Findings of the Food Distribution Research Society Membership Survey

By
Paul Kahn
Vice President, Research

CONCLUSIONS

Returned questionnaires were fairly well-distributed between the academic (21) and non-academic (28) members.

The interests and needs of the two groups frequently differ. Industry members tend to have specific problems that require resolution, whereas the interests of university-affiliated members seem to be broader and more general.

However, despite this membership difference, no major criticism of the Society or its program emerged. The Society appears to fulfill the primary requirements of both segments:

-- the need to keep informed on developments in food distribution, and
-- provide contacts with people of similar interests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. More frequent publication (possibly six issues a year) of newsletter with
-- news items about FDRS members
-- checklist of new and current papers on
   a) food distribution
   b) changes in consumer patterns

2. The FDRS could act as a clearing house or a clinic for problem solution. Many of the members (as seen in the study) have specific problems which require resolution. Other members may be in a similar situation or either have the answer or can provide the direction. These members should be introduced to each other, and this service could easily function as part of the newsletter.

3. Make a concerted effort to increase membership in related food distribution areas by
   a) notifying various trade organizations, publications, etc., of the FDRS and its program
   b) use of outside mailing lists.

4. The research areas which would seem to generate the greatest membership interest are:
   a) changes in consumer patterns of food consumption
   b) warehousing
   c) transportation
   d) how to increase efficiency at all levels of the food distribution cycle.

FINDINGS

HELPFULNESS OF PAST PROGRAMS

Past programs of the Society were considered more helpful by academic members than by industry members.

% who said past program was "very helpful"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Non-Academic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual conferences</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published proceedings</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed paper</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership list and</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contacts with other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among total membership responding, the two most helpful aspects of the past program were the annual conferences and the membership list and contacts with other members.

% who said past program was "very helpful" or "helpful"

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual conferences</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published proceedings</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed papers</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership list and</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contacts with other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HELPFULNESS OF UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Of upcoming activities, the quarterly newsletter with news items about Society members, a checklist of new and current publications and how to get them was
considered 'very helpful' by more members (55%) than any of the other planned programs.

Again, the needs of the academic members generally seem divergent from industry members, and it would appear that the upcoming program appeals more to the university and/or extension people.

In rank order of total members answering:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Non-Academic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| % who said upcoming program would be 'very helpful'

Special sessions at the annual conference or elsewhere on food distribution research techniques

Participation in and distribution of materials from other special conferences/workshops not necessarily sponsored by FDRS

Proceedings of the January conference 'Handling Perishable Foods'

While all members express interest in keeping informed about latest developments in food distribution, industry members do not have the same degree of enthusiasm for conferences and seminars as academic members. Further, industry people tend to exhibit more interest in published data than in personal attendance at meetings.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL SESSIONS

Changes in consumer patterns of food consumption was considered the most important topic for exploration at a special session by an approximately equal number of academic and non-academic members.

In other areas, the dichotomy of interest is very apparent. For example, 25% of the industry members felt warehousing was the most important topic while no school-affiliated member gave a similar response. For 19% of the responding academic members, the consumerism movement was felt to be most important and apparently was not deemed so by industry members.

MOST IMPORTANT TOPIC FOR A SPECIAL SESSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Members Answering</th>
<th>Academic Members</th>
<th>Industry Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes in consumer patterns of food consumption</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warehousing</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism movement</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following subjects were considered most important by two Society members (4%): franchising, convenience foods and their futures, exporting agricultural products, delivering food to retail outlets and one write-in topic, labor-saving potential at retail store level.

No member felt that any of the four following subjects was the most important: food additives and their future, unit pricing, growth of fast food outlets, and food problems of underprivileged.

