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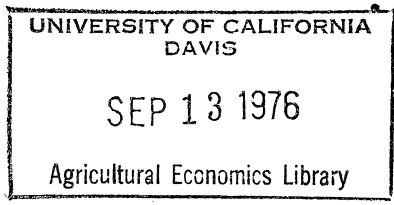
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ABSTRACT

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"Using Educational Television as a Delivery
System for Teaching Futures Market Concepts."

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Thirteen weekly programs on futures markets were taught to farmers using television as a delivery system. Agricultural economists were responsible for technical accuracy, while professional writers and announcers were responsible for communicating ideas. Five thousand individuals pre-enrolled in the series. One third of the enrollees watched nine or more programs.

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Using Educational Television as a
Delivery System for Teaching Futures
Market Concepts

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USING EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION AS A DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR TEACHING FUTURES MARKET CONCEPTS

Television as a medium for delivering extension information has the potential of providing information to more individuals in a single program than most extension personnel reach in one year. Yet, television has been little used as an information delivery system for educating farmers concerning agricultural economics problems. The high cost of commercial air time has meant that few stations were willing to supply time for educational programming on a regular basis. Even if air time is available, it often cannot be obtained at an optional viewing time. Communicating extension information via television requires special skills different from those used by extension personnel in a traditional public meeting educational setting. Most extension economists are not so effective in front of a television camera as are professional television commentators.

The purpose of this paper is to explain how educational television was used to teach commodity futures market concepts to farmers. The futures market program was designed to educate farmers and other interested persons in the basics of forward pricing and to help them apply that information to their own business situations. Television offered the most direct and cost-effective link with those farmers most in need of information. It is one medium that would bring that information to those interested on a regular basis.

Our approach in the use of television as a means to educate farmers was unique in that the educational effort consisted of not merely a single show, but 13 regular, weekly programs on agricultural marketing. The program was aired during prime time evening television beginning in February.

Agricultural economists developed ideas and outlines, but a professional television writer developed scripts for the programs. Professional artists were employed to develop supporting visuals. Hence, agricultural economists were responsible for the *technical accuracy* of the programs. Professional writers and announcers were responsible for *communicating* ideas to the farmer audience.

Educational television stations rather than commercial stations were used because of the availability of air time. The educational television system in our state is one of the largest and most complete in the nation, consisting of 14 UHF stations. This was a particular advantage, compared with local, private television stations which could cover only part of the state.

Why Television

We sought to educate a large number of farmers about futures market concepts. We faced the following constraints: (1) a small extension marketing staff, (2) a large geographical area in which to reach farmers, and (3) limited travel funds.

Educational television has four unique qualities making it applicable to our objectives and constraints. Television was *immediate*. Farmers need not wait for printed materials to be published or for an agricultural economist to be available to teach them about marketing and forward pricing.

Television was *flexible*. The program host transcended the limitations of the classroom or seminar, and through film clips, animation, and live interviews (just to name a few examples) presented information in a manner best suited to the nature of that information and most appealing to the farm audience.

In our state educational television *reached the entire state*. The geographic isolation of many rural areas is no longer a barrier to self-improvement. Through television, farmers obtained information in the comfort and privacy of their homes, without interrupting their workday or losing needed rest time in transit which they might otherwise have to travel miles to obtain.

Television was *familiar*. Television, available in the privacy of the home, is especially appealing to the adult who is often reluctant to admit to educational deficiencies in a group situation. The television host spoke directly to the individual viewer and served as an authority, with none of the negative connotations that many adult learners ascribe to authority figures. Further, farmers in particular already received a great deal of information through the mass media, on local radio and television programs.

The idea of a marketing program did not evolve solely out of the Agricultural Economics Department. Rather, members of the agricultural leadership in the state expressed to the state Educational Television (ETV) their desire that ETV bid on a weekly farm business series. A committee composed primarily of agricultural economists was asked to prepare a program proposal that Educational Television could consider for implementation.

The origination of this program indicates a key factor one must consider in making this type of venture. Agricultural economists acting alone may not convince television producers of the need for a regular show on agricultural marketing or other agriculturally related topics. Our experience suggests that the demand for this kind of educational effort must come from the agricultural leadership in the state.

Methods Employed

In our approach to using television as an extension delivery vehicle, the agricultural economist was used as a resource person. Agricultural economists decided the content and sequence of the subject matter, generated ideas and developed brief topical outlines for each program. A professional writer, specifically trained to write for television took these ideas and generated written scripts.

An outline and sequence of subject matter was prepared several months prior to taping (Table 1). Two review and question sessions were scheduled in addition to programs devoted to explaining futures market concepts and illustrations. Questions were submitted by telephone and by mail. These questions were answered on the air by agricultural economists through direct interviews.

The television writer received written outlines and visual sketches 3 weeks prior to the taping date. The writer then prepared the script, and sent the script back to the agricultural economist for review. The revised scripts were aired 5 days following taping.

Prepared scripts were read on camera using tele-a-prompters. This delivery mode insured constant eye contact with the audience. Two communications specialists served as program hosts. These professionals had agricultural training in addition to their communications skills. This approach insured that small talk was kept to a minimum and that the subject matter was covered in a professional manner.

Agricultural economists appeared as interviewed guests for highlighting particular facets of the program. For example, an economist made a guest

appearance to show how to construct a basis chart. An agricultural economist in another guest appearance showed how to determine an "asking price" when deciding whether to hedge. Commodity brokers and farmers who used the futures market also appeared as guests on the program.

