1940-1965



of withholding of "set-asides"² from producers' checks. One major alteration in the "set-asides" program was from a contribution for sales of one or two months of the year to a year-around withholding program.

The charter members of the organization adopted a policy that 80 percent of the state "set-aside" receipts were to be sent to the national office and the remaining 20 percent would be used to maintain the state program. Today, due to the fact that many producers do not contribute to the NPO, a potential of about five and a quarter million more dollars the organization could use is going uncollected.

Organizational Structure

The NPO is a *voluntary, promotional, federated, and bureaucratic* organization. It is made up of producers (members)³ who *voluntarily* contribute a portion of their income in the form of a "set-aside" to the organization.

It is a *federated* organization because it is organized into state and national units. The state units are semi-autonomous and grant only limited powers to the national organization. However, the amount of autonomy varies from one state organization to the next. As the organization extended to the national level and as the functions became more clearly defined and specialized, the structure took on distinctive bureaucratic characteristics.

The NPO began in the original states as a movement among lay personnel who assumed pseudo-professional roles in the organization to carry out its basic purpose. As is characteristic of leaders in newly-organized promotional efforts, the early field workers had an evangelistic belief in the program. Some of those remaining still have but they have been largely replaced by specialists in the central offices who place more emphasis on performing specific jobs.

The bureaucracy of the organization closely resembles the process which has occurred in other voluntary associations. It has been delineated by F. Stuart Chapin. He found that, as the process continued, conditions pertinent to internal communication developed:

² The membership costs of the NPO consist of a payment by producers of specified rate per volume of product marketed.

³ The persons who contribute to this organization are called members in this publication. The producers have little opportunity to participate in the organization beyond attendance at district and state meetings.

- (a) "The rank and file membership becomes increasingly *passive* and far removed from the central executive organs of the associations, except for the annual meetings which exercise only indirect parliamentary control over executive policies and for the most part have become the *object* of the activities carried on by the office staff.
- (b) "The executive is also increasingly removed from those activities for which it designs blueprints; furthermore, these policies are formulated no longer by one agency or body but by several; executive authority continues to have its origin in the executive board, but this board increasingly formulates its policy by the executive committee and the standing committees.
- (c) "The long lines of communication in the structure pose a problem of communication which the associations try to solve by improving their parliamentary machinery and by improving the channels of communication between the staff group and membership units."⁴

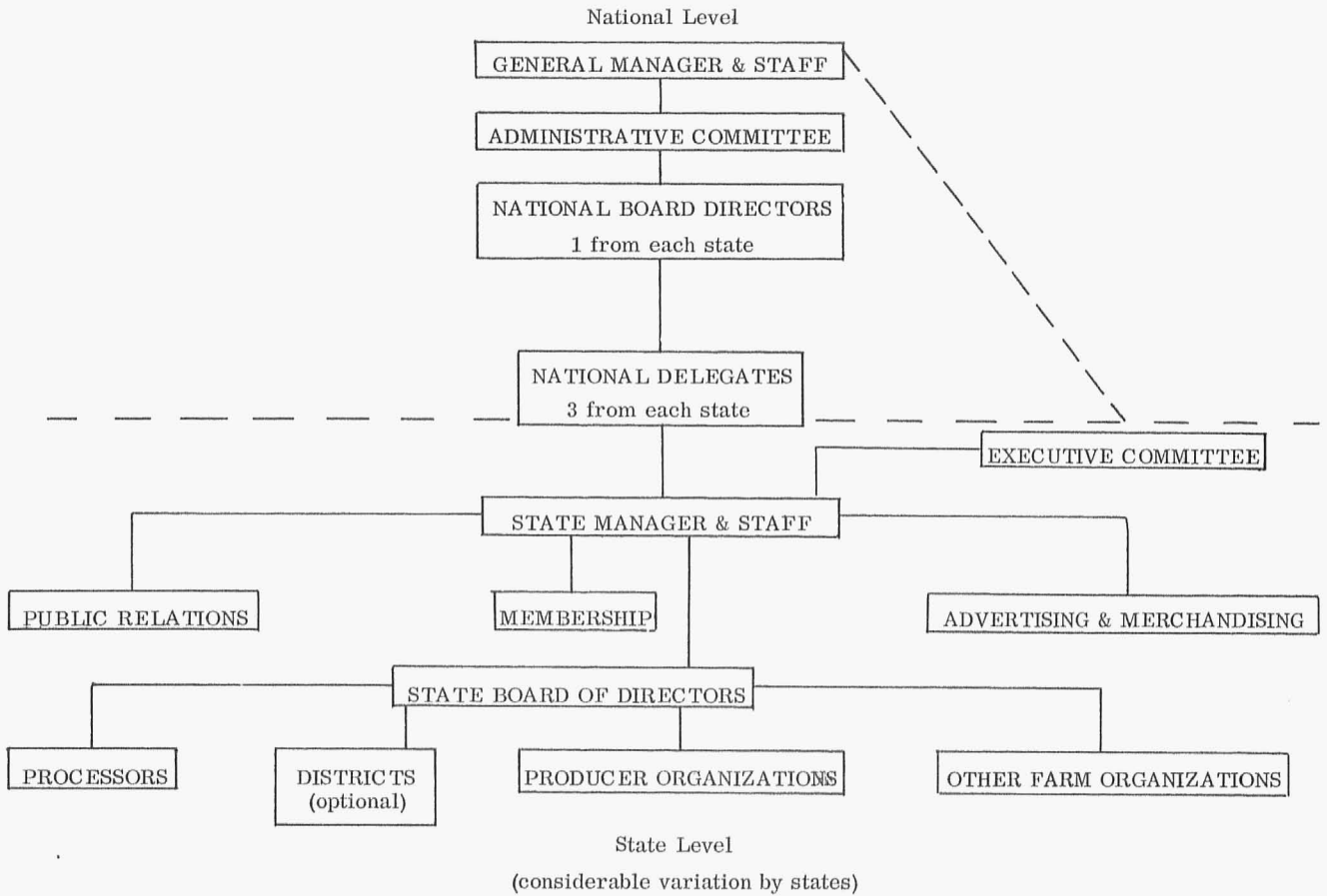
The organizational structure consists of elected representatives of the producers who are formally organized at state and national levels. Each state unit employs one or more professional persons (managers) to administer the state programs. Usually the state professional personnel are selected on the basis of suggestions from the national organization; however, the state NPO board of directors has the final authority to accept or reject any applicant. (See Figure 2.)

