

# Three Studies: Use of Family Living News

Terence L. Day

No question is more pervasive among news communications professionals in the agriculture information offices of the nation's land-grant universities than this: Are information office programs in harmony with the needs of the various print and electronic media? Are we giving editors and news directors what they want? Are they using what we are giving them? How? What can we do to improve our product? Our delivery system?

Three recent surveys sought answers to such questions about newspaper use of family living news in Florida, Indiana and North Carolina. **ACE Quarterly** reports them in this issue.

First, Judith A. Sorton's "A Study of the Use of Family Living News Releases by Indiana Newspapers" tested use of family living news stories. It also tested the potential for reducing delivery costs by distributing news releases to newspapers through county agents who will receive them electronically, by computer. The study provides important information on audience perceptions of editors and the type of newspapers most likely to use family living news. Daily newspapers were more receptive than weeklies.

The second article, by Julie Bender, reports a "Special Interest News Packet Survey." It measured the effectiveness of food preservation news in weekly home economics news packets in North Carolina. Bender found that large dailies preferred stories with a consumer angle while smaller circulation papers preferred stories containing recipes.

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Terence Day, Western Region associate editor, was responsible for pulling together these three study reports.

The third piece, by Ludwig, Kendall and Pierce in Florida measured editors' preferences for home and family news, as distinct from agricultural news. They found that Florida newspaper editors want home and family news that focuses on *both men and women* and that deals with the concerns of average citizens. An important aspect of this study was a comparison of editors' and county agents' preferences. There were major differences. For instance, agents wanted most to get more information about nutrition topics. Editors ranked nutrition eighth. This, of course, raises questions about whether communicators should base news programs on agents' requests.

# In Indiana

## Use of Family Living News

Judith A. Sorton

### The Problem

During 1977, approximately 163 Family Living News (FLN) stories were released by the Agricultural Information Department at Purdue University. They were sent to all Indiana home economics Extension agents, to Indiana news and other media, and upon request to agents and media in other states.

The cost of producing and distributing these releases has more than doubled in the past five years. During 1977, postage increased from 10 to 13 then to 15 cents. Postage exceeds \$3,500 per year for the family living packets.

Rising costs have stimulated interest in the use of the news release. Does use justify the expense of producing them? Can acceptance of the releases be improved?

To answer these questions we measured the way the news releases were used by a broad sampling of media over a period of time.

### Method

Traditional surveys of news releases have relied heavily on questionnaires and on commercial clipping services. Both types of surveys were examined and discarded for purposes of this study. Questionnaires were not used because the response rate is low, the sample is limited to opinion or perceived behavior rather than observable behavior, and information is difficult to gather. Clipping services record use of material by newspapers but do not gather incidental information about placement. Also, in-depth analysis requires length evaluation, hand coding for a computer analysis and, often, reading the entire clipping to gather information. Be-

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Judith Sorton is publications and family living news information specialist at Purdue University. Write her for more information on the computer mechanics involved in this project.

cause of the limitations of traditional surveys a different method was designed.

Resources for a study were a statewide network of agents who could monitor behavior of local newspapers and our access to computer and programming services. Limitations were money and state office staffing.

Three types of information were needed: (1) Information about the newspaper and the intended audience(s) was needed, including information about the circulation of the newspaper, its distribution schedule, and the demographics of its audience(s). (2) Information about placement and use was needed on each family living release. Answers were needed for such questions as: Was the article placed by the Agricultural Information Office or by the agent? Was the article used as submitted or was it altered? Did the article attribute the agent's name or that of the state specialist? How long did it take for the article to be published? (3) Information was needed related to the article and the specialist who was responsible for its content.

A three-month sample of the newspapers' use of the release was made in February, March, and April.

Information was recorded on three decks of computer cards: a set of newspaper cards, one card for each newspaper published in Indiana; a set of cards for each article written during the three-month period; and one article card per article per newspaper in Indiana. Each newspaper received a code number and each article card for that newspaper carried that code and a code number for the article it represented.

