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INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SERVICES FOR MARKETING:  
AN APPRAISAL IN TERMS OF CONVENIENCE FOR WORK  
IN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

J. C. Abbott<sup>1</sup>

There is no lack of bibliographical services which cover food and agricultural marketing--including marketing in the developing countries. World Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Abstracts (WAERSA), Agricultural Research Information System (AGRIS), and the bibliography issued by the FAO Marketing Service provide the fullest coverage. Other bibliographical services which include marketing in the developing countries are USDA's AGRICOLA and the bibliographical series of the Royal Tropical Institute of the Netherlands. The Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Cooperation and various universities have also issued selected marketing bibliographies. The number of titles held in one or another source is enormous. The issue to which this paper is addressed is how best to serve those practitioners of the subject who do not have access to a well-equipped library or are too busy to check through thousands of titles.

**Origin of Study**

This particular study had two points of departure:

1. A senior FAO official visiting field projects found individual advisers writing to a range of personal contacts for information and waiting a long time for possibly negative replies. They made no use of the various bibliographical services available.
2. Several technical support units in FAO had initiated--in collaboration with professional contacts in various countries--their own specialized bibliographical services. These made references available in various forms convenient to their clients. When AGRIS came into operation in the mid-1970s, the question was raised as to whether the others should continue.

This study deals with three bibliographies:

1. WAERSA, well known to most agricultural economists and sponsored by the IAAE.
2. AGRIS, initiated by FAO as an international cooperative venture in the 1970s. It is served by 70 to 90 national documentation centres plus some international and regional bodies.
3. FAO Marketing Service, started in 1960 to brief field advisers, trainees, and national counterpart personnel.

The first two publish monthly volumes covering a range of subjects, including marketing. The FAO Marketing Service is issued every 3 years. It is compiled by staff in Rome directly from material coming across their desks, and as supplied by correspondents in developing countries and collaborators in universities.

The editorial board of WAERSA includes representatives from France, Japan, the United States, and the USSR, in addition to Commonwealth countries. Each issue amounts to about 50 pages of small print and contains 500 to 700 entries consisting of title, publication data, and an English language abstract of the contents. The number of entries grouped under marketing and distribution ranges from 40 to 70. The bulk relate to publications on marketing in developed countries, including those of Eastern Europe for which WAERSA has become an established source.

AGRIS covers the whole range of agricultural sciences with marketing as one subject area among many. The information provided for each entry includes English language title, author, and details of publication. Keywords are used to indicate major subject features. Material coming into AGRIS is printed out monthly as Agrindex, a bound document which includes sections on marketing and distribution along with some 15 other main subject headings. It averages about 11,000 items per year and is indexed by commodity and author. This series is held in all contributing libraries and in others on request.

### **Comparative Review**

The criteria applied in this appraisal are adequacy of coverage of individual country literature and marketing subject areas, and ease of use. The following comments are based on a comparison of the material included in the AGSM Bibliography supplement for the years 1976-1978, a printout of entries listed under marketing in AGRIS for the developing countries, and the material included in the monthly issues of WAERSA, over the same years.

#### **Country Coverage**

WAERSA provides 460 titles concerned with food and agricultural marketing in the developing countries, 396 related to particular countries, and the balance to developing countries in general. It is very strong in coverage of Commonwealth countries. It is weak on francophone Africa and notably so on Latin America.

AGRIS is good on Latin America, good for the SEARCA group of countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines), reflecting the coordinating role of the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture, and poor on India and Africa as a whole.

FAO Marketing Service provides very good coverage of countries where there are FAO marketing projects. Elsewhere, coverage is variable depending on the nature and interest of the correspondent.

