Information and Communication Technology Adoption: A Study of Northern Illinois Farmers
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Introduction

Most agricultural land is currently owned by older producers, and according to the Farm LASTS project at the University of Vermont, 70 percent of all farmland will change hands in the next 20 years. As a younger generation of farmers becomes more involved in decision making, and many of the important purchase decisions are usually made by more than one person, agrisuppliers and agit-marketers need to know how the younger decision-makers prefer to receive information (Smithier and Covrig). The 2007 Agriculture Census revealed that older farm operators are less likely to report Internet access (59%) of farmers 65 years and older vs. 68% of farmers under 45 years. Moss suggested that while a conventional audience (older farmers) might prefer to receive information primarily in print and broadcast form, a contemporary audience (younger farmers) is more comfortable with digital media and wants to participate in a social media conversation. According to research conducted by Successful Farming magazine, farmers are quickly adopting smartphone technology (Walter). Farmers can also use the Internet to search for input suppliers and to locate potential buyers for their products (Mishra et al). Walter also indicated that the younger farmers are making greater use of smartphones. They are using these mobile devices to access the Internet on a daily basis as mobile devices are seen as quick and current (Moss and Steever).

Objectives

This study was designed to find answers to the following questions:

- How do NI producers want to receive information from service and input suppliers?
- Do NI producers use social media?
- What work-related functions do NI producers accomplish via information and communication technologies?
- What challenges do NI producers face when it comes to accessing information electronically?
- What effects do size of operation, age and operator education have on adoption of information and communication technologies?

Methodology

A mail survey was used to collect data. The questionnaire included questions about farm and farmer demographics, use of communication technology: preferred sources of information for farm related decisions; types of work related activities farmers do or would like to accomplish via information and communication technologies; and challenges faced when adopting information and communication technologies. A simple random sample of 1,000 farmers was selected from a database provided by 1st Farm Credit Services. A donation to St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital on behalf of each respondent was offered as an incentive to participate. The 1st mailing was sent on April 19th, 2012. The second mailing was sent on June 4th. The data from the 1st mailing was entered into an Excel worksheet and was analyzed using SAS and SPSS.

Results

Out of 1,000 surveys, four were undeliverable; 51 were not completed and returned, and 253 were completed and returned for 25.3% response rate. This poster shows a summary of results from the 1st mailing.

Conclusions

- Use a laptop or cell phone to access internet.
- Sell and trade commodities, look up loan information, and sign papers using computers.
- Use cell phone, smart phone, tablet, twitter, blogs, apps, farm websites, and receive text messages for farm business purposes.
- Use smartphones to look up markets information, crop insurance information & loan information; to sell & trade commodities; receive reminders and updates from input and service providers; read farm magazines & newsletters.

References