

## Reaching Farm Families Through Farm Magazines

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## Reaching Farm Families Through Farm Magazines

### Abstract

If a man offered to tell your land-grant university's story to almost every farm family in your state, once or twice a month, at virtually no cost to you, would you take him up on it?

# Reaching Farm Families Through Farm Magazines

Gary L. Vacin

If a man offered to tell your land-grant university's story to almost every farm family in your state, once or twice a month, at virtually no cost to you, would you take him up on it? You'd bend over backwards to accommodate him.

There is such a person in Kansas, and in most other states where agriculture is big business. He is your state farm magazine editor. He wants, and in fact needs, information from your land-grant university. A lot of his success depends on such information.

In Kansas, that man is George Smith, editor of **Kansas Farmer**. Smith uses information from Kansas State University in every issue. Much of it is written by our Extension editors. Some comes directly from Extension specialists and agricultural experiment station scientists, or from the University information office. **Kansas Farmer** editors gather additional information from our people during field days, conferences, in their offices on campus, and over the telephone. All told, Smith uses more than four full pages of information from KSU in each issue, on the average.

Relationship with **Kansas Farmer** results in a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts. **Kansas Farmer** probably is the best media channel for getting information to Kansas farm families. We believe KSU is one of the most important

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Our Extension editors are in frequent contact with **Kansas Farmer** editors. Hardly a week passes without our seeing them at a meeting or field day or talking to them on the telephone. Often they approach us with requests ranging from a few paragraphs of background for a staff-written article to a feature-length piece to be prepared by one of our writers. Just as frequently, we contact them to discuss items we would like to place in **Kansas Farmer**. That kind of interaction results in stories that are more comprehensive and better suited to Kansas farm families' needs.

We think we have a good thing going with **Kansas Farmer**. Smith agrees. But he is quick to point out that the relationship is a two-way street. He looks on KSU as an excellent source of unbiased information available at little cost to **Kansas Farmer**. He calls the relationship a nice trade-off that benefits both the university and his magazine. Several other farm magazine editors have told me essentially the same thing.

There's nothing particularly different or unique about our relationship with **Kansas Farmer**. It's typical of that between land-grant universities and state farm magazines in many states, particularly in the north central and western states. Many state farm magazines average four or more pages of information an issue from their state's land-grant universities. Several other state farm magazines use two or three pages per issue. Regional magazines like **Progressive Farmer** and **American Agriculturist** use comparable amounts of information from land-grant universities in the southeastern and northeastern states. Many national farm magazines devote a higher percentage of their editorial space to land-grant university information than regional or state farm magazines.

The goals of farm magazines, as stated by their editors, are to provide information to help farmers make a better living, to make farm life more pleasant, and to help farmers do their jobs more effectively. Do those goals sound familiar? Land-grant universities have essentially the same goals. We are trying to reach the same audience with the same types of information.

The relationship between land-grant universities and farm magazines is like that between a wholesale house and a retail store. Land-grant universities are information "wholesalers." They prepare information for dissemination to farm

magazines. **Vacini: Reaching Farm Families Through Farm Magazines** provides information to their readers.

Land-grant universities use many communication channels to reach their various audiences. But farm magazines have several advantages when it comes to reaching the farm audience. Magazines are farmers' trade journals. Nearly all farmers read more than one farm magazine, and most farmers read them thoroughly. For example, more than 98 percent of the farmers in eight north central states responding to a 1977 survey said they read at least one farm magazine. Average number of magazines read was 3.8. More than 68 percent of the farmers who receive state farm magazines indicated they usually read them thoroughly. That compared with 64.6 percent for **Hoard's Dairyman**, 59.4 percent for **Farm Journal**, and 56.7 percent for **Successful Farming**, the most thoroughly read national magazines included in the survey.

Farmers tend to remember information they obtain from farm magazines. Eighty-five percent of what people learn and remember comes through their eyes, 11 percent through their ears, and 3 or 4 percent through taste, touch or smell. So it's a real advantage to provide information in words or picture form if we want farmers to remember it.

Farm magazines provide multiple opportunities for exposure to readers for weeks and months after the magazine arrives in the farm home. A survey of **The Farmer** readers (Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota) showed that 91 percent keep each issue in their homes more than two weeks for reading and referral, 50 percent regularly keep certain articles for future reference, and 63 percent picked up and read the most recent issue at least three times.

Farm magazines are perceived to be a highly credible source of information by both farmers and agricultural scientists. Appearing in farm magazines provides added acceptability for information provided by land-grant university people.

Often overlooked is the strong support farm magazine editors provide for land-grant universities, not only in their editorial pages, but through personal visits with Congressmen and their aides, state legislators, and other local, state, and national government officials. Too often we take for granted editors' service as nonpaid lobbyists on our behalf.

Farm magazines' importance as a channel for communicating land-grant university information is further emphasized by their cost economy. That's been true for years, but

it's particularly important today when you consider what inflation has done to paper and printing costs. To use the wholesaling-retailing idea, land-grant universities wholesale information to farm magazines in news releases, special features, columns, and interviews, bearing only the minor cost of preparing and distributing the information to relatively few magazines. Magazines pay the major "retailing" costs (postage, paper, ink, mailing lists, printing, etc.) of producing and distributing their issues to thousands of readers.

