

Research Briefs

USDA News Release Usage Survey

Last summer, there was a great deal of newspaper interest in the disease of dogs, canine parvovirus. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued three news releases on the subject. This survey used newspaper clipping services as a partial measure of usage of the stories.

The first news release issued by APHIS was based on the agency's responsibility under the Animal Welfare Act for licensing dog dealers. The other two releases were based on its responsibility for quality control of animal vaccines under the Virus-Serum-Toxin Act. The stories were issued on August 8, August 14, and August 25, respectively.

The survey is considered incomplete because the clipping services used do not provide uniform or complete nationwide coverage. The study does offer an indication of how information from a government agency reaches the public, however.

A total of 67 clippings based on the first release was obtained, 15 directly from the news release and the others from wire service stories based on it. One of these was an Associated Press story which added a number of other sources (notably veterinarians) and which resulted in 27 clippings. Another Associated Press story provided 11 clips, while a United Press-International story based on the APHIS release netted 14.

Clippings showed that some newspapers localized the story for publication. Both the APHIS release and wire service versions were localized.

The second APHIS release resulted in 46 clips. Of these, 38 were based directly on the release. Four clippings each resulted from two different Associated

Press versions. One of these was a brief, straight pick-up of the original material and the other was an expanded version with a followup quotation from the author. At least one newspaper was found to provide a local angle to this story, also.

The third release was issued with different leads—one from Washington and others from the regional USDA information offices serving APHIS. This story produced 33 clips. Two of these were based on the Washington release, nine on the regional versions, and 22 on an Associated Press story resulting directly from the release.

Some interesting approaches to the parvovirus story were revealed by the clippings. For example, a chain of newspapers in southern New Jersey carried a by-lined story published in late August but using parts of the initial APHIS release. An Iowa news service also carried an original story, in part quoting the third release.

In addition, the study produced clippings from 13 newspapers and two magazines that did original stories on canine parvovirus, either using material from the APHIS releases or quotations carried by the news services. Thirty-one other clippings were based on various local and regional stories on the subject which did not directly reflect the APHIS information.

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The AI Newsletter as Marketing Communications Tool

***Abstracted from M.S. Thesis, University of Wisconsin. Eugene A. Kroupa, advisor.**

Newsletters have grown into a major medium carrying valuable information that, in most cases, is too specialized for use in other publications. Often, the newsletter provides the only regular communication between a company and its customers. Yet, little research has been done on this medium.

This study provides a basis for understanding the role of agricultural public relations newsletters as mar-

keting communications tools. Its specific emphasis is upon artificial insemination newsletters.

The research method involved an extensive written questionnaire directed to the 40 regular members of the National Association of Animal Breeders. This group was selected as the sample because the size was controllable to achieve a 100 percent response and because it represented both cooperatives and private businesses.

The study had five principal objectives:

1. To describe the demography of respondents and organizations involved, and compare the impact of agricultural newsletters between cooperatives and private businesses.

2. To examine each company's newsletter in relation to cost, circulation, supervision, production, format, and readability.

3. To analyze the objective, function, and evaluation standards of newsletters.

4. To describe editor demographics including such areas as title, education, employment characteristics, and approvals.

5. To determine the future plans and uniqueness of each newsletter.

Relative to the first objective, findings showed that demographic differences among respondents were not as evident as were differences between the marketing philosophies of cooperatives and private businesses. This latter difference was apparent in the objectives and functions of newsletters. Co-ops were mainly concerned with the newsletter fulfilling an informational function while private businesses placed more emphasis on selling.

Management guidelines and production costs were found to vary with every publication. With newsletter supervision divided almost equally among public relations, advertising, marketing, and administration, it was evident that whichever department was best geared to supervise the newsletter got the job.

Production costs ranged from 2 to 67 cents a copy, averaging 7 cents, with an average circulation of 21,000 copies. There was wide variation in format. A majority were printed in two-color and 90.4 percent used the

standard 8½ by 11 inch page size. Production guidelines were usually similar: most newsletters were written and laid out by company employees over a two-weeks period, then printed offset by outside professional printers.

Most newsletter editors gained their journalism knowledge through experience, not education. Most were not hired specifically to edit the newsletter, but rather gained that as an added responsibility. Top level executive control was apparent for public relations newsletters, with 61.9 percent of the editors reporting to the general manager or president.

Very few newsletters had written guidelines and only 4.3 percent conducted readership surveys. However, just about all were reviewed at least annually by management and entered in evaluation contests.

Finally, very few newsletters had any expansion plans. And when it came to uniqueness, it was evident that each individual placed different priorities on the newsletter and therefore used different standards.

Findings of this study should help others better understand the information and marketing roles of agricultural newsletters. It includes a comprehensive bibliography.

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Missouri Farm News Service Usage Survey

The Missouri Farm News Service (MFNS) is a weekly clip-sheet distributed to about 1,150 subscribers. It is a cooperative publication of the College of Agriculture and the Extension Division of the University of Missouri-Columbia (UMC). The subject matter is quite broad, but intended to be topical enough that editors will use the information with some immediacy.

In this study, use of MFNS stories by Missouri newspapers was measured through clippings returned by the Missouri Press Association clipping service. The service identified the newspaper carrying the article and reported its circulation. The study covered more than 150 stories sent out by MFNS in 1980.

Energy was one important topic reported on by MFNS, and the subject of more stories than any other.

Energy stories gained significant usage by the newspapers. For example, a 23-inch story, "Fuel from Manure," was used by 56 papers with a combined circulation of 207,006. Length did not appear to be a significant factor in editors' decisions on use of energy stories. Stories of 5, 15, and 7 inches in length were used in 28 papers each.

Most of the energy stories were "positive," describing energy research. There were "negative" stories, also. In one, for example, an agricultural economist predicted the energy crisis could get worse. Clippings of this story were returned from 27 newspapers.

Another subject that gained significant acceptance by editors was sunflower research (often related to energy). For example, a September story on crop testing of sunflower varieties was used by 56 newspapers. Another, reporting on sunflower seed oil's potential as an alternative to diesel fuel, was used by 28 papers.

The study also showed that MFNS stories on the 1980 drought gained wide usage. One story reported on the drought-related danger to livestock from forage nitrate poisoning. It was carried by 39 papers with a combined circulation of 170,226. Other stories gaining significant usage covered such things as the critically low forage supply resulting from the drought and the dangers of overgrazing cattle on pastures affected by the drought.

Two other examples of topics that proved popular with editors were safety and the family farm. One story warning farmers of the need for tractor rollbars or cabs appeared in 47 newspapers. Another, on the dangers of careless handling of pesticides, was carried by 30 papers.

Success of stories on the family farm was illustrated by an article on census figures indicating that the family farm remains strong in Missouri. It was used by 41 newspapers with a combined circulation of almost a quarter-million. A story on urban sprawl encroachment on family farms gained clippings from 39 papers with more than 100,000 circulation. Twenty-six papers used a story about an Extension program aimed at keeping farms in the family.

Trend stories are different from the hard agricultural

news typically reported by MFNS. Trend stories also proved highly successful, however. One such story reported on a rural crime study done by several UMC academic units. It was printed in 61 newspapers with a combined circulation of almost 179,000.

A majority of the clippings received were from small weekly newspapers. Larger papers, including big-city dailies, also were shown to use MFNS material directly or to rewrite it to suit their needs.

In summary, the study showed publication of MFNS stories in 1980 in Missouri newspapers with a total combined circulation of more than eight million, counting all issues represented. MFNS subscribers outside Missouri were not covered by the study.

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