#### **Subject Coverage**

The FAO Marketing Service bibliography uses the following subject subheadings to indicate the main elements of food and agricultural product (and input) marketing in the developing countries. This choice is based on experience of usefulness for advisory purposes; i.e., areas of work in which requests for assistance are received from governments, aid agencies, institutions, and students in training or research. In general, these groupings have stood the test of time. The bibliography has gone through some six or eight issues over a 20-year period without requests for major changes in its classifications by either contributors or users. The classifications are:

0. Marketing theory, research methodology, teaching materials
1. Marketing organization and costs by areas or commodities
2. Transport, packing, and initial processing

3. Storage and management of stocks
4. Grading, standardization, and quality control
5. Information, advisory, and related services
6. Market facilities (assembly, wholesale, and retail)
7. Marketing enterprises and management
8. Cooperative and other voluntary group marketing
9. Government participation in, and regulation of, marketing

No distinction is made between printed books, articles in periodicals, mimeographed reports, or official documents so long as copies can be made available on request. The basic criterion is the usefulness of a publication to marketing advisers and students. Titles originally in other languages are translated into English. However, this coverage is limited to publications in western European languages. Material in other languages is included only if the document has a summary in a western European language.

Regarding the nature and quality of material included, the WAERSA listings reflect application of much the same criteria as FAO. The main difference is in the headings used. Thus to achieve the same coverage of marketing material as provided in the FAO listing, the WAERSA user would have to go to the section on inputs for fertilizer distribution, to the section on supply, demand and prices for some material providing specific guidance on marketing opportunities and trends, and to a separate section on cooperatives and collectives.

What would be the expected core of the subject of marketing and distribution is, in most of the issues examined, a rather small section almost entirely made up of developed country material. There are separate sections on statutory marketing institutions, vertical integration, wholesaling, and retailing, again almost entirely made up of entries from the developed world.

If there is a difference between WAERSA and FAO in nature of material listed, it would be that less material is included in WAERSA from FAO field advisory and training projects. This could reflect a degree of negligence (or modesty) on the part of FAO in making the necessary inputs. Alternatively, there could have been a tendency by WAERSA sources to overlook international aid material; IICA and AID marketing project work is likewise very lightly covered.

AGRIS provides many more titles under the marketing heading. However, it includes individually large numbers of articles that FAO Marketing Service and WAERSA would consider of ephemeral interest; i.e., on market price and situation, market prospects and supplies, and export promotion and prospects.

### **Convenience and Use**

WAERSA locates titles on marketing under a number of headings and interspersed among other material, but they can be found quite easily. With the title (translated into English if originally in another language) and bibliographical information goes a summary. These abstracts indicate clearly the scope and findings of a paper and for many users will substitute for reading it. On service, WAERSA rates high. It carries the limitation that someone located away from a library would need access to 36 issues to cover 1976-1978. On request, however, one could receive directly--against payment--lists of titles and abstracts selected by country, language, and subject area.

The FAO Marketing Service bibliography also provides translations of titles and notes on content. It has developed procedures whereby an intensive coverage can be provided in limited space. Situation and outlook material appearing regularly in a periodical news bulletin is not listed directly. The bulletin itself is shown as a source of market information with an indication of periodicity of issue. The procedures are:

1. Reports of marketing boards, etc., on their operations and financial status are only listed the first time of notice.
2. Successive papers by the same author on broadly the same subject are combined into one entry, and the relationship set out in the annotation.
3. Books and proceedings of conferences, including papers by various authors, appear once under the name of the editor or title of the meeting. The most important individual papers may be mentioned in the annotation. Authors' names and the countries concerned are included in the author and country indexes.
4. Successive parts of a report treating aspects of the same subject or problem, and successive issuances by a commission or body of inquiry are combined into one entry.

AGRIS depends on its suppliers for its bibliographical entries. They provide the translations of titles and keywords. The AGRIS computer lists all the material it receives as it comes in. Issued monthly, these listings attain their primary goal of providing current awareness of material available. It is when sorted by subject matter that the duplications and variations in quality become apparent. In the material examined, a commission reporting on abaca marketing structures and margins in the Philippines was given seventeen entries in virtually successive pages.

