

## Research in Brief



MASON E. MILLER, editor

### Don't "Second-Guess"— Trust Your Own News Judgment

*Key Finding:* What an agent sees as valuable ag news tends to match what a newspaper editor sees as valuable ag news—even though agents don't expect the editor to see it this way.

Information staffers keep telling Extension field workers they need to get out and "know your newspaper editors." They know that the editor is a "gatekeeper" who decides what does and what doesn't get into his paper.

Information workers advocate this personal contact because: (1) it will help the agent recognize the standards, requirements, and news values of the editor and be able to give the editor what he wants; (2) the agent can "educate" the edi-

tor to recognize agriculture and/or other client groups as an important part of the audience; and (3) the agent may get to know the editor better so he'll accept more news from the agent.

Tichenor, Olien, and Donohue took a look at some of these ideas in a study of 88 pairs of agricultural Extension agents and editors of community newspapers in Minnesota.

### Study in Brief

Editors were asked to: (1) rate agents as news sources based on the articles sent to the paper and (2) rate those articles on their interest for the general audience.

The editors and agents were given two agricultural topics and asked to rate them on how appropriate they would be for the commu-

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nity newspaper. This rating was then used to measure the degree of agreement between agent and editor on the news value of agriculture.

Finally, agents were asked: (1) how they thought the editors would rate the two agricultural topics and (2) how much contact they had had with their editor the previous month.

### Findings

Agents came closer to the editors' news values when they judged the two agricultural topics on their appropriateness for the community newspaper than when they tried to guess how the editor would rate the same topics. Thus, agent and editor seem to have similar "feels" for their agricultural audience and what would be appropriate.

If the editor rated the agent's articles as high in audience appeal, he also tended to rate the agent as a good news source. But the amount of space the editor devoted to agent material depended more on audience appeal. Thus, it seems the editor judges each news piece primarily on the basis of what he thinks his audience will like. He doesn't print a particular article just because it comes from a particular source.

In line with this finding, larger newspapers devoted less space to agricultural news. And, there was more ag news in areas where the agricultural population was greatest.

Contact with editors wasn't associated with the amount of space devoted to agent copy. This was

true even in communities where agents have coffee with the editor.

### Implications for Extension

An agent is using newspapers to modify views and beliefs and inform people, particularly about agriculture. What determines whether he'll succeed?

This study shows that if agriculture is a significant part of the community, the agent will have the best chance of getting agricultural material in the newspaper. Makes sense.

Also, if the agent knows his agricultural audience well, he can usually trust his own judgment about what is an appropriate or inappropriate story for a particular paper. Then, he's more likely to submit an acceptable story than if he tries to "second-guess" what the editor, as gatekeeper of the newspaper's pages, will want.

Thus, it seems the newspaper editor isn't an arbitrary, irrational gatekeeper at all; he's making rational decisions about what does or doesn't go into his paper. Understanding a given editor is still important to an agent. And, it may be—although the study didn't look at this—that the usual advice of information workers for agents to know their editors is more applicable when either the editor or agent is new to his job or area.

Phillip J. Tichenor, Clarice N. Olien, and George A. Donohue. "Predicting a Source's Success in Placing News in the Media." *Journalism Quarterly*, XL (Spring, 1967), 32-42. Prepared

by Winston E. Bain, John G. Elliott,  
and Mason E. Miller.

### **Rural Adult Ed Participants**

People with more education, and younger people, tend to be the ones who participate in adult education programs. This general finding from adult education studies is supported by results of a rural-areas British Columbia study by Goard and Dickinson.

The initial study during the summer of 1967 involved the purposive selection of five widely scattered rural areas in the province. From the 881 household heads interviewed, 126 said they had participated in adult education programs. They were compared with a matched sample of nonparticipants. The researchers first looked at socioeconomic factors.

Participants were generally younger, had a higher level of living and were more active in the organizational life of their communities. They had more formal schooling, their wives had more years of school, their children were more likely to finish high school, and more of them had job training.

More were rural nonfarm, they tended to work in prestigious occupations, and earned more money.

When age and education variables were controlled via the matching of samples, only social participation and occupational prestige remained as significant variables.

The authors suggest that particular emphasis be placed on com-

municating with the older and less educated rural residents—the major audience not now reached. Working through community organizations may not be an effective way to reach them, since they tend not to be active. The authors propose individual or small group methods with programs based on local needs as a possible effective approach.