The professional state managers are normally persons who have had previous experience in the industry. Many are former producers who have had little training in program formulation and communications. Their duties are diverse and demanding, often leaving little time to spend in contact with producers or individual processing plant managers.

The national professional staff is divided into several departments. Only the membership division will be discussed here. It consists of a director and six regional membership directors. The primary duties of the membership department are the solicitation and retention of membership. The membership department operates within a state only at the request of the state units; that is, the national membership department does not normally communicate directly

⁴ Stuart Chapin, *Social Forces Journal*, Vol. 33, p. 309.

FIGURE 2--NPO ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



with producers. The primary function is to develop membership recruitment material which is used by the state organizations. They also serve as consultants and resource personnel to the states.

The primary orientation within the membership department is toward the amount of "set-asides." The rate of gain or loss and the total strength of a state organization is computed in terms of the "set-asides" received from the state. This is partly the result of the lack of membership lists, and partly a reflection of the importance attached to funds needed to operate the various programs. In fact, in most state units, no lists of the producers exist. The net result of this is an orientation within the membership department toward the impersonal "set-asides" rather than the personal "members."

Producers

The NPO attempts to include all producers of its products in the United States as possible mem-

bers. Thus, a wide diversity of producer interests and characteristics is included in the organization. The range in personal characteristics of producers is probably as great as that in the total farming community in the United States. It extends from the small hill-farmers in the Ozark and Appalachian areas, who have little education, are poverty stricken, and sell their products for only a few months per year, to the large commercial and business-operated firms in the western states and Florida, which are characterized by high levels of managerial and technical skills.

Obviously, a message that would reach the highly commercialized operators in California, Arizona, or Florida must be widely different in content and must be sent through different channels than one for the hill farmers in eastern Kentucky.

This variation in characteristics of producers is found not only between states but within most states. California, as an example, has both a large number

of highly commercialized, large-scale operations and a large number of comparatively small, less commercialized operations.

Thus, messages of the NPO are directed to people who have little or no formal education and to those with advanced college degrees, and whose "set-a-sides" to NPO range from a few dollars to hundreds or thousands of dollars per year.

Utilization of Intermediaries

Within the NPO structure, voluntary persons (non-producers) play major roles in recruiting and communicating with producers (see Figure 3). In this study the individuals who "voluntarily" help but who are not members are termed "intermediaries." They include managers of the plants that process the product, plant quality-control fieldmen, managers of non-processing cooperative producers organizations, vocational agricultural instructors, Extension agents, Extension specialists, and many others. Most communication from the NPO to the producers

flows through these intermediaries. Thus, willing and capable people at the intermediary level have supplied necessary steps in the flow of the NPO communications.

The NPO dependence upon help from people and organizations outside of the NPO has arisen because the professional staff is limited and because, in most of the states, membership lists of the farmers are not available. Even if lists of members had been available, the NPO would have wanted to solicit memberships from non-contributing producers who could be reached only through intermediaries.

The utilization of intermediaries by NPO varies from state to state. The following is an examination of the role of intermediaries by types:

Processing Organization Managers: Managers perform several important tasks for the NPO. These include withholding of "set-asides," recruiting new members, and sending out information from and about the NPO to the producers. In some states or organizations, the recruitment of members is by an-

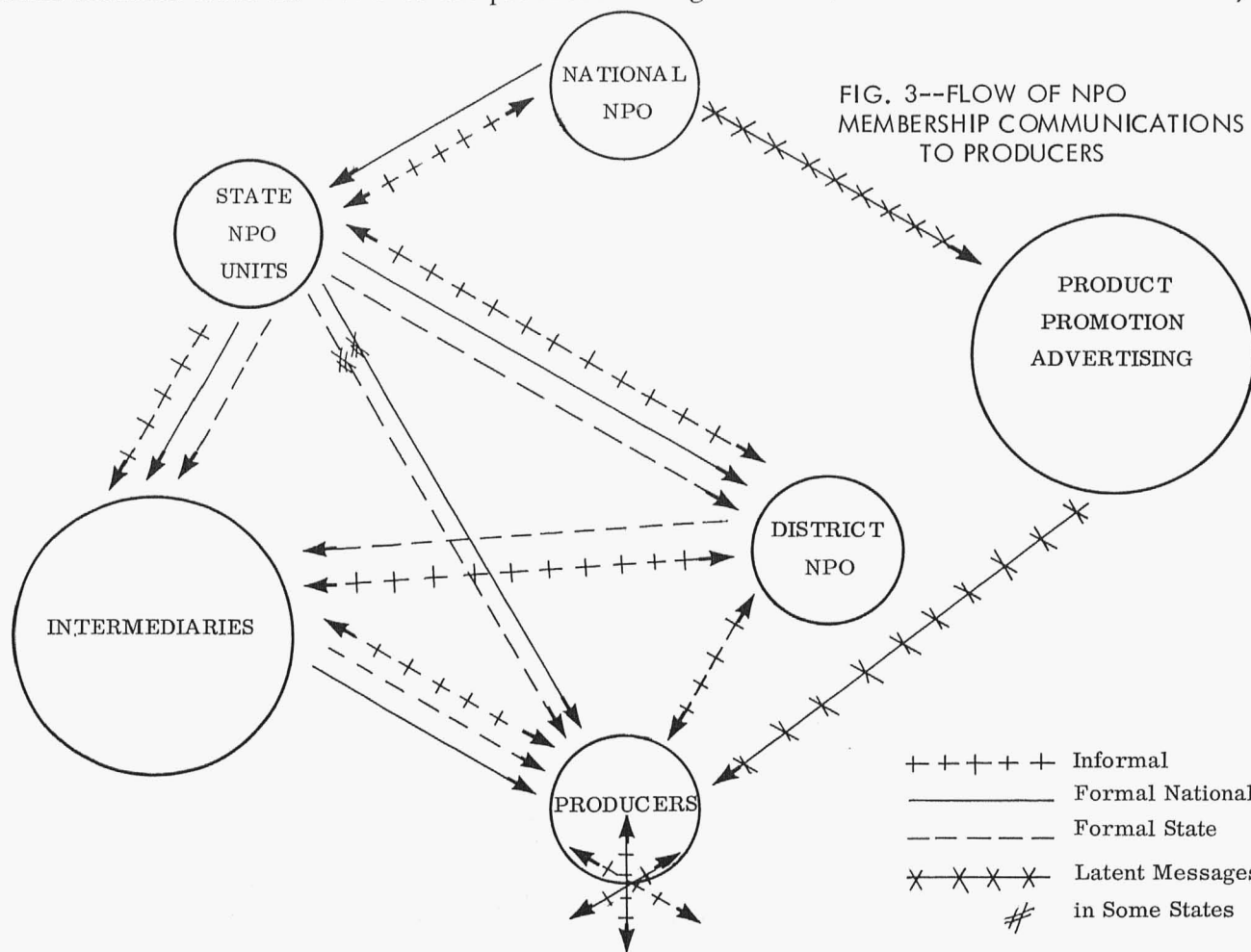
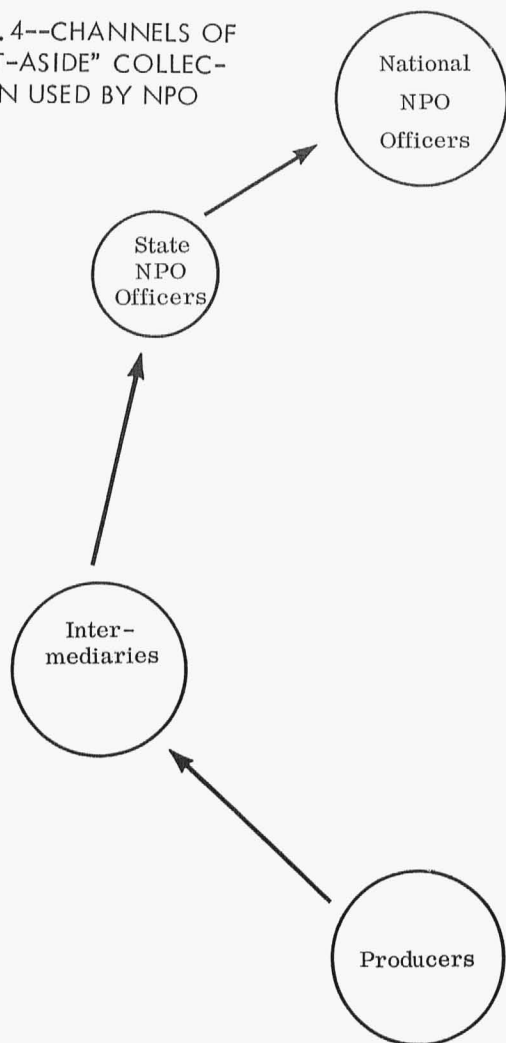


