

## Charging for Agricultural Publications

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## Charging for Agricultural Publications

### Abstract

In an effort to determine policy and experience regarding cost-recovery for Cooperative Extension and experiment station publications, the University of California Agricultural Sciences Publications office surveyed other publications offices.

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## Charging for Agricultural Publications

In an effort to determine policy and experience regarding cost-recovery for Cooperative Extension and experiment station publications, the University of California Agricultural Sciences Publications office surveyed other publications offices. A questionnaire was sent to the 49 other states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam. Results are based on 44 responses.

Survey results indicated that most states ("states" including the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam for reporting purposes) charge for at least some of their publications. The general result seems to be positive. And although policies about charging—and the number, size, and kinds of publications—vary widely, the trend appears to be a move toward putting a price on publications.

Among those responding, 37 (85 percent) charge for some publications. One other state, not presently charging, said the question was "frequently reviewed."

Obviously, such factors as length and special features like the use of color are of great significance in the cost of an individual publication and the question of whether to charge for it. But with quantity alone as the deciding factor, great variance was found. For example, four states considered anything over two copies "bulk." Six states used 10 copies as the cutoff, three used 100, and one state used 250 copies.

No real pattern emerged in answer to the question,

"If you charge for some publications and not for others, what are your guidelines?" Answers were generally vague, indicating charges where production was costly or where commercial or other special interest groups might benefit.

Regarding the relation of charges to length of publications, responses varied widely. A typical charge of about 25¢ for an eight-page publication was indicated, with a range of 50¢ to \$3 for a 48-page publication. Prices cited for a publication of 50 to 100 pages ranged from \$1 to \$6. One state indicated a clear distinction between prices charged for in-state and out-of-state orders.

Several states mentioned low income of audience as a consideration in deciding whether to charge for specific titles. About half said they use catalogs and flyers to promote their publications. For most states, however, the usual references in newsletters and news releases seem to constitute the main promotional effort. Only two states indicated use of paid advertising.

About 30 percent of those responding said the demand for publications had decreased since they began charging for them. Only four states indicated complaints from the public, with most problems resulting from the collection of money. Most states that charge for publications collect at both state and county offices.

No state reported a reduction in the number of titles as a result of charging for publications, while nine said they produce more. Nine said that charging had broadened the content of their publications, and 14 said charging allowed them to increase quality.

Not all the benefits reported were financial. Speculated one respondent, "Some people may be more apt to read a publication they have paid for than one that's free." From another state: "It establishes the idea that they are 'worth something.'" A third state amplified this theme: "one objective we had was simply to reduce the waste and to try to encourage people (staff and audiences) to realize that publications are an important part of their program resources."

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