

TV captures extension farm audience

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Extension professionals are always looking for new ways to disseminate information. They realize that direct contact with audiences is limited; however, the mass media offers an opportunity to reach large numbers of people.

Through the use of television, agents in Northwest Ohio have been able to attract a sizable viewing audience, including many people who'd never attended an Extension meeting.

The effort started in February, 1974, when a committee of Extension agents and the supervisor of the Defiance Extension area met with personnel at station WBGU-TV in Bowling Green. WBGU is a public broadcasting station sponsored by Bowling Green State University. The meeting explored the possibility of cooperation between the station and Extension to develop a program for a rural audience. After studying potential programming, the committee asked the area agronomist to prepare a series of programs on crop production.

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A proposal for 13 half-hour programs to be presented during the winter of 1975 was prepared by the area agronomist and approved by the agricultural agents. Several meetings were held with the station to determine job responsibility. A director was assigned, publicity planned, agreement made on what each party would contribute, and a program name selected. Extension would be responsible for selection of subject matter and the station would help produce it. These planning meetings made

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Extension agents aware that TV is a *viewing* medium and subject matter can be covered quickly with the use of visuals.

Program Content

The series was named "The Crop Game." The area agronomist served as program host and producer and the county agricultural agent was co-producer. The station provided a director and help with publicity, filming, and other technical jobs. The programs were presented live on Tuesday evenings during January, February, and March. In 1976, the series was rebroadcast Wednesdays at noon and used by stations in Athens and Cambridge, Ohio.

Each program consisted of an introduction by the host, a grain market analysis by the state grain marketing specialist, a main topic, and a summary. The introduction included a review of the previous program and a short timely subject. The grain market analysis was phoned to the station weekly by the state specialist. The specialist reviewed the factors affecting the market the past week and explained what to look for in the future.

A state specialist or county agent helped the program host present the main topic. Topics included herbicides, fertility practices, tillage, cultural practices, harvesting, management, and marketing. Short film features produced in 1975 were used on each program. In 1976, filming was done on area farms to supplement topic presentations. A typical program used 2 to 4 minutes of film and about 40 slides.

The programs encouraged viewers to seek additional information from the county agent and featured two agents each week.

Information packets were prepared by the area center and distributed by the county offices. These packets contained bulletins, special publications, and worksheets for the series.

Evaluation Procedures

To evaluate the program, 13 counties were selected for a survey in 1975 and 6 were also used in 1976. The counties included the nine counties in the Defiance area and four counties in other viewing areas.

Two surveys were conducted in 1975. Post cards were mailed to every 15th crop producer listed on the ASCS mailing list. Of 1,502 cards mailed by county agricultural agents, 237 were returned—a 15.7% response. A more complete program evaluation survey was mailed to the 1,334 people who received the information packets—with 374 of the forms returned, for a 28.0% response.

The 1976 evaluation consisted of a random survey of 6 counties in the Defiance area using the post card procedure.

A total of 545 post cards were mailed and 113 were returned, a 20.7% response.

The survey forms were mailed within a week of the last program in the series each year.

Audience

The random surveys indicated that 34.3% (7,723 crop producers) of those who returned the surveys watched "The Crop Game." This estimate included only crop producers in the 13 counties. It didn't include other interested people in those counties. Nor did it include viewers in 28 other Ohio counties and parts of Indiana and Michigan who received the programs.

The total viewing audience was estimated at 10,000. The number of packets distributed supports this audience estimate. Over 2,000 packets were distributed in 1975 and another 1,500 in 1976. Station personnel said there were usually about five people in the audience for each request for information.

The estimated TV audience compares favorably to the audience at agronomy meetings. Attendance at county agronomy meetings in the Defiance area range from 50 to 400, about a 100 per meeting average. The TV audience averaged 600 crop producers per county or about 6 for each 1 attending meetings. The estimate relates only to number and doesn't compare the effectiveness of TV and group meetings. However, Blackwood and Trent found that a telephone lecture was as effective as a face-to-face lecture when measured by pre- and post-test scores.¹

A question on the number of programs watched was included in both surveys and this information is shown in Table 1. Survey results indicate that the average viewer watched about half the programs. Reasons for not watching was asked on the survey to packet holders. "Not at home" was the reason given by about two-thirds of the respondents. "Forgot" was another reason given. "Not interested" was indicated by only 4.3%.

Table 1. Percentage of Crop Game programs watched.