The endorsement of Extension area administrators was obtained and cooperation of home economics agents was solicited during district meetings in January and early February. Cards were collected during the first and second weeks in June, 1978.

## Results

One hundred seventy-one decks were recovered and processed. No information was processed from 49 newspapers.

Circulation of newspapers using the family living news (FLN) articles ranged from 640 (**Cynthiana Argus**) to 111,039 (**South Bend Tribune**). Impressions of each article (total circulation of newspapers using the articles) ranged from 68,858 to 482,097. An accepted number of readers per impression is 2.5; therefore, an estimated 172,146 to 1,205,243 readers were exposed to each article. Because 26 percent of

the cards were not turned in, the total number of Indiana people exposed to each release must be estimated - 86,761 to 607,442 impressions and 216,903 to 1,518,605 readers.

The recorded newspapers made 10,761,712 impressions of FLN releases during the survey. These newspapers reached an estimated 24,441,780 readers. On a yearly basis, these reader exposures approximate 86,502,052. (State population during 1978 was 5,329,300 with 1,831,470 households and a farm population of 364,400.)

If the 26 percent of Indiana newspapers not recorded in the survey are taken into account, an estimated 1,089,586 readers are exposed to FLN releases each year - approximately 200 exposures per Indiana resident per year. The total circulation of newspapers using the FLN was 1,032,163.

However, remember that exposure to an article does not necessarily mean the article was read nor that its information was acted upon. Also, the reader may have been exposed to the same article more than once.

Of the newspapers receiving the FLN releases, 104 used at least one of the releases while 67 did not use any. The majority of the dailies used at least one release—44 used at least one release while 9 used none. Weeklies were almost evenly divided with 58 using releases while 52 did not.

When comparing the delivery systems (supplied by the agent or supplied by Agricultural Information), differences in use were small. Of dailies supplied by Agricultural Information, 36 used at least one release while 8 did not. Of dailies supplied by the agent, 8 used the release while only one did not.

Weekly delivery systems showed a similar pattern. Of weeklies supplied by Agricultural Information, 43 used the releases and 41 did not. Of weeklies supplied by the agents, 15 used the releases while 11 did not.

The largest group of newspaper readership is in the 36-54 age group, which is also the largest age group in the Indiana population. However, only 8 percent of the newspapers using FLN releases and 5 percent not using them try to appeal to the 26-35 age group, the second largest age group in the state. Based on this information, FLN stories aimed at established families and pre-retirement people would have the best chances of success.

Nearly 70 percent of the news releases were used within 14 days after release. Of course, this number does not make allowance for news releases that were received too late to

use, were filed for future reference, or were thrown away. The largest group that eventually used the releases used them within 10 days. This suggests the influence of the daily newspapers that want to use the material "First or not at all." It also suggests that weeklies may use the material the first week it is received or not at all.

Four articles were circulated on each subject area specialty—for each of the specialists working in that subject. Consequently, a bias toward subject matter areas may be indicated by the number of specialists working it. For example, four articles were written for the food and nutrition and for the expanded food and nutrition program. That program is served by three specialists. So 12 articles were circulated on food and nutrition subjects.

The subject matter bias is not sustained by the specialty of the agent placing the articles. For instance, human development agents placed 24 percent of the articles but had only 2 specialists. At the same time EFNEP agents placed only 2 articles - too few to be reflected in percentages. This small placement by some types of agents is probably a reflection of the priorities and location of the agent. EFNEP, for instance, is aimed at low-income audiences and the newspapers are aimed at middle income. So a newspaper column or article would not have high priority for most EFNEP agents.

### **Recommendations**

Since the county Fast Agricultural Computer Terminal System (FACTS\*) is connected and can be contracted by Purdue terminals, we designed news releases specifically for the agents' use, delivered via FACTS.\* These releases should be:

1. Short - one page or less
2. Capable of being localized
3. Without specialist's name
4. Aimed at weekly newspapers and rural or combination rural/urban audiences.