FIG. 3--FLOW OF NPO MEMBERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS TO PRODUCERS

nual agreement; in others, it is permanent until notification by the producers to the contrary.

In the task of collecting for NPO, processing plant managers compute the "set-asides" for each producer, collect the money by withholding it from the producers' checks, assemble the money, and forward it to the state NPO office. (See Figure 4). This

FIG. 4--CHANNELS OF "SET-ASIDE" COLLECTION USED BY NPO



is entirely voluntary on the part of a manager or organization. No pay is received for this service, which is done often in the absence of mechanical bookkeeping equipment and may involve considerable work and expense.

In addition to membership solicitation and deduction of funds, the NPO requests help of the managers in communicating to the producers by using NPO material in their house organs and by sending out NPO-prepared "check stuffers." This material,

which includes information about the NPO and its program, serves the dual functions of membership solicitation and reinforcement of previous membership decisions.

The plant manager has some, usually considerable, influence with the producers. Most of this influence is due to the official managerial position, and not because of any personal acquaintance with producers. The amount of personal interaction the typical manager has with his producers is limited. The amount of interaction varies widely according to the type and size of the organization. In a large organization the manager may not see the average producer more than once a year, if then, while in a very small organization the contacts may be daily. Managers in cooperatives probably have more contacts than those in privately-owned businesses.

Because of the limited amount of personal contact with producers, the primary role of the managers can be described best as "gate-keeping." If the managers do not cooperate with the NPO, "set-asides" can not be withheld and no communications link is available with producers; and even where they do cooperate, the producers still are not forced (although sometimes they are strongly urged) to contribute or to receive NPO messages.

The manager can also influence the NPO program through his power to direct the actions of his fieldmen. If the manager is not favorable toward the NPO, it is unlikely his fieldmen will promote the NPO.

Because of the crucial nature of the linkage between the NPO and plant managers, the NPO traditionally has placed a heavy emphasis in their membership program on the relationships between the NPO and the manager. Much, possibly all in some states, of the membership recruitment and communication effort has been directed to gaining and maintaining the cooperation of the managers.

Quality Control Fieldmen. In the processing organizations the fieldmen have the most direct contact with the producers. They can personally encourage producers to join and contribute to the NPO, answer questions, and reinforce the NPO program within the existing membership. Thus, because they often have good personal relations with the producers, they have considerable potential as communicators and decision-influencers.

County Agricultural Extension Agents: The county agricultural agents are professional commun-

icators to farm operators and usually have considerable influence with them. The cooperation with and promotion of NPO by such agents is important for at least two reasons. First, the extension agents organize a large number of meetings which include producers and where NPO membership representatives can appear. Second, the agents have considerable direct contact with producers and their leaders.

In most states the agents are prohibited from officially promoting or recruiting for any individual farm organization. However, because most agents and their supervisors believe that the idea behind NPO (cooperative promotion of products) is good, these rules are often indirectly ignored, and the agents informally promote NPO. This promotion is encouraged by the NPO through personal contacts, through NPO literature directed to agents, and through sponsorship awards for 4-H Club and other Extension activities.

In areas where the industry is more important, the Extension agents are likely to put more emphasis on industry-related programs. Likewise, the attempts by NPO to involve the county agriculture agents are highly correlated with the intensity of the industry in the area.

In addition to work with producers, the county Extension agents in some states set up programs for the farm youth. The basis of these programs is the dissemination of NPO youth literature, and in some of the larger NPO states, the NPO prepares special bulletins directed to youth.

Vocational Agriculture Teachers: Another important professional communicator in most agricultural communities is the vocational agriculture teacher. The vocational agriculture teacher's work involves primarily youth. It is believed that the producers may be reached through their children; also if the children can be convinced of the importance of NPO, they may become NPO members in the future.

