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A SUMMARY OF RESULTS COLLECTED FROM A FARMER SURVEY*

Johanna Pluske (Hector)

Agricultural Economics
Discussion Paper 1/93

Nedlands, Western Australia 6009

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1. Introduction

Farmers from the high rainfall sheep growing region of Western Australia were randomly selected to participate in this project. This area included shires from Moora in the North to Cranbrook in the South. One hundred and sixty farmers completed this survey in September, 1991.

Results pertaining to use of agricultural information as well as some demographics are presented below.

2. Demographic Data

Data concerning the age and education of farmers as well as some of their enterprise statistics were collected.

Table 1. The Percentage of Farmers in the Five Specified Age Groups

Age	Farmers (%)
up to 24 years	1.88
25-34 years	20.00
35-44 years	26.25
45-54 years	32.50
55+ years	19.38

Table 2. The Percentage of Farmers who Achieved Their Highest Level of Education Within One of the Seven Specified Groups

Level of Education	Farmers (%)
Primary only	9.55
Completed year 10 secondary	23.57
Some secondary	7.01
Completed year 12 secondary	21.02
Agricultural college	20.38
Technical/trade	8.28
University	10.19

Table 3. The Average Area and Yield For the Main Crops Grown as well as the Average Number of Sheep and Lambs and Pasture Area for the Farms Surveyed

Area of Wheat	256 ha
Yield of Wheat	1.9 t/ha
Area of Barley	85 ha
Yield of Barley	1.9 t/ha
Area of Oats	112 ha
Yield of Oats	2.3 t/ha
Area of Lupins	119 ha
Yield of Lupins	1.1 t/ha
Number of Sheep	5168
Number of Lamb	1594
Area of Pasture	1133 ha

3. Agricultural Information

Farmers were asked whether they used three different types of agricultural information. These were defined as: fee-paying information from private consultants/groups; non fee-paying information from private companies; and non fee-paying information from the Western Australian Department of Agriculture (WADA)

Just over four percent of respondents did not use agricultural information at all. The remaining farmers used information in varying degrees. Of the total farmers surveyed, the following percentage of farmers used the specified information; fee-paying private consultants/groups, 44%; non fee-paying private companies, 83%; The Western Australian Department of Agriculture, 92%.

3.1 Fee-paying Agricultural Information from Private Consultants/Groups

Of the farmers who used fee-paying agricultural information, the percentages of farmers using consultants or groups (as specified by the farmers) have been calculated.

Table 4. The Percentage of Farmers Employing Private Consultants/Groups*

Consultant/Group	Farmers (%)
Bob Hall	7.45
Kevin Bell	7.45
Ralph Burnett	25.53
Planfarm	8.51
Pierre Fievez	1.06
Rod King	2.13
P McKenzie	2.13
G Lean	1.06
Tim Johnston	2.13
Ken Sevenson	1.06
Biodynamics Consultant	4.26
Vet Consultant	8.51
Agriplan	1.06
Bird Cameron	3.19
Kondinin Group	6.38
General Finance	13.83
WISALTS	1.06
PGA	1.06
WAFF	2.13

Farmers were asked to nominate what was the major type of information they received from these private consultants/groups.

* As the survey was completed in 1991, some private consultants/groups are no longer practising. However, it may be assumed that the consultants who have since taken over such businesses would retain the clients.

Table 5. The Percentage of Farmers Nominating the Major Type of Information they Received from Private Consultants/Groups.

Information Type	Farmers (%)
Sheep and wool	16.83
Chemicals	22.77
General	28.71
Landcare	0.99
Biodynamics	3.96
Finance	7.92
Other stock	9.90
Sheep/crop	8.91

Farmers were asked if they would continue to use this information at the price they are currently paying for it.