Of course, universities also "retail" information in newsletters, publications, magazines, and other printed material distributed directly to clientele, but at a much higher cost. I did a little pencil pushing to find out how much higher. First, I calculated how much it costs KSU to wholesale information to **Kansas Farmer** for one year. We get about four pages of information in each issue, on the average. So I figured how much it would cost us to get the same coverage each year by "retailing" a four-page newsletter to the 67,000 farmers who receive **Kansas Farmer** 21 times a year (**Kansas Farmer** publishes 21 issues a year). Variable wholesaling costs run about \$344 a year, assuming an average of one mailing a day from Extension Information or the University Information office and 60 mailings a year from Extension specialists or agricultural experiment station scientists.

Paper, and variable printing costs (supplies maintenance, and depreciation) .....	\$11.00
Photographs .....	67.50
Film and processing .....	162.50
Envelopes .....	5.95
Postage .....	57.33
Telephone calls .....	40.16
<b>TOTAL (for the year)</b> .....	<b>\$344.44</b>

Cost of retailing the same information directly to **Kansas Farmer** readers for one year would be \$141,207, or 411 times more than our wholesaling costs. Or we could buy four consecutive pages at advertising rates in all 21 issues published each year for \$142,490. Retailing calculations are shown below:

Paper, and variable printing costs (supplies maintenance, and depreciation) .....	\$694.65
Composition .....	40.00
Photographs and negatives .....	12.00
Film and processing .....	97.50
Postage .....	5,880.00
<b>Per Issue</b> .....	<b>\$6,724.15</b>

Biggest expense -- salaries -- are omitted from both computations, because it would be almost impossible to accurately estimate wholesaling costs for our writers, subject matter specialists, secretarial staff, and duplicating center staff. However, in all likelihood, salaries would favor wholesaling to farm magazines even more.

Let's look at the trade-off from **Kansas Farmer's** point of view. For it, KSU is an inexpensive source of information. George Smith thinks he would need to hire another writer, at a total cost of at least \$33,000 a year, to produce the same volume and quality of copy from KSU that he accepts for publication. Here are his figures:

Salary .....	\$20,000.
Office space .....	1,000.
Travel .....	5,000.
Equipment -- camera, film, typewriter, etc.....	2,000.
Fringe benefits -- insurance, retirement, etc. ....	5,000.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$33,000.</b>

Wholesaling is not without disadvantages. You run the risk of having your information altered, used out of context, or not used at all. Retailing directly to clientele eliminates the middleman or gatekeeper, saves time, and insures that your information will not be changed. However, most farmers likely perceive land-grant university information appearing in a farm magazine to be more acceptable and credible than information received from the university in a newsletter or bulletin.

State, regional, and national farm magazines play slightly different roles as communications links between land-grant universities and farmers in different states. State magazines reach more farmers and carry more information from the university in most north central and western states. State magazines need and can handle a type of news information that is not particularly suited for national and regional publications. There is no way land-grant university people can reach the audience they are hired to serve faster than by having material published in their own state farm magazine. University specialists can multiply their effectiveness thousands of times in this manner.

National magazines are important because they

- Provide an additional channel for getting information to farmers in your state. For example, **Farm Journal** reaches about 87 percent of the commercial farmers in the East, 84 percent in the Midwest, 75 percent in the West, and 65 percent in the South.

- Provide research results to readers in other states, who help support all land-grant universities with their federal tax dollars.
- Reach many farmers specializing in a specific commodity. Virtually all the 3,700 commercial dairy farmers in Kansas subscribe to **Hoard's Dairyman**.
- Reinforce information farmers receive through state and regional farm magazines, newspapers, radio, bulletins, public meetings, and other channels.
- Provide publicity and prestige for land-grant universities and their people.

Regional farm magazines fall somewhere in between. **Progressive Farmer** and **American Agriculturist** take on characteristics of state farm magazines in many southern and northeastern states, where state farm magazines are not published. **Progressive Farmer** has 15 state and sub-state editions. **American Agriculturist** is the state farm magazine in New York, but its New England edition is the most widely circulated farm magazine in seven other northeastern states. **Successful Farming** probably should be classified as a regional, but has a lot in common with general interest farm magazines.

In conclusion, farm magazines — particularly state farm magazines — probably comprise the best public channel for getting land-grant university information to farmers and their families — not only in Kansas, but in many other states. We're fortunate to have two state farm magazines in Kansas — **Kansas Farmer** and **Kansas Farmer-Stockman**, and four weekly farm tabloid newspapers and cover different parts of the state. Even though these publications use a great deal of our material, I believe many Extension and agricultural experiment station people at Kansas State University, and in many other states, have underestimated magazines' teaching potential. Brown and Collins came to the same conclusion in their study of large commercial family farmers' information needs and sources.

In Kansas, we hope to improve our editorial services to farm magazines and to show specialists and scientists how magazines can be an important channel for getting information to the farm audience. Specifically, we plan to tailor more of our material to meet farm magazines' needs, to train specialists to write for farm magazines, and to work more closely with Extension program leaders and



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