The NPO provides literature to the teachers for classroom use, in which the importance of cooperative NPO-type advertising is discussed. The California NPO program is the largest effort of this type; it includes programs sponsored by the high school vocational agriculture departments, and a state-wide contest for NPO college scholarships for the sons of producers.

Other Voluntary Help: The NPO also seeks the aid and good will of various other industry agencies, such as manufacturers' associations, by inviting their representatives to the NPO meetings. The NPO professionals reciprocate by attending their meetings and serving on committees and panels. These representatives of related industry organizations are termed "associate members" by the NPO. The representation of the industry is made more complete by including representatives from processing organizations, breed associations, and various related industries.

Membership Communications Program of the NPO

The Message

As previously stated, the primary purpose of the NPO is to promote the use of certain products. All of the advertising of the NPO is "non-brand advertising." It is difficult to determine the influence of general advertisements. For that reason, the NPO membership department has had no empirically proven results to use for promotional messages.*

* This was correct at the time of the study, however, a research project recently completed by the NPO has adduced positive evidence of the effectiveness of "non-brand" advertising.

Their only way of determining the effect of such advertising has been the changes in the use of products and a multitude of factors besides NPO advertising can influence total usage.

Some positive results of NPO advertising would be much more effective promotional material to use in soliciting membership. But in its absence, the NPO has had to rely on persuasive presentation of the organization's basic aims in its promotional communications.

Formal Communications

The formal membership communications program of the NPO will be traced from the national level through the state NPO offices and the intermediaries to the producers. (See Figure 3.)

The national NPO office prepares and prints a majority of the membership communications materials for the entire organization. It then advises the state managers of the availability of publications. There is some selectivity at this level because the state units select most of the material to be disseminated in their state. In a few states, the national office provides a budgetary subsidy.

The first loss in the full flow of formal publications from the NPO office occurs between the state and national level. The state is required to purchase (at cost) the bulletins to be disseminated; however, the state manager and the state executive committee have to fit the communications programs to the available budget so that the number of bulletins and the audience selected are in proportion to the size of the industry and the amount of "set-asides" collected in the state.

In many instances, the state manager selects the "key influentials" or leaders in the industry in his state who will receive the formal communications material. Most of the publications usually go to the district NPO lay officials and intermediaries in most states and the average producers receive few, if any, of the national NPO publications. This is partially a result of budgetary limitations and partially a result of the communications policy of the NPO. Some of the states publish and distribute a state bulletin or newsletter in which articles from the national NPO publications are used. Such state publications usually include a report of the activities of the state and national NPO units and pertinent information.

Attrition of the national membership communications also occurs at the intermediary level when the intermediaries do not redistribute all of the messages they receive. The redistribution of NPO messages at the intermediary level takes two forms: (1) The intermediaries are asked to redistribute NPO literature which is "drop-shipped" to the organization by the state NPO and (2) the state offices ask

intermediaries to reproduce messages in their publications. The state NPO also prepares material for the intermediaries to use in speeches and letters.

Informal Communications

Informal communications are defined as: *the exchange of information about the NPO in interpersonal interaction by two or more individuals*. In addition to the more usual types of interpersonal communications such as conversations, formal programs conducted by the NPO officials are included in this category. The informal membership communications network follows channels similar to that of the formal channels; however, there is more activity at each of the levels. This will be discussed in more detail in later sections.

Communicative Effects of Product Advertising

The products promotion programs have considerable influence on membership solicitation and retention because members see them in action and are made aware of one of the purposes of the organization. Also, personal evaluation of the ads is the major method by which the membership can evaluate the organization. These advertising programs are disseminated through mass communications media throughout the United States and thus are exposed to the membership. In this respect, the merchandising programs fulfill a latent membership communications function for the membership division.

A second way the advertising program of the NPO promotes membership communications is through a service to local processors, providing them with material to advertise products the NPO promotes, products in general, and, of course, the processors' products. Processors have the opportunity to obtain these materials at cost to disseminate directly to their patrons or to use as point of sale material. Ad mats for local newspapers are among the materials available.

This promotion materials service, plus the realization that anything that increases all sales of their type of products may also increase their's encourages the processors to cooperate with the NPO in communicating the NPO program to producers.

Results of the Communications Program

Producer's Knowledge and Action Toward NPO

The producers interviewed in this study are representative in the areas studied. (See Figure 5.) Each of the areas was selected to include a particular type of producers. The types range from the small farms of the North to the highly-commercialized, dry-lot farming found in the West. In 1962, the median gross enterprise income per unit ranged from \$55,000 in the West to \$6,300 in the North. (For more information about the methodology, see the Appendix.)

Membership in the NPO also varies by area, with 46 percent of the farmers in the North reporting membership, 44 percent in the East, 66 percent in the South, and 54 percent in the West. In the North, 25 percent of the producers reported that at one time they had been members but did not belong at present. The comparable figure was less than 10 percent in other areas.

The producers are not well informed about their NPO membership status. A check of actual memberships, through the organizations to which the producers sold their products, revealed a 26 percent error in reporting of membership. This error ranged from a low of 12 percent in the West to 36 percent

in the South. The error consisted both of producers who said they were members and those who said they were not, with the inaccurate reporting equally divided between the two types of error. These inaccuracies are partially explained by the vague relationship of the organization with the producers.