The study indicates many participants take part in adult education for vocationally-related training. The authors point out that probably the effect of this is to further widen the gap between the educationally advantaged and the educationally disadvantaged. New methods are needed to reach those most in need of this assistance.

All but one of the eight intervening psychological factors examined in the study differentiated between participants and nonparticipants.

Participants more favorably accepted changes in the present job, the place of residence, and changes involving learning. More favorable attitudes toward changes were expressed by the younger respondents. When age and education were controlled, participants were more willing to give up their spare time to further their education. They also were more aware of the need for further education to ensure satisfactory employment in the future.

The authors show that the attitudes of rural residents toward change seem important as to whether they seek adult education learning opportunities. They see

"learning how to learn" as possibly a first step to prepare rural residents for further exposure to basic education and job training.

Dean S. Goard and Gary Dickinson. *The Influence of Education and Age on Participation in Rural Adult Education*. ARDA-Canada Land Inventory Project No. 49009, Special Study No. 2. Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education, 1968.

### Abstracts from ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education<sup>1</sup>

AC 003 093 JI

"MMPI Profiles as a Function of Chronological Age." Fred J. Thumin. *Psychological Reports*, XXII (April, 1968), 479-82.

How do middle-aged workers compare with their younger counterparts as risks for employment? Popular notion is that the older group is relatively defensive, threatened, rigid, subjective in their evaluations, difficult to get along with, and lacking in adaptability and mental alertness. Not so, according to this research among 176 male job applicants given the MMPI and Otis mental ability tests. None of the 13 basic MMPI scales or the Otis scores showed significant differences among subjects divided into mean age groups of 24.8, 31.4, 37.7, and 45.1 years. Groups were relatively well matched in formal education, so that wasn't an important variable.

AC 003 928 I

*Homemaking Information Obtained from Mass Media by*

*Young Homemakers in Spokane, Washington*. Karen W. Bartz. Pullman, Washington: Washington State University, Cooperative Extension Service, 1966.

Four-fifths of these homemakers read a woman's magazine for information on child care, recipes, decorating, and sewing. They obtained information about store specials, recipes, and food preparation from a daily newspaper. Two-fifths watched television during children's naptime (1 to 3 p.m.) and remembered programs about food. Most had the radio on during the day and remembered spot broadcasts on food. They were likely to ask friends, relatives, or neighbors for needed information. They had learned about some products from advertising and television.

AC 002 184 E ED 017 867

*Low Income Family, Training Needs of Home Demonstration Extension Agents*. Opal H. Mann. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 1964. MF \$.50, HC \$2.25.

To help them work with eastern Kentucky (Appalachia) families, these agents wanted information on the community participation patterns, value systems, family resources and living standards, habits, abilities, worries and concerns, and nature of the community in which low-income people live. They felt they should be helping low-income families budget time, effort, and re-

sources to meet minimum standards in food, clothing, and shelter. Responses of experienced agents didn't differ significantly from those of agents with little experience. General characteristics of these families included lack of participation in school and community activities, inadequate food and housing, and minimal education.

AC 002 889 E ED 024 866  
*Adult Education Activities of Florida's Businesses and Industries, Present Scope and Anticipated Changes.* Wayne L. Schroeder and Dunnovan L. Sapienza. Tallahassee, Florida: Florida State University, School of Education, 1968. MF \$.50, HC \$3.20.

Study of Florida companies employing at least 200 people. Training programs were conducted in 55 per cent of these companies, with 12 per cent of them expecting to develop such programs within 3 years. Over half had training directors, but these directors were more often prepared in subject matter than in teaching adults. Of those firms doing training, 71 per cent included all employee levels. Attendance was compulsory for 11 per cent and voluntary in 34 per cent, while 45 per cent had a mix. Promotional opportunity and tuition refunds were used to encourage education outside the company, but company programs were free in 79 per cent of the firms.

Chief purposes of programs were to orient new employees, and

to upgrade or retrain old employees, although course content was managerial and supervisory oriented in 77 per cent of the firms. On-the-job training, classes, and conferences were the favorite methods of instruction.

AC 003 978 E

*Evaluation of TV Series "Beginning Sewing" Albany Area.* Martha A. Cheney *et al.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, Cooperative Extension Service, 1969.

Knowledge test covering subject matter of the series was sent to 344 registrants after the series. Only 38 per cent responded. The majority had been notified of the series via newspapers and the Extension newsletter. Almost three-fourths had sewn before. The mean number of programs viewed was 3.7. Few attended supplementary classes.

#### Footnote

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