Table 6. The Percentage of Farmers Stating Whether They Would Continue to Use Information Provided by Consultants/Groups at the Current Price

	Farmers (%)
Yes	89.47
No	0
Undecided	10.53

Hypothetically, if the price of this fee-paying information was to increase by ten percent, would farmers continue to use this information?

Table 7. The Percentage of Farmers Who Would, Would Not or May Continue to Use Information from a Paid Private Consultant/Group

	Farmers (%)
Yes	79.79
No	6.38
Undecided	13.83

3.2 Non Fee-Paying Agricultural Information from a Private Company

Of the farmers who used non fee-paying information, the percentage of farmers using the sources (as specified by the farmers) was calculated.

Table 8. The Percentage of Farmers Using the Different Sources of Non Fee-Paying Information

Source	Farmers (%)
Wesfarmers	7.36
Elders	12.02
RTC	1.16
SBS	0.78
Stockfirms (Not Specified)	16.28
CSBP	39.53
Chemical Companies	14.34
Wool Brokers	3.10
Marketing Boards	0.39
Seed Merchants	0.78
Other Farmers	3.49
Pig Association	0.78

Farmers were asked what major aspects of agricultural information they were seeking from these private companies.

Table 9. The Type of Non Fee-Paying Information Sought by Farmers

Information Type	Farmers (%)
Sheep	23.64
Crop	1.95
Chemical	22.09
Fertilizer	34.5
Marketing & Economics	5.43
Crop and Stock	6.98
Stock/marketing	4.65
Other Stock	0.78

Farmers were asked whether they would continue to use this non fee-paying private information.

Table 10. The Percentage of Farmers Nominating Whether They Would, Would not or May continue to use Non Fee-Paying Information

	Farmers (%)
Yes	98.88
No	0.75
Undecided	0.37

If farmers could not obtain the information they specified they used, then they were asked whether they would use another source to acquire the same information?

Table 11. The Percentage of Farmers Who Would, Would not or May Use Another Source If they Could not Obtain Information From Their Specified Source

	Farmers (%)
Yes	82.77
No	6.74
Undecided	10.49

If farmers thought they would use another source to obtain this agricultural information, they were asked from whom they would approach for this same information.

Table 12. The Information Sources Farmers Would Approach for Information

Source	Farmers (%)
Agriculture Department	40.91
Other farmers	5.45
Paid private consultants	17.27
Elders	2.27
Other stockfirms	15.00
Libraries/magazines	17.27
Stud stock manager	0.45
Chemical company	1.36

3.3 Non Fee-Paying Agricultural Information From the Western Australian Department of Agriculture

Agricultural information provided by WADA and used by farmers was divided into general and specific information. General information includes that information gained by farmers at field days, seminars, public meetings and the like. Specific information refers to that specifically sought by farmers through telephone calls and farm visits.

3.3.1 WADA General Information

The farmers who used WADA general information were asked how may times in the last year they had used this information.

Table 13. The Number of Times Farmers Used WADA General Information

Times Used	Farmers (%)
1-2 times	51.88
3-4 times	21.80
5+ times	26.32

The major use of WADA general information was identified by the farmers.

Table 14. The major Use of WADA General Information As Identified By Farmers

Use	Farmers (%)
Sheep	15.91
Crop	7.58
Chemical	12.88
Landcare	10.61
Cattle	1.52
Stock & crop	21.97
Stock/economics	3.03
Crop/landcare	6.06
Stock/landcare	6.06
Other stock	1.52
Grasshoppers	5.30
Assortment of Information	7.58

Farmers were asked whether they would continue to use this information in the future if it was provided as it is currently.

Table 15. The Percentage of Farmers Indicating Whether They would, Would Not, or May Continue to Use WADA General Information

	Farmers (%)
Yes	100
No	0
Undecided	0

If farmers could not get this general information would they use another source to obtain the same information?