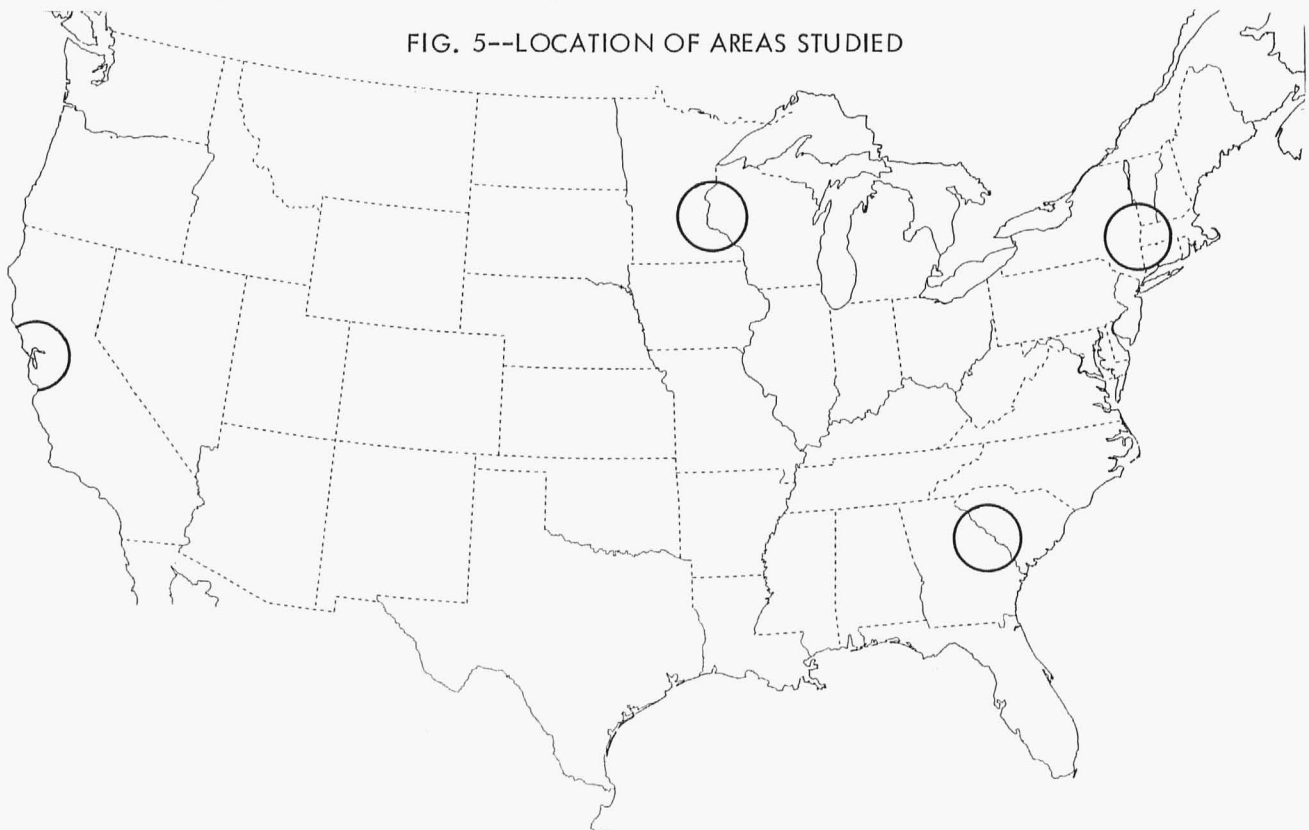
The producers are not well informed about the specific activities or organization of the NPO. The organization has an image as an advertiser of their products which most producers were able to recall; however, upon more specific questioning they were unable to give much further information about the organization.

Sources of Information About the NPO

Approximately 83 percent of the producers were informed or learned about the NPO from some source during the year prior to the interview. Percentages ranged from 77 in the Eastern area to 91 in the West.

Mass Media: The mass media, consisting of newspapers, farm papers, magazines, radio, and television, provided information to the highest proportion of the producers who had received information.

FIG. 5--LOCATION OF AREAS STUDIED



Television and farm papers were used most with 61 percent of the producers obtaining information from each of these sources. Farm papers served as a source of NPO information for half to three-fourths of the producers in all areas. Television served from 49 percent to a maximum of 84 percent in the West. Radio served as an information source for three out of eight producers with a range from 29 percent in the South to more than 50 percent in the North. It is likely that information attributed to television, and, perhaps, the other mass media was the result of NPO product advertising.

Intermediaries as Sources of Information: The personal sources used by producers included professional communicators, vocational agriculture teachers, county agriculture Extension agents, processing plant personnel, business people, and fellow producers.

Professional Communicators: Two such sources were considered: vocational agriculture teachers and county agriculture Extension agents. Five percent or less of the producers in any area (except 10 percent in the west) received information about the NPO from vocational agriculture teachers. Producers in the West were frequent users (20 percent) of county Extension agents. However, the use of the county agents was highest in the South (26 percent) and lowest in the East and North with 9 and 12 percent, respectively, reporting county agents as sources of NPO information.

Processing Organizations: The managers and quality control fieldmen served as information sources of the NPO for 5 percent and 16 percent of the producers, respectively. Regional variations were no more than 5 percent from the average for plant managers. There was a distinct contrast in use of fieldmen, ranging from 6 percent of the producers in the East to 28 percent in the West.

Other Producers: Less than half of the producers indicated that they had talked with other producers about the NPO during the past year. Less than 5 percent indicated that the NPO was a subject of *frequent* conversation. Forty-one percent of the producers, however, indicated that they talked with each other about NPO at least *sometimes*, thus indicating some exchange of information and/or opinions about the organization.

The proportion reporting such conversations was highest in the West (58%) and lowest in the

East (25%). Of these, most (59%) gave no subject in response to the question, "What did you discuss?" This *no response* was the highest in the East (73%) and lowest in the West (40%). This indicates a greater salience of NPO and its activities to producers in the West and less in the East. Not only did a smaller percentage of eastern producers indicate having had conversation about the organization, but a larger proportion of those who did recall such conversations could not recall any subject discussed.

Thirty-four percent of the producers said they received one or more of the formal publications of the NPO. However, variations were large from area to area. The percentage was highest in the West with 58 percent reporting receipt of the NPO literature. Slightly more than one-fifth of the producers in the East and North reported receiving any of these publications.

Pamphlets from NPO were the most common type of the formal publications received, and meeting notices, the second. These were followed closely by receipt of "positive" (membership recruitment) letters. Most producers in all the areas except the West were not sure from where the publications came. Of those volunteering an opinion or indicating actual knowledge, direct mailing from the NPO was seen as by far the most frequent source in all areas but the North.

The Western and Southern producers were more knowledgeable and willing to express opinions regarding the source of the literature received. Forty-seven and 57 percent, respectively, indicated direct mailing from the NPO as the principal source of information, and no more than 1 percent indicated any other source from which publications were obtained.

In conclusion, the data indicate that the formal communications structure of the NPO is functioning at considerably less than maximum effectiveness. The producers do not use the channels established by the organization, to any large extent, for further solicitation of information, and they do not recall it as a source of past messages. They do not remember many of the messages aimed at them.

Intermediaries' Knowledge of and Action Toward the NPO

The membership communications linkage at the intermediary level was examined by studying the type and amount of material the intermediaries

recognized they had received from the NPO, and the NPO messages they disseminated on to the producers. It was established in the last section that this link was not functioning effectively to reach the majority of producers directly.