Structure of releases, mailed from Agricultural Information for daily newspapers, should:

1. Be relatively long - two or more pages
2. Include clip art when feasible

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**\*FACTS can electronically transmit information to all 92 of its county Extension offices. Each county will be equipped with receiving units that include printers.**

3. Include specialist's name
4. Be aimed at daily newspapers with an urban or urban/rural audience.
5. Be timely.

Despite strong interest in the consumer movement, traditional women's page subjects such as food and clothing seem to have more appeal. So the management and home improvement articles are more often identified with farm or general interest pages.

In general, the use of the releases declined as summer approached. The decline could be attributed to waning interest of the newspaper watcher (agent or homemaker), to the reduced news hole due to weddings and graduation, or to other, less obvious factors. Topical subjects that had strong, immediate relationship to problems of general interest received the most widespread play. The number of newspapers using a particular article was not related to the size of circulation of those newspapers.

### **Conclusions**

Results showed weeklies to be the largest single group not using family living news. These papers average under 7,500 circulation. Many request information with a strong local angle, which the agent is best able to supply.

Newspapers listed their target audiences as either general urban, general rural or both urban and rural. Of the newspapers not using FLN, those with a target audience of both urban and rural were the largest group. Those newspapers with either a total urban or a total rural audience tended to use more family living news. Of the newspapers using the FLN only 2 percent have a general urban orientation as compared to 13 percent of the newspapers, not using the service.

With 26 percent of the articles appearing in the agents' columns and an additional 24 percent appearing under the agent's name, 50 percent of the releases could be sent directly to agents for placement. This could be done through FACTS at a greatly reduced cost. Apparently short items also are needed for agents' columns. These also could be delivered through the FACTS system.

Though many newspapers view their audiences as both urban and rural, a large percentage try to appeal to rural only. FLN often is seen as farm-wife oriented, yet 63 percent of the newspapers not using it are trying to appeal to both urban and rural audiences.

Agents could receive releases by either direct mail or through a printout from the FACTS system. But we urged that the direct mail releases only be sent to those agents with strong working relationships with local dailies. Contacting the rest of the dailies by direct mail may allow the information office to establish better rapport between the dailies and Purdue. (Plans call for supplying dailies with news releases "sent" directly from Purdue's computers to theirs.)

All agents would receive the same releases through FACTS. These would be short and easily localized so agents can better work with Indiana's weeklies.

**TABLE 1: Family Living News Survey Tabulations****Newspapers using FLN**

Daily		
Supplied by Ag Info*		36
Supplied by Agent		<u>8</u>
		44
Weekly		
Supplied by Ag Info		43
Supplied by Agent		<u>15</u>
		58
Monthly		
Supplied by Agent		<u>2</u>
	Total	104
Circulation of newspapers using FLN		
Supplied by Ag Info		845,486
Supplied by Agent		<u>186,677</u>
	Total	1,032,163
Possible impressions		
(total circulation x number of articles)		49,542,824
Recorded impressions		10,176,712

**Newspapers not using FLN**

Daily		
Supplied by Ag Info		8
Supplied by Agent		<u>1</u>
		9
Weekly		
Supplied by Ag Info		41
Supplied by Agent		<u>11</u>
		52
Semi-weekly or monthly		
Supplied by Ag Info		4
Supplied by Agent		<u>2</u>
		6
Newspapers recorded in the survey	171	74%
No information received**	<u>59</u>	<u>26%</u>
Total	230	100%

\*Primary supplier - if Ag Info mails directly to the newspaper Ag Info is assumed to be primary supplier.

\*\*Nineteen newspapers in one county not reported (all but one supplied by agent); ten by other agents in counties without home economics agents; and five by agents who left during or after study.

**TABLE 2. Article Information\***

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Article placed by	Ag Information	61%
	Agent	34%
	Both	6%
Under whose name	Specialist	47%
	Agent without change	12%
	Agent with changes	12%
	Agent column	26%
	Newspaper reporter	5%
Agent placing the articles		
	Food & Nutrition/EFNEP	21%
	Clothing & Textiles	19%
	Housing	7%
	Consumer Marketing & Family Resources	17%
	Restaurant, Hotel & Institutional Management	1%
	Human Development	24%
	Other (youth, agricultural, etc., agents in counties with no home ec specialists or combined specialists)	11%
Time from release to publication		
	5 days or less	14%
	6-10 days	38%
	11-14 days	16%
	15-21 days	16%
	3 weeks or more	17%

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\*Raw data indicate that articles appeared in both agents' name and/or column and under either newspaper reporter or specialists' name 14 times.