Table 16. The Percentage of Farmers Nominating Whether they Would, Would Not or May Find Another Source If they Were Not Able to Obtain WADA General Information

	Farmers (%)
Yes	78.03
No	11.36
Undecided	10.61

If farmers indicated they would seek another source for the same information (if WADA general information was not available), they were asked who this source would be.

Table 17. The Information Source Farmers Nominated to Replace WADA General Information if it Was Not Available

Source	Farmers (%)
Stockfirms	9.62
Elders	6.73
Other Farmers	17.31
Private Paid Consultants	39.42
Chemical Companies	9.62
Library/Magazines	17.31

3.3.2 WADA Specific Information

The farmers who used WADA specific information were asked how may times in the last year they had used this information.

Table 18. The Number of Times Farmers Used WADA Specific Information

Times Used	Farmers (%)
1-2 times	57.48
3-4 times	21.26
5+ times	21.26

The major use of WADA specific information was identified by the farmers.

Table 19. The major Use of Specific Information As Identified By Farmers

Use	Farmers (%)
Sheep	22.22
Crop	9.52
Chemical	22.22
Landcare	10.32
Cattle	0.79
Stock & crop	15.87
Fertiliser	1.59
Stock/economics	1.59
Crop/landcare	3.97
Stock/landcare	3.17
Other stock	2.38
Grasshoppers	2.28
Assortment of Information	3.97

Farmers were asked whether they would continue to use this information in the future if it was provided as it is currently.

Table 20. The Percentage of Farmers Indicating Whether They would, Would Not, or May Continue to Use WADA Specific Information

	Farmers (%)
Yes	99.21
No	0.79
Undecided	0

If farmers could not get this specific information would they use another source to obtain the same information?

Table 21. The Percentage of Farmers Nominating Whether they Would, Would Not or May Find Another Source If they Were Not Able to Obtain WADA Specific Information

	Farmers (%)
Yes	84.38
No	8.59
Undecided	7.03

If farmers indicated they would seek another source for the same information (if WADA specific information was not available), they were asked who this source would be.

Table 22. The Information Source Farmers Nominated to Replace WADA Specific Information if it Was Not Available

Source	Farmers (%)
Stockfirms	4.59
Elders	7.34
Other Farmers	17.43
Private Paid Consultants	48.62
Chemical Companies	8.26
Library/Magazines	13.76

4. Conclusion

The results found from this survey indicate that farmers use agricultural information whether it be fee-paying or not. Almost all farmers use the WADA information at least once a year with slightly fewer stating they use information from non fee-paying private companies. Almost half of the farmers surveyed use at least one fee-paying private consultant/group.

Given the manner in which the information services are now provided, most farmers thought they would continue to use them. However, if the non fee-paying information sources currently used by farmers ceased to exist, almost 50% of farmers would turn to the WADA for this information with around 17% going to fee-paying information sources and 19% of farmers seeking out other non fee-paying companies. On the other hand if WADA general information was discontinued, 26% of farmers would seek the same information from non fee-paying information sources with almost 40% pursuing the information from fee-paying sources. If WADA refrained from providing specific information, 20% of farmers would turn to non fee-paying information sources and almost 50% of farmers thought they would have to pay for the same information. However, many farmers stated that if they had to substitute information sources they would, albeit reluctantly.

It would seem that agricultural information is important to farmers. Each of the three types of information specified in this paper are necessary to farmers in the areas surveyed. Some information appears to be interchangeable between sources and if this is the case, the information sources involved could organise themselves more efficiently. However, before any information source decides to change their provision of agricultural information, a careful investigation of who uses the information, why they use it, and the cost they would incur to account for the change, should be completed.

5. Author's Note

Please note that the survey was completed by farmers in the sheep producing, high rainfall region of Western Australia, so results should not be extrapolated to other regions. While the survey was conducted in a random manner, with a sample size as large as was practically feasible, the data could not cover all private consultants/groups. Therefore any specific use of this data should be done with extreme care. As these results are in discussion form, any use of subject material contained within this report must have approval from the author.