The intermediaries have a strong advertising image of NPO. When responding to what they thought the purpose or purposes of the NPO were, advertising was given as a purpose by approximately 90 percent. Slightly over 50 percent of the producers made the same statement. However, there were many more "don't know" responses given by the producers in answer to this question.

The intermediaries received more information about NPO activities than the producers. This is not surprising since the NPO aims much of its efforts at the intermediaries. The fact that the producers were not well informed about the NPO gives rise to three possibilities: (1) the managers did not effectively disseminate the NPO messages and communications, (2) not enough of the managers were persuaded to cooperate in the NPO programs, and/or (3) the messages were not effective when they reached the producers. A closer look at the first possibility as to why the managers do not disseminate these messages will be taken up later.

Communications Received by the Intermediaries

The intermediaries receive NPO messages through formal (printed) and informal (personal) channels.

Formal Sources: A large percentage of the intermediaries do not recognize receipt of any NPO publications. One hundred and fifteen of the 300 intermediaries reported they did not receive any NPO publications. This may reflect the actual non-receipt of the material or it may result from the non-recognition of actual receipt. As many as half of the intermediaries received no NPO publication and of the five national NPO publications, publication D was received most frequently (40%). (See Figure 6.) Less than 20 percent of the intermediaries received any other NPO publication (state or national).

These figures, which include all intermediaries, hide some interesting variations in regard to region and position in the receipt of NPO literature. The differences are due mainly to the differences in NPO state programs. Some states may be better able to afford the cost of distributing bulletins to all inter-

Figure 6

PERCENT OF INTERMEDIARIES RECEIVING SELECTED NATIONAL NPO PUBLICATIONS

Publication	Fieldmen %	Managers %	Agents & Teachers %
A	16	30	15
B	7	16	4
C	14	23	15
D	30	56	37
E	16	14	17
None	60	30	41

Percentages add to more than 100 because of individuals reporting receipts of more than one publication.

mediaries than other states. While D was the publication most commonly received, a wide variation existed in who received it. Only 30 percent of the fieldmen received this publication, but 56 percent of the managers received it. The South and the West received more NPO publications than the remaining two areas.

Sixty percent of the quality-control fieldmen reported they had not received any NPO publications. These figures may reflect a lack of importance placed on these intermediaries by the state NPO offices. Seventy-one percent of the fieldmen in the North did not receive any publications. This percentage fell to 30 percent for the fieldmen in the South. The East with 66 percent and the West with 40 percent were between these two extremes. The fieldmen received fewer NPO publications than any other group of intermediaries.

Differential receipt by areas of the NPO publications was also found in the manager and agent-teacher intermediary positions. The Southern managers received the highest percentages (87%) of these publications, and they were closely followed by managers in the North (83%).

The agents and teachers in the West received more NPO literature than those in any other area. In fact, the agents and teachers in the West received twice as much NPO literature as those in the South. While the South was at or near the top in literature receipts for the other two intermediary positions, it was the lowest for the agent-teacher category. The

difference reflects the policy of the state organizations.

Industry Publications: The NPO places advertisements and editorial material in various industry publications. Because of the potential for reaching the intermediaries through these publications, recognition of receipt of selected industry publications by the intermediaries was examined.

Similar conditions to those found in the NPO publications were encountered when the industry publications received by the intermediaries were examined. The "Record" was the only industry publication to be received by as many as 40 percent of the intermediaries. Most of the publications mentioned as being received by the intermediaries were received by 5 to 20 percent of the total reporting in this study. However, it must be recognized that one of the major reasons for the low percentage of intermediaries receiving these publications is that the intermediaries are a very diverse group. Not all of the publications were suited or intended for them. Most of the trade magazines, house organs, and technical publications in the industry have restricted circulations. Only one or two of them attempt to include in their audiences all the types of occupations that have been included here.

State Publications: Some of the state NPO organizations publish a newsletter or bulletin to their producers and intermediaries and include material from the national NPO publications. This may be in lieu of distributing national publications in some states.

Thirty-nine percent of the intermediaries reported that they thought that the state NPO organization published a bulletin regularly (Figure 7). It was significant that 42 percent were not able to answer this question. About 20 percent of the intermediaries re-

Figure 7

OPINION OF INTERMEDIARIES WHETHER STATE NPO ORGANIZATION PUBLISHED A BULLETIN OR PAPER REGULARLY

All Intermediaries	N	%
Yes, it publishes one	116	38.7
No, it doesn't	57	19.0
Don't know	127	42.3
TOTAL	300	100.0

ported that they received this publication monthly, but only one-fourth of these (5% of total) said that they read it regularly. The remainder reported reading it only occasionally or not at all.

Professional Meeting: Another form of communication is the intermediaries' attendance at professional meetings at which the NPO is formally discussed. Thirty-seven percent of the intermediaries reported that they had attended such meetings during the past year (Figure 8).

Figure 8

ATTENDANCE AND DISCUSSION OF NPO BY INTERMEDIARIES AT PROFESSIONAL OR INDUSTRY MEETINGS ATTENDED DURING THE LAST YEAR

All Intermediaries		
Record of attendance	Number	Percent
Attended one or more meetings	213	71.0
Did not attend	87	29.0
TOTAL	300	100.0
Formal Discussions at meetings		
Discussion was held	127	42.3
Discussion was not held	81	27.0
No response	92	30.7
TOTAL	300	100.0
Informal Discussions at meetings		
Discussion was held	113	37.7
No discussion was held	101	33.7
No response	86	28.7
TOTAL	300	100.1

Seventy-one percent of the intermediaries attended industry meetings during the year preceding interviewing. Sixty percent of this group reported having discussed the NPO informally while attending these meetings. Informal discussion of the NPO at these meetings occurred more often than the formal presentations by the NPO at the meetings. Also it was more frequent among the managers (69%) than the fieldmen (47%).

Informal Communications About NPO: Only the managers and fieldmen were asked if they knew

any NPO officials. Approximately 60 percent of these said they were acquainted with an NPO official. While this does not indicate communicating, it does indicate a linkage available for future communications.