According to a random ten page sample, only 7 percent of the AGRIS titles for 1978 carried keyword descriptors. In appraising this proportion, allowance should be made for price bulletins, etc., requiring little additional information.

AGRIS printouts are available at libraries through computer linkage. Printouts are available through institutions making an annual financial contribution to the system. Marketing coverage for the same period as the last AGSM bibliography supplement involves a volume of paper about 20 x 10 x 7 centimetres. Thus there remains the considerable task of assessing the usefulness of the material provided. On the other hand, the AGRIS computer can print out on request lists of titles selected by country, language, and keyword. Thus, a user can obtain, to order, all titles in French dealing with livestock marketing in Africa, for example. With the AGSM bibliography one would have to use the index.

This comparative study was undertaken on the basis of 1976-1978 bibliographical material. Since then there have been some changes. WAERSA has strengthened its coverage of Latin America. AGRIS has undertaken a further briefing of its documentation centres. The FAO Marketing Service draws on the AGRIS listings to supplement the material covered directly and supplied by correspondents.

## **Conclusions**

Adaptation of computer technology to the assembly of bibliographical information has expanded enormously the amount and range of information that can be held. Its quality and relevance depends, however, on the professional qualifications of the input supplier. Because of their institutional base, the national documentation centres supplying AGRIS are likely over the long run to provide a more comprehensive coverage than the more personal contacts used by WAERSA and FAO Marketing Service. Intensive briefing is needed, however, if they are to meet the requirements of specialized users. There is a role here for the relevant national professional leaders and associations.

Pending such a professional input, practitioners of a particular discipline will continue to seek reference services applying their own criteria. Convenience in use remains an important consideration. A second stage selection based on the primary sources and issues in a convenient form seems essential.

### **Note**

<sup>1</sup>FAO, Rome.

**Schieck and Fischer's Paper**

In terms of the GDR's objectives, it is unclear what modern methods are being used in the technical base. The asserted higher growth in production and improvement in the social position in terms of the standard of living are without comparative figures. Also, it is very difficult to assess the yield and output figures without comparative data. I have taken Zimbabwe data for the similar period in order to give some comparison with a developing country, bearing in mind that the GDR is a developed socialist country. In Zimbabwe over the past 30 years, maize production has increased 19 times, wheat 670 times, sorghum 30 times, and soybeans 980 times. Yield factors have improved in the order of 4 to 13, beef slaughter results have improved 3 times, milk by 1.8, and eggs by 2. This would imply that the GDR has, in a number of these commodities, had poorer results than those of Zimbabwe.

In general terms, the paper does not demonstrably show how the increase in social security has directly contributed to the GDR's output. The role of state farms is not defined; are they important in terms of output?

The form of socialist agricultural production should be clearly defined in terms of social structure, responsibility, flexibility and the condition of services. The whole concept of industrial techniques should be explained. The authors talk about improvement in labour productivity but do not define this productivity. Is this the output divided by number of workers or the output per category of worker? The authors say that in 1985 the GDR will expand grain production by 10 percent. They do not, however, stipulate how or what incentive will be used. In Zimbabwe, we managed to increase the grain crop by a factor of 3 in 1 year by adding 50 percent to the price. Would this kind of mechanism be employed to ensure the 10 percent increase in productivity?

**Pray's Paper**

I am concerned with the use of *Plant Breeding Abstracts* as the measure of research productivity in Southeast Asia. By implication, publications on new genetic varieties have become the only indicator of research productivity in the paper. A broader base would have been more helpful, even if publications on some of the technological changes in the agronomic practices were included.

The paper defines export crops as both foodgrain and nonfoodgrain, but then goes on to criticize the colonial past for its emphasis on nonfoodgrain exports. But Japan supported a very strong foodgrain research programme in Taiwan, as did Great Britain in India and the United States in the Philippines.

