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 nationwide
- 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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