**TABLE 3. Comparison of Newspapers Using Family Living News To Those Not Using It\***

	Not Using	Using
Dailies	13.5%	40%
Weeklies	76.5%	47%
Monthlies	4.5%	2%
Bi-Weeklies	4.5%	7%
No Answer	1.0%	6%
<b>Circulation</b>		
500 or less	--	1%
501-1500	21%	13%
1501-2500	13%	10%
2501-5000	13%	18%
5001-7500	16%	17%
7501-10,500	9%	9%
10,501-15,000	5%	13%
15,001-20,000	12%	9%
20,001-35,000	5%	4%
35,001-50,000	2%	2%
50,001-100,000	5%	4%
100,001 or more	3%	
	34%	24%
	29%	35%
	14%	22%
	17%	13%
	10%	6%
<b>Distribution</b>		
Home delivery	13%	10%
News stand only	3%	--
Home and news stand	52%	78%
Free delivery	21%	9%
No answer	11%	4%
<b>Target Audiences</b>		
General urban	13%	2%
Urban/rural	43%	63%
General rural	33%	30%
No answer	12%	5%

(Indiana farm population 364,400)

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**Table 3. Continued**

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<b>Median Income</b>	<b>Not Using</b>	<b>Using</b>
Less than \$6,000	--	2%
\$8,001-10,000	13%	10%
\$10,001-13,000	36%	24%
\$13,001-16,000	16%	26%
\$16,001 up	8%	8%

(Indiana median income \$15,315)

**Age of readership**

Under 25	--	--
26-35	8%	5%
36-54	70%	71%
55-64	2%	5%
Over 65	--	--
No answer	20%	17%

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\*Note: Percentages do not total 100% because of rounding factor.

## In North Carolina

# Use of Family Living News

Julie Bender

During the summer of 1978 I substituted four packets on home food preservation for four of my weekly general home economics news packets. Each of the substitute packets was on a different subject: canning, freezing, pickling and drying. Each contained two to three times as much material as in a regular packet, and the packets were mailed out at two-week intervals.

My purpose for this change was fourfold:

1. To tap into the current interest in home food preservation, using the knowledge and resources of our food specialists. I hoped that this would lead to increased newspaper usage of all home economics news stories.

2. To compare the newspaper usage of the special interest packets to those containing varied subject matter.

3. To find out if there is a difference between the kinds of stories weekly and daily newspapers choose to print.

4. To determine what kind of food preservation stories are most popular—those with facts only, those with facts and recipes, or those containing a large proportion of recipes.

Clippings of news stories based on these packets were obtained from a clipping service and were sorted in November. A list was made of all the daily and weekly newspapers in North Carolina that used these stories. The number of stories used by each paper and the total number of column inches printed by each were recorded. I also made a list of the stories in each packet, their lengths and the number of times each was printed in a newspaper.

The larger dailies preferred stories with a consumer angle (such as how to save money through home canning) or with a safety angle (how to properly can to prevent botulism). The smaller circulation papers preferred stories containing recipes, though many will print all types of stories.

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**Julie Bender is Extension Home Economics editor at North Carolina State University.**

Results are summarized below:

- Total number of North Carolina newspapers printing from 1 to 26 stories: 94 (79 weeklies and 15 dailies).
- Total number of stories in all newspapers: 508.
- Total number of column inches: 4,257.
- Cost to buy advertising space for equivalent number of column inches in all newspapers: \$6,500.
- Number of people possibly reached by at least one story: 674,311.
- Number of possible people contacts through all stories (number of stories multiplied by the circulation rate of newspaper): 3,116,984.

