

Research Briefs

Readership of AG Outlook Inserts in Farm Magazines

In late September, 1981, we surveyed Minnesota subscribers to *The Farmer* magazine to see how well they read an editorial insert called "1981 Ag Outlook." The insert was written by extension economists at the University of Minnesota and stapled as an insert in the middle of the magazine. Format for the magazine is 10" x 14" pages; the insert was a 16-page (8½ x 11) page effort.

The insert was received by 180,000 subscribers in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. We surveyed a random list of 200 Minnesota subscribers, (there are about 115,000 Minnesota subscribers). The people at Webb Co., parent unit of *The Farmer*, gave us a random list of 200 Minnesota subscribers from their computer. They also let us use their WATTS lines to make the calls.

Our telephone survey yielded a response rate of 80 percent, or 160 out of 200. In many cases, we had to call back two or three times. Of that number, 99 (or 62 percent), had looked at the magazine (not necessarily the insert). And 67 of those 99 (or 68 percent) had noticed the ag outlook supplement in the magazine.

We did not survey farmers in late September because it was an "idle" time period on farms. On the contrary, it was an extremely busy time—many people were harvesting corn silage, corn, or soybeans. Many people said they hadn't read the magazine yet due to the busy harvest season. But we had little choice as to when we did the survey. The insert appeared in the Sept. 19 edition; we had to do the survey before the next edition came out.

We asked how useful the ag outlook supplement was to the farming operation. Here are the results:

- 24 percent said very useful
- 51 percent said somewhat useful
- 8 percent said of little use
- 5 percent said of no use
- 13 percent (no response)

So if you take the top two categories, 75 percent of subscribers who noticed the supplement said that it was either very useful or somewhat useful.

Corn is the most widely grown crop in Minnesota. Of the 67 people who had looked at the Ag Outlook insert, 83 percent raised corn.

How well were some of the articles in the Ag Outlook section read? We asked subscribers whether they read most, some, noticed the article, or did not read it. For the feedgrains article, 16 percent read most of it, 24 percent some of it, 30 percent noticed it, 24 percent did not read it. Another 6 percent gave no answer.

The article on agricultural policy had about the same readership:

- 18 percent read most
- 14 percent read some
- 19 percent noticed it
- 18 percent did not read it
- 4 percent gave no answer

In terms of cost efficiency, it's hard to beat use of an insert like this. It reached 180,000 people in three states. Cost to extension services of the three states totaled \$6,000 in out-of-pocket printing costs. That calculates to three cents per copy in our public funds. THE FARMER picked up mailing and some other production costs.

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