Number of programs	Percentage watching	
	1975 and 1976 random surveys	1975 survey to packet holders
1-4	35%	38%
5-8	43	34
9-13	21	22
No answer	1	6

Practice Changes

Two survey questions were designed to measure viewer education after seeing "The Crop Game" series. Table 2 shows the response to the question: "Will you change some practices as a result of these programs?" More than 40% said "yes" on both surveys. This question was analyzed by size of farm and number of programs watched on the survey to packet holders. The response to this question was similar for all sizes of farms.

Table 2. Percentage who will change some practices.

	<u>1975 and 1976 random surveys</u>	<u>1975 survey to packet holders</u>
Yes	62%	41%
No	28	44
No answer	10	15

Further analysis showed that the number of programs watched was related to probability of change, with 69% of the people who watched 9 to 13 programs and 28% of those watching 1 to 4 programs planning changes. Forty-six percent of those watching five to eight programs planned to change some practices.

Another question asked was: "Did the programs help you make final decisions on some practices?" A high percentage of the respondents indicated the programs helped them make decisions (see Table 3). The number of programs watched was related to the response to this question. This study agrees with the one by Gauger, who reported that television was an effective way of getting new ideas on corn production to farmers.²

Table 3. Percentage helped to make decisions on some practices.

	<u>1975 and 1976 random surveys</u>	<u>1975 survey to packet holders</u>
Yes	69%	84%
No	25	8
No answer	6	8

Other Results

A high percentage of the respondents said they'd like to see similar programs on crop production over WBGU-TV next year. Ninety-nine percent on the random survey and 90% on the survey to packet holders asked for similar programs the next year.

One result of the survey was the knowledge that many people didn't know about the program. Other comments from those not viewing were "poor reception," "gone for winter," "work," "competition to use TV," and "too early in the evening." Much effort was directed toward publicity, but greater effort to inform people is needed.

The survey to packet holders included several questions about the programs. Seventy-eight percent said they usually understood the information being presented. The packets of literature were helpful to 78% responding; 49% indicated they used the worksheets. Sixty-four percent said 7 p.m. was a good time for the program. Around 50% indicated they'd like to see the program repeated.

Since people watch more commercial than public television, we asked if a break was needed during the topic presentation. Only 15% said "yes." The time allowed for the main topic was 17 to 22 minutes—64% said this was enough time. Merrill reported the viewer lost interest in most farm features after eight minutes.³ A high percentage (over 85%) liked the opening segment and the grain market analysis.

Comments

Many people wrote extra comments on the survey. Many stated it was an excellent program, one of the best things Extension has done. A few indicated they preferred getting information through other methods. Several stated it was a good way to reach more people. Some were critical of the format or guest, and one person said "that it was a waste of taxpayers' money."

One seed corn dealer asked his customers if they watched the programs. He said a high percentage watched and liked them. He also said most of these people never attended an Extension meeting. A landlord said these programs helped him understand the decisions his tenant had to make.

One farmer reported a group in his community got together informally on Wednesday morning to discuss the program. Several farmer organizations watched each program as a group and discussed it. A program outline was provided to the instructor of these groups.

Summary

"The Crop Game" was a successful program. The estimated audience of more than 10,000 justified the effort. There were indications of farming practice changes by over half the viewers and strong support for similar programs next year.

Improvements can be made in "The Crop Game." The depth of teaching needs to be carefully evaluated. Better use

can be made of visuals. And, selecting the most important subject matter is always a challenge.

A program of this nature demands a lot of time. The area agronomist spent 53 days on the 1975 series and 45 days on the 1976 series. Reducing the number of programs wouldn't reduce the time much. The length of the series made it possible to make many improvements from program to program, and allow for word-of-mouth publicity. As the station became more familiar with the program, it was able to offer new ideas on how to present the subject matter.

"The Crop Game" was on the air again in 1977 and 1978.

Footnotes

1. Helen Blackwood and Curtis Trent, *A Comparison of the Effectiveness of Face to Face and Remote Teaching in Communicating Educational Information to Adults* (Manhattan: Kansas State University, Co-operative Extension Service, October, 1968).
2. C. J. Gauger, *Evaluation of Results of the "Corn Production" Television Program in Story County, Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State College, Agricultural Extension, 1953).
3. I. R. Merrill, *"Town and Country" Program Analysis*, Research Report 552M (East Lansing, Michigan: MSU WKAR-TV, 1955).