Another form of informal communications is the discussion of the NPO among fellow intermediaries (Figure 9). Approximately 50 percent reported

Figure 9

PERCENT OF INTERMEDIARIES REPORTING DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE NPO WITH OTHER INTERMEDIARIES OR PRODUCERS

	Managers %	Agents & Teachers %	Fieldmen %
Reporting Discussions with:			
Others in Similar Positions	45	56	50
and/or			
Their Producers	54	57	70

that the NPO was a topic of discussion with other intermediaries (Figure 10). Also, approximately 58 percent of the intermediaries reported that they had engaged in discussions about NPO with producers.

Figure 10

INTERPERSONAL DISCUSSION OF THE NPO WITH INTERMEDIARIES IN SIMILAR POSITIONS WITHIN THE PRECEDING YEAR

ALL INTERMEDIARIES	N	%
Had discussed NPO	151	50.3
Hadn't discussed NPO	149	49.7
TOTAL	300	100.0

In some instances, the producers may be informed about the activities and goals of the NPO as well as or better than the intermediaries, in which case a reverse flow of information may occur. In any case, matters of mutual concern in relation to NPO may be resolved, discussed, or reinforced.

NPO Communications Sent to Producers by the Intermediaries

The intermediaries are urged to communicate NPO messages to the producers (Figure 11). These

Figure 11

COMMUNICATION OF MATERIAL BY INTERMEDIARIES FROM OR ABOUT THE NPO TO PRODUCERS

All Intermediaries	N	%
Had sent material to producers	148	49.3
Had not sent material to producers	143	47.7
Didn't know whether or not material was sent	9	3.0
TOTAL	300	100.0

messages may take several forms; they may be "positive" letters or other material for membership solicitation, announcements of NPO meetings, or literature of an informative nature. Earlier discussions have shown that the intermediaries are not well informed about the NPO and can only communicate what they know, which means they have limited information to communicate.

This examination of the data further supports the conclusions that the communicative link between the state and national NPO organization and the intermediaries is not strong; and attrition of messages at this level is relatively large. However, it should be pointed out that a significant number (50%) of the intermediaries do transmit information from the NPO to their producers.

Action Taken in Behalf of the NPO

A number of types of action toward the NPO are taken by intermediaries. Sending "positive" (membership recruitment) letters soliciting memberships has been mentioned (Figure 12). As a further determination of possible action, each intermediary was asked about the persuasion he would exert on a producer who wanted to drop out of the NPO. Only

Figure 12

PERCENTAGE OF INTERMEDIARIES WHO DISTRIBUTED MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT LETTERS

All Intermediaries	N	%
Yes	60	20.0
No	153	51.0
No response	87	29.0
TOTAL	300	100.00

3 percent of the respondents indicated that they would allow the producer to do so without making a positive statement on behalf of the NPO.

Responses such as "that's his business" and "he can drop if he wants to" were given by only a few of the intermediaries. A large proportion of all respondents (37%) said that they would try to persuade the producer to continue supporting the NPO program. The intermediaries who were active in the communications network of the NPO also stated that they would attempt persuasion in behalf of the NPO, both in the solicitation and retention of memberships for the NPO.

Product Promotion as Source of Information

A second aspect of the NPO communications to intermediaries is through the promotion of products.

Summary and Conclusions

The organization selected for study was a National Promotional Organization (NPO) for producers of a farm commodity. Data on NPO membership communications were obtained from publications of the national and state NPO organizations and from results of two national surveys.

One survey examined the attitudes, knowledge, and action toward NPO of 300 product processing plant managers, quality control fieldmen, county agricultural Extension agents, and vocational agriculture teachers. These individuals, called "intermediaries" herein, are in the NPO membership communications channel.

The second survey concerned the attitudes toward and knowledge about NPO of 700 producers in seven states. The areas surveyed were selected to include a wide range of types of producers, intermediaries, and NPO state organizations. The areas were located in the upper mid-western, southern, northern, and western sections of the United States. A more detailed description of the surveys and methodology used in each section is given in the Appendix.

A picture of the formal flow of information from the national and state NPO organizations through

The NPO advertises products through radio, television, magazines, point of sales material, industry magazines, newspapers, farm weekly papers, billboards, and other sources. As with producers, these efforts have a latent but important influence in creating a favorable disposition among intermediaries toward NPO.

Most of the intermediaries acknowledged having seen various types of NPO product-promotion advertising. The average number of media in which NPO ads were carried and which were recognized by the intermediaries in the month preceding the interview was three. Sixteen percent of the intermediaries did not recall having seen any form of NPO advertising in the month preceding the interview.

intermediaries and received by the producers was drawn.

The NPO does not have direct linkage with its producers members; rather it depends upon intermediaries to serve as communications links between the organization and the members. These intermediaries are asked to voluntarily transmit messages from the state and national organizations to the members.

In addition, the processing plant intermediaries are asked to withhold "set-asides" from the checks of the producers for support of the NPO and to transmit these "set-asides" to the state units. Thus, the cooperation of the intermediaries is crucial to the functioning of the NPO organization. The membership communications program still may not succeed, however, because of the failure of producers to receive and understand the NPO messages.

The data revealed that the producers had little specific knowledge about the NPO. Approximately half of the producers knew that the basic function of the NPO was to promote products; however, the amount of knowledge beyond this was very limited. A comparatively large proportion of them did not know whether or not they were contributing to the organization.

This information, together with an examination of source of information used by the producers, indicated that one of the primary sources of information may have been NPO advertisements and not the membership communications channels set up within the organization.

The membership of the organization did not take part in many NPO activities. This may have been due in part to lack of interest in the organization since the organization certainly cannot be described as having a high involvement with the producers.

Of the limited knowledge the producers did have about the organization, the mass media, such as radio and television, were the sources most often named. The intermediaries were named by a comparatively small minority.

The level of knowledge about the NPO was considerably higher among intermediaries than it was among the producers. Almost all of the intermediaries knew the general purpose of the organization.

Most of the attitudes toward the organization were favorable and many of the intermediaries felt they were a part of the organization in spite of the bylaws of the organization prohibiting such action. The amount of action taken by the intermediaries toward the NPO was limited by the feeling that while they responded favorably toward the organization, they felt no strong responsibility to promote it.

The results of these two surveys indicate that the membership communications program of the

NPO is not functioning very effectively; its structure tends to be weak in a number of places.

First, the national office, which prepares most of the membership communications material, may not be constructing messages which are meaningful to the producers.

