

Research Briefs

Includes explanations of practical communication, training media methods, and equipment use (1-2 typed pages). Send briefs to Robert Hays or James F. Evans, Office of Agricultural Communications, College of Agriculture, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL 61801.

Piggybacking Communications Research*

*From a report presented at the ACE annual meeting, July 16, 1980, at the University of California, Berkeley.

In 1977, the Indiana legislature funded the Citizens' Information Program (CIP), designed to provide information enhancing citizen understanding of the food production and marketing system to aid in wise public decisions affecting these activities. An important part of the project was to identify current public thinking and opinions and areas that merited educational efforts, and to test responses to various messages developed for CIP.

Purdue University researchers developed a plan for an extensive statewide survey of both farm and non-farm families, but found it too expensive. As an alternative, they chose to "piggyback" a less ambitious survey onto an existing Department of Agricultural Economics regional research project on "multiple goals and objectives in decision making." Questions for both studies were asked by a single interviewer (a graduate research assistant) and analyzed separately. Respondents' background information was used for both studies.

For the CIP investigation, respondents were asked to tell what they thought were the most important messages or issues that should be presented to help non-farm audiences gain a better understanding of agricul-

tural production and food economics. Each respondent also was asked to read some sample news releases and rate them as to their importance in "telling the agriculture story."

The CIP questionnaire was administered to 89 randomly selected central Indiana farmers during the summer of 1979. The same questionnaire was mailed to 21 randomly selected members of the advisory committee to the dean of agriculture—"leaders" known to be active in farm policy at both the state and national levels.

"Piggybacking" allowed completion of both research projects at a cost of \$10,857, of which only \$2,197 came from the CIP budget. This covered costs of research consultation and development of the questionnaire, as well as travel and other expenses of the research assistant who conducted the interviews and wrote a 61-page report identifying messages and issues farmers thought should be emphasized for non-farmers.

Nearly 90 percent of the respondents said the typical non-farm resident of Indiana needed more information on agriculture. About 50 percent of the respondents felt that Indiana consumers were either "poorly" or "very poorly" informed on farm issues.

Who should inform the general public? The two most frequent answers were "farm organizations" and "Cooperative Extension Service." About 60 percent said the best way to get the farm message to the consumer was by radio or television, with newspapers the second choice.

Finally, respondents identified six issues on which they felt that education efforts were most needed:

1. The relationship between farm product prices and supermarket prices.
2. The necessity of farm exports in the U.S. economy.
3. The size of investments required in farming.
4. The impact of inflation on food processing costs.
5. The reasons for using farm chemicals.
6. The effects of foreign ownership of U.S. farmland.

*Horace S. Tyler
Purdue University*