### Helpfulness of Specific Topics

In terms of the helpfulness of a specific topic, the table below lists the percentage of respondents who judged each category as either "very helpful" or "not helpful".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Very Helpful</th>
<th>Not Helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in consumer patterns of food</td>
<td>37 10</td>
<td>36 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consumption</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warehousing</td>
<td>37 4</td>
<td>39 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>35 29</td>
<td>39 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering food to retail outlets</td>
<td>33 29</td>
<td>36 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>29 29</td>
<td>29 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perishables distribution</td>
<td>27 19</td>
<td>32 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism movement</td>
<td>27 50</td>
<td>4 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franchising</td>
<td>22 33</td>
<td>4 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience foods and their future</td>
<td>22 29</td>
<td>18 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food additives and their future</td>
<td>22 29</td>
<td>18 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food discounting</td>
<td>22 33</td>
<td>4 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth of non-food items in food outlets</td>
<td>18 25</td>
<td>14 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth of fast food outlets</td>
<td>18 29</td>
<td>11 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exporting agricultural products</td>
<td>16 19</td>
<td>14 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food problems of underprivileged</td>
<td>14 25</td>
<td>7 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit pricing</td>
<td>12 10</td>
<td>4 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Journal of Food Distribution Research
January 73/ page 19
Subjects dealing with a specific aspect of food distribution, such as warehousing, transportation, perishables distribution, delivering food to retail outlets, are of greater importance to industry members than to the academic members of the FDRS. Peripheral topics such as consumerism movement, franchising, convenience foods, food additives, food discounting, food problems of the underprivileged, were of more significance to the academic members than to the industry.

As stated earlier, the only suggested topic of equal interest to both groups was changes in consumer patterns of food consumption.

It is interesting to compare rank order of subjects that respondents considered would be very helpful.

### Academic Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>very helpful %</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>very helpful %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. consumerism movement</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1. warehousing</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. changes in consumer patterns of food consumption</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2. transportation</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. warehousing</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2. changes in consumer patterns of food consumption</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. franchising</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2. delivering foods to retail</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. food discounting</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3. perishables distribution</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. transportation</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4. packaging</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. delivering foods to retail outlets</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5. convenience foods future</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. packaging</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5. food additives future</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. convenience foods and their future</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6. growth of non-food items in food outlets</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. food additives and their future</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6. exporting agricultural products</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. growth of fast food outlets</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7. growth of fast food outlets</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. growth of non-food items in food outlets</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8. food problems of underprivileged</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. food problems of underprivileged</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9. food discounting</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. exporting agricultural products</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9. consumerism movement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. perishables distribution</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9. unit pricing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. unit pricing</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9. franchising</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Industry Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>very helpful %</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>very helpful %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. warehousing</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1. transportation</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. changes in consumer patterns of food consumption</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2. delivering foods to retail</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. perishables distribution</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3. packaging</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. packaging</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4. convenience foods future</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. food additives future</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5. food additives future</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. growth of non-food items in food outlets</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6. exporting agricultural products</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. growth of fast food outlets</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7. growth of fast food outlets</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. food problems of underprivileged</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8. food problems of underprivileged</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. food discounting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9. consumerism movement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. unit pricing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9. franchising</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The frequency of finding particular subjects very helpful is also greater among the academic members than among the industry members of the Society.

RESPONDENT JOB RESPONSIBILITY

Of the twenty-eight industry respondents, job responsibility breaks down as follows:

- Research and development: 7
- Marketing: 3
- Industrial engineering: 2
- Systems programming: 2
- Distribution planning: 2
- Quality assurance: 2
- President and Vice President: 6

All other responses were single mentions: food processing, plant design, cost benefit analysis, futurism, packaging consultant, transportation research, food industry consultant, operations analysis.

Twelve of the academic respondents mentioned university extension programs as their job responsibility.

TYPE OF R&D CONDUCTED

Physical distribution, plant or store layout, labor analysis and equipment evaluation were the primary kinds of R&D conducted in member firms. Seven out of ten academic members conducted consumer studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of R&amp;D conducted in organization</th>
<th>Academic Members</th>
<th>Industry Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product market research</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site selection</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer studies</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical engineering</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial engineering</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment evaluation</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor analysis</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant or store layout</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical distribution</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic and transportation</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate new ventures</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records and computer systems</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New techniques</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trends/forecasting</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research is a major product of this organization</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REASONS FOR JOINING THE FDRS

Almost one out of four members said they joined the Society to keep abreast of new developments. The second response mentioned most often was the opportunity to make contacts with people of similar interests. Both motivations were volunteered with about equal frequency by academic and non-academic members.