In Florida

# Use of Family Living News

**Cynthia J. Ludwig, Robert Kendall,  
and JoAnn B. Pierce**

Previous studies by staff members of the Editorial Department of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) have analyzed editors' news preferences for general as well as specific news categories. However, few have studied the editors' preferences regarding home and family news. The few studies that have been done have considered home and family news as a type of agricultural news. Yet there is no evidence that editors express the same preferences for both types of news.

In 1975, Ruffner surveyed Florida newspaper editors to determine their preferences for agricultural news and found that 61 percent wanted more home and family news stories. In 1977, Root questioned Florida newspaper editors in more detail to determine how editors select and use agricultural news. He found that 52 percent of the editors desired more home and family news. A majority of editors in both studies indicated they preferred more home and family news over any other type of agriculturally related news except youth topics.

With such a ready market, in July 1977, the IFAS Editorial Department instituted a program of producing a monthly home and family news packet. It is sent to county extension home economics agents to be used to support their communication programs. Before establishing this program, the department had no organized method of getting family and

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consumer oriented information to state newspapers or county agents.

A year after the inauguration of this program, this study was begun. The objectives of the study were twofold: (1) to measure Florida newspaper editors' preferences for home and family news as a special category of news quite separate from agricultural news; and (2) to measure Florida extension agents' evaluation of the home and family news packet produced by the IFAS Editorial Department.

More than 220 Florida newspaper editors were surveyed—49 daily general-readership newspapers and 173 weeklies—so were 57 county extension home economics agents. A mail questionnaire method was used for both populations. To increase the response rate, the newspaper editors who did not respond received a follow-up questionnaire and a new cover letter. A follow-up telephone call was used to increase the response rate from agents.

More than 60 percent of the editors responded and 82 percent of the agents. Of the editors responding to the survey, 29 percent represented daily newspapers and 71 percent represented weekly newspapers.

## FINDINGS

### Editor Survey

Over 75 percent of the newspapers in the state are regular users of home and family news. Dailies use more home and family news than weekly papers do. Papers with a circulation of over 50,000 use more such stories than do the smaller papers.

Nearly three fourths of the weekly editors ranked the county extension agent as one of the top three providers of home and family information. Nearly one third of the daily editors ranked agents that way. Other highly ranked sources included feature services, the papers' staffs, local individuals and wire services.

Sixty-nine percent of all editors said they preferred to have either face-to-face or telephone contact with home and family news sources. Daily editors preferred telephone contact, while weekly editors preferred face-to-face contact.

Dailies most often place home and family news with "food pages" and in the "features section." The most popular placement by weekly editors is "where space permits."

That indicates home and family news must compete for space with news from all of the editors' sources, including information unrelated to home and family.

Papers with a staff specialist who covers home and family news were predominantly dailies. Feature editors, lifestyle editors and family editors are most often responsible for home and family news on dailies. Editors and news editors are most often responsible on weeklies.

Daily editors would like to receive more stories about consumer and family finance and management topics. Weekly editors would like more advance event, family finance and management, public affairs and consumer affairs. Overall, food marketing and clothing and fashion were the least popular story types.

The editors desire more localized stories which have more impact on their readers. Editors also wanted more human interest stories. Most of the editors agreed that what they receive is readable and timely—although a sizable number thought both qualities could be improved.

News releases should not be sent to editors with the expectation that they will be saved for background information. Over one third of the editors said they seldom or never save such releases. An additional 44.3 percent only sometimes save releases.

Almost all of the editors said that they would not use home and family news releases without at least making minimal style changes.

Weekly editors would like to receive shorter news stories. Slightly over half of the weeklies would like more home and family news fillers and 58.8 percent would like more news that is kept to five column inches in length. Approximately 40 percent of the daily editors would also like such short material.

There are distinct story length preferences based on general category types. Local news is given more space than general news. In both local and general categories, feature material is given more space than news. Dailies will allow more space for material than weeklies. Local news or features should be more than five column inches long. General news or features should be kept under 10 column inches in length.

