

idea corner

The Green Thumb

By Fall, 1979, 200 farmers in 2 Kentucky counties will have access to "on-demand," up-to-the-minute information on weather, crop reports, pest alerts, market prices, and more.

The GREEN THUMB project represents a major departure from past dissemination systems. It also represents the potential public service application of what's known as "teletext" systems—examples of which now operate in Britain, Canada, Sweden, and other major nations.

The GREEN THUMB project is a cooperative effort of the USDA, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture and Cooperative Extension

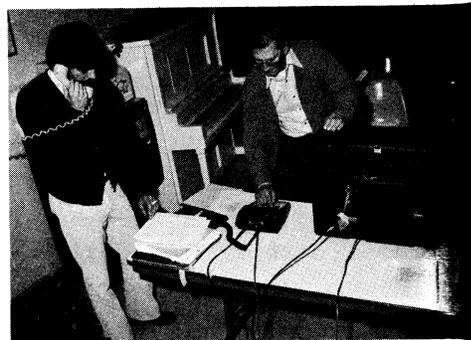
Service, and the National Weather Service (NWS). NWS and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) teletype lines will be connected directly to the UK computer and deliver required weather and marketing data continually as generated.

Agricultural recommendations will be directly entered into the computer by state Extension specialists. The state computer acts as a "post office" sorting the information according to county and providing each *county with information appropriate* to it.

At specified time intervals, the state computer automatically calls county computers located in county agents' offices. The appropriate information is loaded into each county computer and is ready for farmers to access. In addition, the county agent may add a wide range of local information at the county level.

Farmers will obtain the information directly from the county computer. They must use a GREEN THUMB box that is attached to their home television set and telephone.

To access the system, the farmer turns on his receiver and dials the special phone number in the county agent's office. The farmer selects the information he wants from the catalog provided and records his selection by



pushing the correct numbers on his GREEN THUMB box.

The requested information is loaded into the memory of his GREEN THUMB box at high speed and the telephone line's automatically disconnected and made available for another caller. Then information stored in the instrument may be reviewed by the farmer at his leisure on his television screen.

The present project is considered a pre-test of the system which, if successful, will lead to consideration of a 150-county test in about 10 states.

The success of the project will be judged by considering the effects of the system on three areas: informational content and form, impact in the form of behavioral change on the user, and the impact on the institution supporting the system. Initially, we'll concentrate

on determining information needs and format through discussion with farmers, farm leaders, county agents, and subject-matter specialists.

During the course of the project, continual feedback will allow for modifications in the initial system design. Final project impact assessment will be determined via personal exit interviews with all of the 200 farmer-users and professionals within the delivery institution.

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