Second, the membership material suffers considerable attrition as it flows downward. The first major attrition occurs at the state level. The state NPO organizations, which are semi-autonomous, select and use only a portion of the national NPO communications material.

Another attrition occurs at the intermediary level. A considerable amount of the membership material is "drop-shipped" to plant managers and organizations with the request that it be further transmitted. The amount which is actually transmitted probably varies considerably, but certainly attrition occurs at this point. This type of shipment is used because many of the state organizations do not have membership lists, and the cost involved in direct mailing of such material would be considerable.

A third reason for the comparative lack of success of the membership communications program is that the producers themselves do not have a strong positive feeling toward the organization and may not read the NPO materials which reach them. This of course poses a dilemma for the organization; if the membership material is not read, closer ties cannot be created, and, conversely, if closer ties are not in existence, membership material will not be read.

Appendix

This two-stage research program was undertaken by the Department of Rural Sociology to advance understanding of how a non-tangible idea (cooperative promotion) has diffused among producers in selected areas of the United States. The project also offered the opportunity to analyze the communications programs of a large complex organization. Rural sociology research in the past has been criticized as being too localistic. This makes generalizations from some research difficult because results are from small geographic areas.

STUDY I: PRODUCERS

Data Collection

The data presented in this report were derived from interviews from 686 producers in four regions of the United States. These regions consisted of parts of seven states which are geographically distributed to give an over-view of the producers in North, South, East, and West areas of the U.S. However, not all producers were considered. The sample was limited to those above a minimum size and to those who sold products. The four general areas were selected after an extensive examination of the various regions in the United States and a review of the related statistical information from the Agriculture Census and other sources.

The sample counties within the areas were selected subject to the following conditions:

1. That they be contiguous and include more than one state to enable comparisons to different NPO state organizations.
2. That the areas be located as much as possible in the marketing area around a large city (on account of the producer's organizations. For the availability of statistics in the federal marketing area, federal marketing areas were used whenever possible; however, this was not possible in all areas because of state marketing orders and the overlap of federal marketing orders).
3. That the producers in the sample areas be representative of those in the surrounding areas.

Within each large sampling area, the county was used as the secondary unit of sampling. Counties

were selected randomly from those comprising the larger areas. Within each county in the Eastern and Northern areas, probability samples were drawn to include a minimum of 15 producers in each. All producers in each segment meeting the size criterion were interviewed. Since producers constituted a relatively small proportion of the operators in the Western and Southern areas, producers to be interviewed were randomly selected from lists available from state and local governmental units in these areas. A sample of 200 was drawn from each area except the West where a sample of 100 was selected. This was deemed adequate because the entire sampling area was located in the state of California.

The interviews were built and pretested by the University of Missouri Department of Rural Sociology. The interviewing was conducted by a professional interviewing service, and the interviewing, which was completed in the spring and summer of 1963, resulted in 199 usable schedules in the North, 190 in the South, 197 in the East, and 100 in the West. The total usable number was 686.

STUDY II: INTERMEDIARIES

Sample

The sample in this part of the study was developed from a list of organizations to or through which each producer interviewed in Study I sold his product. Those named constituted the first contingent in the intermediary sample. The quality control fieldmen of these organizations were also included as a second contingent. The county agricultural Extension agents and the vocational agriculture teachers in the counties in Study I constituted the third and fourth contingent.

This group did not provide a large enough number for statistical analysis within categories, so the sample was expanded by adding all intermediaries in the Sample I counties, whether or not mentioned by the producers, and additional intermediaries in adjoining counties.

Another factor that made the sample areas larger was that some companies operated receiving stations in an area but sent the checks from a division or home office some distance away. Here the personnel

at the receiving station had little, if anything to do officially with NPO or the producers. Where this occurred, the people in positions in the division or home office were interviewed.

Processing of Organizations

To be included in this study a processing organization had to have more than three producers selling products to it, which had the net effect of virtually eliminating the producer-distributor type of plants. A second requirement was that there actually be personnel having direct contact with producers. The unit to be interviewed could not be divisional offices where only storage or bookkeeping operations were maintained. Most of such offices had relatively little, if any, contact with the producers and, because of this, they were not as important in the dissemination of NPO information to the producers. This criterion did not delete many organizations from the sample. However, in both the East and the South some divisional offices were found. These were either eliminated from the sample, or the manager directed the interviewers to the position which met this criterion.

Characteristics of Organizations Interviewed

Two-thirds of the organizations were privately owned, and one-third cooperatively owned. Within the one-third of the sample which was cooperatively owned, bargaining and handling cooperatives were included. Of these, six were found in the North, three in the East, and one in the South. These organizations were included because both the bargaining co-ops and the handling co-ops deal directly with the producers and the processors. Usually, bargaining and non-processing handling cooperatives distribute the funds to their producers.

Definition of Positions of Interviewees

Manager Position: The manager was defined as the individual in charge of general management. However, in large organizations with more specialization of management the individual who was in charge of producer relations, but who was not a fieldman himself, was selected as the person to be interviewed. This definition eliminated plant managers who controlled only the processing procedures. It

also took out sales managers and other personnel who did not have any, or had only limited direct contact with the producers or little influence on producer relations. Many of the managers whose names had been secured from the secondary sources were found to be general managers who were not directly responsible for producer relations. They were asked to direct the interviewers to the proper person; in addition, these general managers helped to legitimize the interviews by directing subordinates to cooperate with the interviews.

Fieldman Position: A fieldman was a person who spent a majority of his time working with the producers. This did not eliminate fieldmen who spent a large proportion of their time in the field and the remainder in the plant.

The Questionnaire

Many of the questions in Study I which were used to determine producer attitudes toward NPO were also included with appropriate changes in Study II.

The first section of the questionnaire, which secured descriptive information about the organization, was changed to fit the position of the person being interviewed. This resulted in three different questionnaires which differed in the descriptive section and in other minor details.

The questionnaires were pretested in Missouri and in each of the four sample areas by a member of the staff, and in a pretest situation with the commercial interviewing organization.

Collection of the Data

The data were collected by a commercial research service. The survey resulted in 308 completed questionnaires, of which 300 were usable in the analysis of the data.

Only one interview was taken from each position in each intermediary organization. When more than one individual could qualify, the one interviewed was selected randomly. This kind of situation occurred in the school systems where more than one vocational agriculture teacher was involved in teaching courses in the subject matter area; also in product organizations with more than one eligible fieldman.