More than 62 percent of the editors wanted more picture and outline combinations that could stand by themselves without an accompanying story. Dailies preferred 8" x 10" pictures, while weeklies preferred 5" x 7" pictures.

## Extension Agent Survey

Results suggest that extension agents use the newspaper medium extensively for disseminating home and family material to the general public of Florida. More than one of every five agents send an average of two home and family news packet articles per week to their newspapers for publication. Approximately 36 percent of the agents send an average of one news packet article per week to newspapers. In addition, roughly seven out of eight agents supplement the news packet by submitting articles they have written themselves.

According to agents, most of the articles in the news packets are published. Approximately 62 percent of the agents said they use some of the packet material in their own regular newspaper columns.

The data obtained in this study suggest agents' practices are congruent with editors' preferences. Editors desired stories with a local angle more than any other quality. An overwhelming 94 percent of the agents said they localize the articles in news packets before using them. Roughly one fourth of the agents simply supply such local information as their names and counties in the blanks provided. However, nearly three fourths either partially rewrite or completely rewrite articles to insert local information.

Over 95 percent of the agents indicated they usually have either face-to-face or telephone contact with editors. This compared favorably with editors' preferences since over two thirds of the editors preferred one of these two types of source contact.

Both editors and agents seemed to want more information about consumer topics than any other topic. Specifically, they wanted more family finance and management topics. Food marketing was mentioned most often by both sets of respondents as the topics they would **not** use.

There were also major differences in editors' and agents' preferences. Agents ranked nutrition topics first along with consumer topics, saying they wanted to receive more nutrition information. But editors ranked nutrition eighth while personal relationships and child rearing were ranked high by editors and low by agents.

Nearly 40 percent of the agents wanted more news fillers compared with 49 percent of the editors. But more significantly, almost all editors indicated a desire for photographs while less than half of the agents said they wanted more.

Results showed that agents use of the news packet releases in several other ways. Approximately 89 percent of the agents use the releases in extension newsletters; 38 percent use them in radio programs; 17 percent in "other" ways such as special interest programs; and 8.5 percent use the releases in television programs. More than one third of the agents said some of the releases would be more useful in a radio or television script format.

Agent use of the news packet articles is high. Almost half of the agents use seven or more articles out of an average of 17 articles included in the packet each month. Approximately 44 percent of the agents use four to six articles. None of the agents said they did not use any of the articles. Since approximately 23 percent of the agents use 10 or more of the packet's articles each month, we concluded that the present packet size, averaging 17 articles, is not too large. In addition, 94 percent of the agents said they file the unused packet articles for future use or reference.

Over 90 percent of the agents said the news packet supports their educational and communications programs in the following ways: (1) It keeps them updated on current information; (2) It provides ideas and background information for programming; (3) It provides timely information that can be easily adapted to a variety of uses; (4) It provides publicity for extension's education purpose and programs; and (5) It gives the general public an incentive to seek more information from county agents.

## IMPLICATIONS

Traditionally, home and family news has been considered a woman's area. But the results of this study suggest that Florida newspaper editors desire home and family news topics that focus on both men and women and deal with the concerns of average citizens.

Editors desired fewer "traditional" women's topics such as clothing and fashion, food preparation and home care and furnishings. Editors wanted more topics that focus on "lifestyles" such as consumer, family finance and management, personal relationships, child rearing, and family health and safety.

This implication was additionally supported by the respondents' job titles. Over 62 percent of daily newspaper respondents hold the title of lifestyle editor, feature editor, or

family editor. Women's editors accounted for less than 8 percent.

This fact suggests that communicators of home and family news should send editors "lifestyle" topics to obtain more successful placement. However, if communicators cannot be selective in the choice of topics, it is possible to write about a "traditional" topic from such an angle that it becomes a "lifestyle" topic.

Although daily newspapers use more home and family news than weekly newspapers, weeklies are an extremely important channel for transmitting messages. The study showed major differences in the needs and editors' preferences of dailies and weeklies. This fact suggests that home and family news communicators should consider dailies and weeklies separately when planning the format and content of news.