Exchanging ideas at peer level and a desire for professional growth were a greater inducement for academic members to join the FDRS than for industry people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for joining FDRS</th>
<th>Academic Members</th>
<th>Industry Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep abreast of new developments</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts with people of similar interests</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange of ideas at peer level</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional growth</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My field of work</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduced to FDRS by colleague/friend</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become aware of problems in food industry</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An organization to which I can contribute</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Single responses included "respect for initial members and work done", "pure luck", "interested in food packaging".

PRINCIPAL BENEFIT EXPECTATIONS OF SOCIETY PROGRAM

In general, the benefits members expect to derive from the Society program are the same reasons given for joining. Primarily, the FDRS is perceived as an information center to provide current problem definition and knowledge of new and emerging developments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Expected Benefits</th>
<th>Academic Members</th>
<th>Industry Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of current research/current information/keep informed</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early knowledge of trends/new techniques/awareness of future developments</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make contacts with people of similar interests</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods/techniques (unspecified)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight into and solution of food distribution problems</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published data/research papers</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve extension education/university program</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource data</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General knowledge of food economics</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create interest in transportation industry to become more professional in refrigerated cargo fields</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SPECIFIC PROBLEM AREAS FDRS MIGHT PROVIDE DIRECTION FOR A SOLUTION

In answer to the question, "What specific problems do you now have where the FDRS might be helpful providing either a solution or a direction for a solution?", 39% and 57% of industry and academic membership respectively said there were none.
There were as many specific problems as there were members answering. Only three problem areas were cited by two members:

- would like membership list with credentials
- lack of funds for research
- physical distribution

The range of other problem areas, each with a single response, included:

- marketing of seafood and seafood products
- aid in teaching
- better operational data
- convenience store location research project
- solid waste disposal and environmental conditions
- getting wholesalers and retailers to initiate distribution instead of manufacturers
- distribution center design
- bakery-deli operation
- warehouse site location projects
- food prices as a social rather than economic question
- standardization of package sizes
- cost reduction studies
- open dating
- documented research of palletized handling vs combination cart/pallet handling
- retail labor scheduling
- improved stock rotation in customer warehouses
- food protection through distribution cycles
- help to market R&D ideas designed to increase effectiveness in perishable food distribution

SUGGESTED AREAS FOR FDRS RESEARCH EFFORTS, ANNUAL PROGRAM CONFERENCE, JOURNAL ARTICLES

Suggestions for research efforts, program and journal again were almost as numerous as respondents. Frequently, the suggestions were repeated for all three categories, and there was no problem area in which a sizeable contingent expressed concern. Each respondent appears to have his own problem which he would like resolved.

Only two areas were suggested for research by three members each:

- reducing costs/labor costs/store labor costs
- evaluate changes in life style and food consumption

Mechanized Warehousing areas which promise greatest efficiency for food distribution, packaging and merchandising of meats, and how to reduce marketing costs were topics suggested by two members each.

A selection of the diverse topics that concern individual members is listed below:

- export breakthrough
- quality assurance management techniques
- automatic check-outs
- grower to user distribution
- economics vs the law - a look at the logic of regulation
- internalization of externalities
- economics of 24-hour store opening
- product distribution
- eating out at lunch
- food prices in poor sections of the U.S.
- solid waste disposal
- environmental control
- budgeting and forecasting
- personnel training
- macro-consumerism as regulator vs other regulatory methods
- how food distributor can educate shopper re: open dating, nutritional labeling
- computers
- control systems
- sanitation
- getting wholesalers and retailers to initiate distribution rather than manufacturers
- packaging as it relates to unitizing goods that can be delivered to store in display cases
- physical distribution specializing in pallet exchange problems
- methods of getting food quality - sanitation, refrigeration at all levels

CRITICISM OF SOCIETY’S OPERATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Only one criticism - failure to meet deadlines - was mentioned by four respondents.

