

Improving Communications to Farmers, Ranchers, and Educators A Literature Review

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Purpose of the study

To improve the capacity of the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) to reach “whole of American agriculture” with messages about sustainable agriculture



Guiding questions

- Who are the different types of producers and educators that make up the key audiences in American agriculture?
- What are the current communications channels used by conventional farmers?
- Are there differences in how sustainable agriculture is presented in different publications?
- Are there common values or messages appropriate for a broad range of producers?



Literature review methodology

- Review of the SAN literature and communication products
- Review of US academic literature in agricultural communications
- Review of key communications materials aimed at conventional and organic producers
- Qualitative analysis of selected texts



Components of Sustainable Agriculture – Finding a Consensus

Profit – Protection – People

- Economic profitability
- Environmental protection through improvement in soil conservation and fertility, reduced water and pesticide use, increase wildlife and plant biodiversity
- Create vibrant farm communities



Identifying Producer and Educator Audiences

- Size of farm or ranch
- Volume of sales
- Crop/Livestock
- Region
- Limited-resource farmers
- Ethnicity
- Women
- Conventional/Sustainable/Organic
- Extension agents and researchers





Reaching Conventional Farmers, Ranchers, and Educators

Communication Channels

- Where do conventional farmers get information?
 - Radio
 - TV
 - Print Media
 - Extension Agents
 - Other face to face exchanges (family, neighbors, agricultural fairs)
 - Computer-based information sources



Print Media

- Remains the most frequent cited provider of information
- Multiple channels exist:
 - Commercial subscription providers, e.g.:
 - *Progressive Farmer*
 - *Farm Journal*
 - *Successful Farming*
 - Commodity-based
 - Input Supply-based



Computer based information transfer

- Ag producer use of computers is increasing and tracks national increases in availability
- Major use of computers for Ag producers remains in record keeping, but use of web and e-commerce rising
- Extension Service increasingly providing subject matter content and engaging minority producers through web based channels
- Subscription, commodity and input supply print media providers offer web-based information



New avenues for computer-based information transfer

- Websites
- Email list serve
- Blogs
- RSS feeds
- Social networking sites



Cooperative Extension Service

- Approximately 3,000 agricultural agents nation wide
- Agents tend to be Land Grant (LG) University graduates and are located in a specific county
- Retain links to the LG Universities and their research results
- Provide producers with face-to-face information as well connecting to LG University based web information



Content analysis of publications for conventional farmers

- Farming as a business -- emphasis on increasing farm income and profitability
- Reliance on science-based recommendations
- “Environmental stewardship”
- Infrequent or no use of the terms “sustainable agriculture”



Thank you

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