The rate of return on research productivity appears good in the examples quoted—rubber in Malaysia, rice in Taiwan, and in the Punjab in India (where the crop is undefined but is assumed to be research on foodgrains). If one looks at the data on growth in improved varieties, the Philippines shows positive improvement in all products including rice, as do Taiwan and Malaysia.

The determinants of the colonial past are very well covered, being on the one hand the import requirements of the mother country and on the other hand the commodity requirements of the colony. Direct contributions to revenue in the importing country have been mentioned, but indirect contribution to revenue for both the importing and exporting countries in terms of employment in relation to all aspects of the commodity have not been looked at.

The comparative timing of some of the data is also questionable. Research publications are enumerated for Java for the period 1935-1939 at the height of a great depression, yet these are compared with research expenditures for 1926, which represented a relative boom year before the depression. On the whole, the

paper deals with depression years but there is, however, no specific mention of how the depression affected grain production.

Generally, the paper seems to attribute a great deal of exploitation to the colonial powers in terms of export crops, but at the same time it discounts any data contradictory to the basic hypotheses; for example, the time lag in rubber research in Malaysia, the application of agronomic technology in the Philippines, or the bad statistics in British India. The paper seems to be saying that colonial research activities were spent on nonfoodgrains for export. The implication of this is that post-colonial governments have concentrated their efforts on foodgrain research. There is, however, no attempt to discuss or evaluate this proposition.

It is apparent that there is no clearcut pattern for all Southeast Asia other than the concentration of research into exports which may or may not have been based on foodgrains. There is very little difference between concentration on rice research for export or on rice research for local consumption in Taiwan. One wonders why the Japanese were successful in increasing foodgrain production in Taiwan whereas a similar research input by Great Britain failed in India.

Zimbabwe, which has recently achieved its independence, shows some quite interesting comparative data. The current maize varieties of SR52 and the three-way hybrid series of the R200s have all been extensively used throughout Africa in the small scale farming sector. Hybrid seed maize is one of the principal inputs into maize production in this sector.

Prices are only one of a number of very strong policy measures used to control production, but the author does not mention this aspect at all. The case could well have been that very low productivity was caused by low prices despite high research inputs. In Zimbabwe, the maize research programmes were not abandoned when the price fell. The exporting country's need for foreign exchange could also have been considered.

#### **Abbott's Paper**

I think that the paper has a useful function in defining how marketing data can be obtained and utilized at present. I have no substantial disagreement with anything said or in the way it was presented. The author described the mechanics of the system very adequately, and the paper should be helpful for agricultural economists working in the marketing field to get access to source reference material.

## OPENER'S REMARKS—Henry E. Larzelere

I choose to concentrate on the additions and modifications that might be helpful to the readers of these papers. Further, the evaluation of these comments should be interpreted in relation to my mainly extension based career, largely in the United States, with short term assignments in Bangladesh, Tanzania, and South Korea.

Schieck and Fischer's paper is built on the authors' experience in the GDR. It is difficult for me seriously to discuss some of the points since I have only spent a few days in the GDR. In general, the paper gives indications of recognition of the importance of economies of scale, of increases in the production of certain commodities, of increases in mechanization, and of decreases in labour requirements. However, it would be helpful if we could see some additional quantitative measures of inputs and outputs per land unit so that we as agricultural economists could analyze the managerial situation over a period of years in the GDR and compare it to other countries. This addition would help us evaluate the period of increases in net product followed by a period of diminished net product indicated to be the result of inclement weather and other production conditions. This would also help us evaluate the managerial procedures used both at the national and local farm unit levels.