Two months prior to the first program, promotion was begun to enroll farmers and others for the program. Farmers enrolled through local county extension staff. Agents were furnished posters and enrollment forms to place in agribusiness establishments. News releases and radio tapes were also used to advertise the program. Enrollees received by mail special materials (workbook) which complemented the television tapes.¹ A mailing list was thus provided for use in program evaluation.

Local extension agents were encouraged to schedule several work meetings whereby enrollees could come to a central cite to work on the special material, or for group discussion. At their own initiative, participants in several counties gathered at a central location to watch the program.

The programs were deliberately written and taped so that material would not be dated. Tapes were reproduced on video cassette, enabling subsequent use. In this manner it is possible to repeat the program on ETV, or the tapes may be used with video-tape machines for local meetings.

Program Evaluation

One week prior to the last program, a short post card questionnaire was mailed to the 5,000 enrollees. Enrollees were asked to indicate the number of programs watched as well as their general impression of the series. Five percent of these enrolled returned the questionnaire.

Thirty-six percent of the respondents had watched 9 or more programs, while an additional 17 percent had viewed between 6 and 8 programs. Twenty-seven percent had viewed 3 to 5 programs, and the remaining 20 percent had watched fewer than three.

Ninety-three percent of the respondents indicated that they felt the series had helped them to better understand the farm marketing system. In addition, 28 percent indicated that they would use one of the strategies discussed on the program, while 9 percent said that they might possibly use one of the marketing strategies presented.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the television subject matter was clear and easy to understand. Seventy-eight percent said that the subject matter was clear and easily understood. The remaining 22 percent indicated that the subject matter was not easily understood. Seventy percent of the respondents indicated that they would like to view the same program at a later date.

Conclusions

Our objective was to educate a large number of farmers about the marketing system with special emphasis on commodity futures marketing. We did reach a large number of farmers as evidenced by the 5,000 enrollees. Our experience with television as a tool for delivering extension information suggests the following conclusions.

We believe that a *professional script writer* added much to the program. Writing style for television is quite unique from the methods that extension personnel usually employ. Most script writers find it easier to write a script from a brief outline, rather than revising a script prepared by the agricultural economist. In addition, the economist can save valuable time if only an outline has to be prepared.

Numerous *visuals are essential* for television communication. Verbal dialogue without visuals becomes boring to a television audience. Hundreds of visuals are required for a 13-week program, and good visuals are difficult to prepare. For these reasons professional artists are essential to programs of this size.

Communications specialists are better trained to host a regular program series than most agricultural economists. It is helpful if the communicators also have agricultural training.

Viewer feedback after two programs revealed that the material moved at too rapid a pace. One reason cited was the *lack of commercials* on educational television. Our taping experience suggests that liberal use of visuals, having guest interviews, and film clips, makes it easier to follow educational programs.

Written materials which complement the television tapes are essential. Ideally, a complete workbook should be distributed to all enrollees prior to the first show. The complementary materials should be liberally referenced on the air as the program progresses.

Large amounts of *staff time* are required from the agricultural economist. Each program required at least 40 man hours from the agricultural economist. Agricultural economics departments must be willing to devote many man hours to similar ventures.

Coordinating such a venture is cumbersome. Scripts had to be prepared, visuals designed, special materials prepared, taping scheduled, and guests chosen and scheduled. Clearly an adequate amount of lead time is required to produce a show of this magnitude. We allowed 2 months of lead time for each show. However, 4 to 6 months would have been more desirable.

Television facilities and support are essential to ventures such as the program to teach farmers about futures markets. Our state is fortunate in that extensive, modern facilities are available. ETV broadcasts in color, has modern equipment, and covers the entire state. In addition, the facilities were less than two blocks from the Agricultural Economics Department. Clearly, such ventures are impossible unless you have both the manpower and facility commitment from educational television.

Producing a 30-minute program for 13 consecutive weeks is *expensive*. ETV provided a producer, director, production assistant, script writer, two artists, a facility, camera crews, taping equipment, tapes, and a \$2,500 set specially prepared for the program. Educational Television estimates that their total cost in man hours and facilities came to approximately \$52,000, or \$4,000 per program. While producing a program of this magnitude is expensive in hours and actual expense, the money expended was small compared with the number of people reached.

The results from our mail questionnaire indicated that the program was effective in educating farmers. Ninety-three percent of those responding felt that they had a better understanding of marketing. More than one-third indicated they would possibly use one of the marketing strategies in their businesses.

Presently the 13 programs have been re-taped and condensed into 10 programs. These programs are going to be rerun on ETV in 1977. In addition, the video tapes are available for local meetings.

Table 1. Program Titles and Sequence of Subject Matter for
"FARM MARKETPLACE"

<u>Program</u>	<u>Working title</u>
1.	Introduction to the various methods of marketing commodities
2.	An introduction to futures marketing
3.	What is Basis?
4.	Working with Basis
5.	Engaging in futures trading
6.	Review, and questions and answers
7.	Hedging
8.	Brokers and speculators
9.	Using the futures market--grain
10.	Using the futures market--livestock
11.	Using futures in feed
12.	April intentions report
13.	Review, and questions and answers

FOOTNOTES

1. The Workbook was entitled "Farm Marketplace Workbook."
It was developed by the Department of Agricultural Economics
in cooperation with Educational Television.