

# *Research Press*

Discussion Leader, **BILL CARPENTER, NORTH CAROLINA**

The members of the research press discussion group were primarily concerned with developments in commercial agriculture. Consequently, the areas covered by the speakers were not of equal interest to the members of this group and the three discussion sessions centered mostly on issues raised by the report on the gatekeepers, along with some attention to the papers on opinion/policy leaders and agribusiness people.

The discussions can be summarized in four general areas.

1. **Quality of writing.** The charge by the gatekeepers that college editors are poor writers was a shock to members of the group who consider themselves as professionals. A representative of a USDA agency said he would rate his editorial group slightly above the gatekeepers in professionalism and writing ability. It was admitted that quality may suffer when the editor is required by administrators to report certain activities that may not lend themselves to mass media reporting or may not be newsworthy to start with.

2. **Working with news sources.** One of the greatest problems faced by research writers is the reluctance of many researchers to see their results disseminated through the popular press. There was divergence of opinion on how to best break down this reluctance. Two gatekeepers present indicated a desire to work directly with the researchers, rather than through editors. They suggested that personal contact was needed with researchers to overcome their fears of being quoted and to establish confidence in a particular media outlet.

Another expressed need was to make researchers and administrators aware of the desire for research stories by the media gatekeepers, by opinion/policy leaders, and by agribusiness representatives.

3. **Reaching specific audiences.** Each speaker emphasized that there are many audiences for research reporting. The discussion group participants were aware of the vast number of specialized audiences for whom we might write, along with the mechanical and other problems faced when trying to service these audiences.

One editor suggested the practice of mailing subject matter stories to appropriate commodity groups while news about people would go to limited and specialized media outlets. Another suggestion was to mail to county groups according to farming interest concerned, with regional and national media getting all stories. One editor expressed the belief that the dailies get our best research stories while the weeklies suffer because they get poorer quality stories.

A number of special approaches are being tried, such as efforts to get research reports on major news pages, working through business editors of newspapers to replace disappearing farm editors, and channeling publicity type stories through university-wide news offices. It was stated that some singling out of opinion/policy leaders could be done, such as state legislators.

The group moved somewhat into the publications area in discussing research periodicals. There was detailed discussion on the new procedure in Michigan where specialized reports have replaced the periodical. The future of the research periodical is questionable.

4. **Getting the job done.** The overwhelming desire for more research stories expressed by the gatekeepers indicated a shortage of editors assigned to research reporting in state offices. There is evidence of a trend whereby the media are desiring more research findings and less how-to-do-it type recommendations. This trend is likely to continue, calling for more research writers hired by the experiment stations or extension editors devoting more time to writing reports of research.