The other papers might have referred more directly to the objectives of this conference, namely, growth with equity. I agree with Pray's point that evaluation of the research done in the colonial period, as well as in the post-colonial period, is much more complex than is frequently asserted. We have to admit at the outset that political and financial influences do have effects on the direction of research projects. Therefore, both colonial and post-colonial interests have often emphasized work on export and cash crops to the benefit of the mother country or balance of trade considerations. As the author has indicated, this may not be all bad. Work on export and cash crops in some countries may actually involve work on food crops. The payoff has been shown to be high for export and cash crops because there was more room for improvement in either the experience and expertise of newcomers in the production of these crops or in the culture of varieties introduced from other areas started from relatively low levels. At the same time, much adaptation or possibly applied research has historically taken place over years of trial and error of near subsistence agriculture (largely food production) by many small farmers.

As agricultural economists, as well as historical reviewers, we must continually urge equitable emphasis on research both for small farmers with concentration on food production and for large scale commercial agriculture. In the interest of growth and equity, it is important that small farmers become more efficient within the limits of their individual units, and that the efficiency of agriculture in general be improved.

It would be helpful if Abbott would conclude with some desirable modifications in the entire bibliographical process and with some additional examples of how persons interested in particular phases of marketing would proceed to review the literature on a certain issue or problem in an effective and efficient way. This would be especially useful to encourage and thereby improve their programmes by readily backstopping their work by considering others' research. Too often bibliographical materials tend to be started under special circumstances and continued without changes or adjustments to new circumstances. It is our responsibility as agricultural economists to encourage changes in bibliographic procedures as users' needs change.

## RAPPORTEUR'S REPORT—Walter J. Armbruster

Related to Schieck and Fischer's paper, a comment was made that no mention was made of the private sector in the GDR which was particularly important in the production of some commodities. A related question asked about the current official policy relative to increasing production. The reply indicated that sales of produce to the state from individual efforts of cooperative members and from other small scale producers has increased over time. However, it is not as important in the GDR as in other socialist countries due to geographic limitations and the relatively higher opportunity returns outside agriculture for the limited labour. Another question related to the same paper regarded comparative input/output ratios between socialist (i.e., GDR) and nonsocialist states. Nazarenko replied that he has spent considerable professional effort attempting such comparisons and has encountered nearly insurmountable obstacles tied to differences in institutional arrangements and associated accounting data.

Related to the Pray paper, questions were raised about how much research relevant to the crops under analysis may have been taking place outside the colonized countries, and how much was occurring in the colonized versus other countries such as Thailand. Perhaps the only research being done was in the colonial countries. Further questions were raised about whether the purpose of research was to help the indigenous population (i.e., an equity emphasis) or rather designed to concentrate on increasing production of crops of most interest to the colonizing country for export. Particularly, the historical data should not be analyzed without careful attention to the institutional and noneconomic influences on the data.

The Abbott paper contains observations that may be equally applicable to subsets of the international agricultural economics literature other than the marketing sector dealt with here. The two basic approaches to compiling international bibliographic services—one utilizing professional correspondents and the other automatically pulling from national documentation centres—result in different qualities of contents. The personal approach, such as used by WAERSA, provides a higher quality bibliography but is perhaps more limited in coverage. Perhaps more effort should be devoted to increasing the quality obtained from the more comprehensive automatic collection systems such as AGRIS. Those bibliographic services which have a good index, such as USDA's AGRICOLA AG-ECON file, are the most useful. The difficulty of access because of having to scan several issues in a year is overstated, because proper use of the index greatly reduces the amount of material to be examined closely. Further, wise use of on-line access channels through various organizations also eases accessibility. Finally, rapid progress in data handling in the past few years rapidly outdates analyses of content and coverage. Related points regarding bibliographic services included information that a briefing service is being developed at the Oxford Institute of Agricultural Economics to provide well specified, brief reviews of literature. USSR has a computerized documentation service which covers all published literature in all fields of agriculture, and is easily obtainable by agricultural economists anywhere relatively cheaply since the service is government subsidized.

Participants in the discussion included Margot Bellamy, P. von Blanckenburg, Yang Boo Choe, William T. Manley (Session Chairman), B. Peters, and G. H. Peters.