

RESEARCH BRIEFS

Includes explanations of practical communication, and training media methods, and equipment use (1-2 typed pages).

Research Shows What Farmers Prefer In 30-minute Farm Show

This paper shows how two agencies, Cooperative Extension and Mississippi Educational Television Network, surveyed the prospective farm television audience in Mississippi and came up with a program format for "Farmweek." In addition I will present preliminary findings from a second survey, almost completed and still being evaluated, following up on many of the questions asked in the first. The second gives us some idea how many farm families are now watching "Farmweek."

"Farmweek" was born early in 1977 during the state legislative session. Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service (MCES) and Mississippi Educational Television (ETV) were asked, after submitting their budgets for the next fiscal year, to work together on producing a program for the state's farmers. Both agencies agreed. At that first meeting of the two agencies in mid March, a need for a state-wide questionnaire-survey was established to determine farmer preferences.

Dr. James Carpenter, associate director of MCES, was the pivotal figure in guiding "Farmweek" into existence. He asked ETV's program director and members of the state's leading agricultural organizations to submit questions they thought needed asking on this first farmer survey.

Researchers decided on a mail survey, using county extension general farm mailing lists. These lists are kept up-to-date by the agents, usually in conjunction with the county ASCS office. They are as accurate a total listing of farmers in a given county as can be found in Mississippi.

Thirty surveys were sent to each of the 82 Mississippi counties, or a total of 2,460 surveys, knowing full well that a considerable number would never be returned. The total number mailed is about two percent of all the farm families in Mississippi. About 28 percent,

or 670, returned completed questionnaires.

Apparently the principle concerns of that questionnaire were: (1) Whether farmers in all parts of the state could receive ETV on their television set(s). (Mississippi ETV claims to be a state-wide network with microwave towers strategically located throughout the state, but many county agents, especially those in the far corners of the state, say ETV is impossible to pick up. ETV says this is because it is on the high noise level UHF band and requires more sophisticated tuning knowledge of its viewers.) (2) What day of the week and time of the day, a majority of farmers would rather have the program on the air. (3) What farmers were most interested in seeing on a weekly farm program.

In a cover letter sent with the first surveys, each county agent was asked to send a questionnaire to every seventh person on his mailing list until all had been mailed. The questionnaires were returned to the county agent, who sent them to Extension headquarters for computer coding and analysis. The two-page questionnaire consisted of 10 questions and a brief description of the proposed farm program and the need for the farmer's input through this survey.

From the 670 families responding, the following data were developed: 565 reported watching ETV an average of 4.3 hours per week per household (impressive numbers, perhaps, but leading one to ask if the so-called, "halo effect," might be surrounding them). Almost one-fourth said they had no preference for the choice of day to broadcast the program. More than one in five preferred Monday, and the strongest time period was somewhere between 6 and 8 p.m. Agricultural weather was clearly the strongest content area, followed by markets, and then a weekly crop and livestock report. An agricultural news report was fourth, and an in-the-field feature on a successful production method or research breakthrough was fifth. The rather low interest in a feature presentation surprised us.

Based on this survey, "Farmweek" was broadcast every Monday night at 7:30 p.m. Each week the program format contained 3 to 4 minutes of news, followed by 4 to 5 minutes of the latest market price averages for the past week, an agricultural weather forecast, and a feature presentation on a successful farming practice. We also tried to include a crop condition report, when timely, and some gardening facts.

Twice from October to June, 1978, telephone call-ins were conducted through state-wide watts lines at ETV's facilities immediately following a "Farmweek" program. In both instances we received a small number of very enthusiastic calls, praising our efforts.

In June we decided to do a telephone survey, again using the general farm mailing lists in our county agent offices. Preliminary findings are based on about 75 percent returns. In this survey we asked our agents to have a middle-aged woman on their staff call every eighth person on their mailing list until 15 farmer owner/operators were reached and questioned.

In numbers, this meant we would survey about 1,200, or one percent, of the 120,000 farm families in the state. Expert researchers told us a telephone survey, if pretested, was more reliable than one conducted by mail. For example, the so-called, "halo effect," trying to make oneself look better, is less likely in a telephone survey.

Our telephone survey, though not completely analyzed yet, has shown that a much larger number of people in the state than we at first surmised say they cannot receive ETV on their television set(s). We have isolated pockets where viewer reception is a problem and ETV has promised to step up its effort to educate viewers to the subtleties of tuning in UHF frequencies. (That's as specific as ETV has as yet gotten on this problem.)

We are also finding a significant change in content preference on this survey. The agricultural news segment is far and away coming out number one, followed by markets, then weather, and finally the feature presentation. We attributed the drop in the weather segment from first to third to poor presentation and content. Until we can make the weather segment more interesting and relevant to farmers, we have decided to drop it. The plan is to begin incorporating weather into a crop report that will run during the news segment.

Finally, the telephone survey indicates an apparently strong preference for viewing the program later in the evening. With still one quarter of the surveys yet to come in, over 30 percent say they would like a later broadcast time. But the survey was taken in June, so the later time may be desired only during daylight savings when farmers are likely to be outside until dark. This question has yet to be answered scientifically, so we are uncertain whether to make a change at all.

In hard, cold numbers, the telephone survey is telling us that only about one-fourth of the state's farmers watch, "Farmweek." In discussing this with ETV, we feel a much more coordinated publicity effort is needed to get the word out to the many who have never heard of the program. We have already started meetings to achieve this.

We have also increased our evidence, we feel, that "Farmweek" should be available for broadcast on commercial stations in Missis-

issippi as well as on ETV. Since we have our own production facilities, we have suggested—and recently gotten ETV agreement—that we experimentally produce the program at our studio and then let them air it. This would put most of the burden of production on MCES. Eventually, for maximum coverage, we would like to be sole producer of "Farmweek" and make it available to all stations.

—Bruce Johnson, *Radio-Television Editor, Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service*

States Report Teaching, Research Activities

In 1978 the Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching and Research surveyed ACE members or information staffs at the Land-Grant institutions, including Puerto Rico, of the United States.*

Forty-seven of the possible 51 offices replied to the questionnaire. While, by all standards, this is an excellent return for a mail survey, it doesn't quite speak to 100 percent of the Land Grant College Information Offices. The reader should also be aware of some other facts concerning the survey instrument, and the resulting data: (1) Because Land Grant College Information Offices operate under many different names, confusion can result as to exactly who should be included in answers to such a survey (2) In some states, research editorial offices are separated from Extension editorial offices, so some ACE members could be missed as a result (3) In some states the teaching function may be located in the College of Agriculture, but be completely separated administratively from the information office (4) The information gathered by the instrument does not allow sharp delineation between the undergraduate and graduate courses taught (5) Finally, the instrument does not distinguish between information staff who are, or are not, members of ACE.

Given these, and possible other, shortcomings, the instrument does appear to provide reasonable answers to the basic questions asked of the ad hoc committee on teaching and research: "What is the current status of ACE members regarding teaching and research, and what are the trends regarding each?"

Of the 47 states replying to the survey instrument, 18, or 38 percent, are involved in one or more of the three areas—undergraduate, or graduate teaching, and research. Of those 47, more are