Three members each offered the following comments:

- more frequent contact by mail/newsletter
- FDRS is too inbred/isolated
- too oriented toward USDA/government research
- more information on what’s going on
- more involvement at annual meeting by food industry leaders
- need to expand membership

Other criticism or suggestions voiced by one or two members include:

- more financial support
- FDRS has not been a leading industry force
- quality of papers and presentation often marginal
- too much emphasis on academic world
- more interaction at annual meeting
- sponsor research and management workshops
- planning council that could develop problem areas to stimulate research

SUGGESTIONS FOR EXPANDING FDRS MEMBERSHIP

The following suggestions are offered with a view to increasing Society membership and public awareness of FDRS activities.
1. Create an FDRS office whose responsibility would be public relations and information services. It is critical that this function be performed by someone with a degree of expertise in the PR field.

2. Since the creation of such an office would entail expenses (printing, mailings, etc.), an increase of $2.50-$5.00 in annual dues should be effected. The additional monies should be allocated to meet the needs of the promotional activities.

3. a) Each officer and director of the FDRS should submit a list of
--- trade organizations
--- trade publications

   to whom a copy of the FDRS brochure and planned events/programs should be forwarded.

   b) Use of outside applicable mailing lists.

4. Conduct an annual competition for university-level student research on food distribution. The competition could carry a small monetary first prize and two honorary mention awards. The papers could be read by the winners at the annual meeting and printed in the FDRS publication.

REPORT OF THE FOOD DISTRIBUTION RESEARCH SOCIETY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION 1971-72

The Ad Hoc Committee on Education of the FDRS was created as the result of a Special Educational Problems session held at the 1971 FDRS meeting in Phila., Pa. The unusually high attendance (40 plus) at that session pointed out the need for further examination of the problems facing the Academic members of the FDRS. President Dale Anderson appointed the educational committee to examine these problems and report at the 1972 meeting. Dr. John Allen of Michigan State University was appointed Chairman, with Daniel J. McLaughlin of St. Joseph's College to serve as Vice-Chairman. Informal meetings were held during the year with other committee members for budgetary reasons. Dr. Allen concentrated on the West, and Mr. McLaughlin on the East, with joint meetings in Philadelphia and E. Lansing.

The Philadelphia sessions raised several areas that needed study.

a) Improved communications between the academic institutions involved in food distribution. The FDRS Newsletter would appear to be the appropriate vehicle at this time.

b) Student Recruiting - The schools and the FDRS should encourage more young people to select food distribution as a career. Industry and Trade Association support is essential to mount an effective campaign.

c) Industry and Government Support - The schools need more support from both groups; and perhaps should broaden the base of government interest. Conversely the schools should increase their communications with both groups.

d) Examine Existing Programs - The nature, extent and purposes of the existing academic programs should be examined for the good of all members. This project is currently being undertaken by Past President Anderson and will be reported in the FDRS Newsletter.

e) The educational committee should exist as a permanent wing of FDRS.

The Ad Hoc committee makes the following suggestions to the FDRS at this time:

a) Formalize the educational committee within the FDRS structure. This has been done as a result of a change in the FDRS constitution at the 1972 meeting. There is now a permanent Vice President for Education.

b) Create an informal coalition for the food distribution schools under FDRS leadership. This should be a major priority for the newly appointed Vice President for Education.

c) Design a letter of support and encouragement from the FDRS to the executives of the food distribution schools. This would be the responsibility of the new Vice President with the approval of the Board of Directors.

The frustrations of 1971-72 point out the need for and the challenges facing the new educational arm of the FDRS. There are many problems and no easy solutions; but a start has been made.

D.J. McLaughlin
Vice President, Education 1973

Journal of Food Distribution Research  

January 73/ page 23