# ASSESSMENT OF JOURNALS USED BY AGRICULTURAL ECONOMISTS AT LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES

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**Abstract**

Agricultural economists at land-grant universities were surveyed to evaluate the use and assessment of professional journals. Faculty rankings of journals are reported along with faculty perceptions of changes in the quality of selected journals. Of 25 journals used by agricultural economics faculties, the *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics* ranked first among regional agricultural economics journals in personal usefulness, subscriptions held, papers submitted, papers published, and participation in the editorial and review processes. The *SJAE* was also ranked as the second most improved journal among all journals evaluated.

*Key words:* journals, faculty perceptions, faculty participation, professional activities.

Agricultural economics faculties at land-grant universities publish and consult a variety of professional journals. As the basic media for documenting and disseminating professional knowledge and information, journals have come under scrutiny at various levels of the academic unity. Faculty and administrators tend to be sensitive to issues of journal quality, proliferation, editorial policies, and use by faculty.

This paper summarizes the findings of a national survey of journal use by agricultural economists at land-grant universities. The objectives of this paper are to:

1. describe general characteristics of the agricultural economics faculty members surveyed,
2. report faculty rankings of 25 journals according to professional quality and personal usefulness,
3. report faculty assessment of changes in journal quality during the past 5 years, and
4. describe the extent to which faculty support and utilize various professional journals.

## USE AND QUALITY OF ECONOMICS JOURNALS

Previous studies on the use and assessment of economics journals have been conducted primarily, but not exclusively, by general economists. Some of the most recent research efforts have examined current publication lags in economics journals (Yohe), what economists think of their journals (Hawkins, Ritter, and Walter), the supply and demand for journal literature (Button), alternative quality indicies for economics journals (Bush, Hamelman, and Staaf) and the degree to which economists are satisfied with their journals as research tools, aids in teaching and a medium of current awareness (Kagann and Leeson). A major limitation of previous journal surveys is their omission of some of the more popular journals used by agricultural economists.

Previous studies of journal use and assessment by agricultural economists have been few and/or less than comprehensive, either limited in the number of journals or faculties surveyed. Studies of contributions to the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* include those by Arnold and Barlowe; Finley; Holland and Redman; and Broder and Ziemer. Concentration of authorship in the *Journal of Farm Economics* was considered by Neilson and Riley. Opaluch and Just explored the institutional affiliation of academic agricultural economists contributing to major economic journals. Finally, publishing policies and procedures have been studied for agricultural journals (Lacy and Bush) and for agricultural economics journals (Colyer; Fettig). The study described herein borrows from the methodologies developed in journal surveys by general economists (Kagann and Leeson) and expands the number of journals and faculties which have been previously

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researched by agricultural economists and rural sociologists.

## SURVEY AND DATA

In the Summer of 1982, 516 randomly selected agricultural economists at land-grant universities were asked to complete a mailed questionnaire.[1] The questionnaire used in the study was pretested and designed to secure individual information, without threatening respondent anonymity. Two hundred and forty-six usable questionnaires were returned, representing a usable response rate of approximately 48 percent. These individuals formed the sample for the analysis in this study.

Table 1 includes data comparing and contrasting assistant professors, associate professors, and professors (full professors) according to certain general characteristics. The sample used in the survey consisted of 24 percent assistant professors, 25 percent associate professors, and 51 percent professors. Assistant professors tended to have the larger research appointments (55.5 percent) while professors tended to have the larger teaching appointments (32.2 percent). Consistent with the findings of Lee, the largest and smallest percentages of female faculty were found among the assistant professor and professor ranks, respectively.

When faculty members were grouped into four major subject-matter areas of the profession, the majority in all ranks except associate professors identified themselves as being marketing and/or policy oriented. A proportionate majority of resource faculty respondents was found among associate professors while the smallest percentage of faculties in all ranks identified themselves as being quantitative. The 64 responses from the Southern Region accounted for 26 percent of the faculties responding.

Also shown in Table 1 are faculty respondents by region of employment and regional response rates. Differences in the number of responses across regions were due primarily to differences in the number of faculty across regions and not to differences in response rates. Similarities in response rates were taken as evidence that regions were represented in proportion to faculty populations.

TABLE 1. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEYED AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS FACULTY MEMBERS AT LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES BY RANK, 1982

| Characteristic | Unit | Faculty rank: Assistant professor | Faculty rank: Associate professor | Faculty rank: Professor |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Observations | No. | 58 | 62 | 125 |
| Appointment: | | | | |
| Research | Pct. | 55.5 | 51.5 | 46.8 |
| Teaching | Pct. | 30.5 | 28.3 | 32.2 |
| Extension | Pct. | 13.7 | 15.6 | 16.9 |
| Other | Pct. | 0.3 | 4.6 | 4.1 |
| Age | Yr. | 33.4 | 38.8 | 50.1 |
| Female | Pct. | 6.9 | 1.6 | 0.8 |
| Experience | Yr. | 4.5 | 9.2 | 18.6 |
| Areas of emphasis: | | | | |
| Production and finance | Pct. | 24.1 | 16.1 | 30.4 |
| Marketing and Policy | Pct. | 37.9 | 33.9 | 39.2 |
| Resources | Pct. | 25.9 | 41.9 | 22.4 |
| Quantitative | Pct. | 8.6 | 1.6 | 4.0 |
| Region of Employment[a] | | | | |
| Northeast (35.8) | Pct. | 12.1 | 19.4 | 11.2 |
| North Central (42.8) | Pct. | 20.6 | 14.5 | 31.2 |
| Southern (38.3) | Pct. | 39.7 | 21.0 | 22.4 |
| Mountain, Plains and Southwest (37.9) | Pct. | 20.7 | 27.4 | 24.8 |
| Pacific (41.1) | Pct. | 6.9 | 17.7 | 10.4 |

[a] Regional response rates shown in parentheses. For regional delineation, see Peck and Babb.

## RANKING OF JOURNALS

Surveyed agricultural economics faculty members at land-grant universities were asked to rank 25 journals according to professional quality and personal usefulness. The list of 25 journals was constructed and modified during a pre-test. Specific journals were selected according to pre-test responses, subject matter areas, and general readership.[2] To accommodate the diversity of interests and journals available to the profession, and to allow respondents to identify and rank journals other than those listed in the questionnaire, space was provided in which faculties could list up to five additional journals.[3] However, the findings herein are limited to the 25 journals listed on the questionnaire.

Table 2 reports mean rankings of journals by faculties according to professional quality and personal usefulness (where 1 is highest and 25 is lowest). Also reported in Table 2 are simple ordinal ranks based on mean rankings and the

[1] Respondents were randomly selected from agricultural economists listed in *Professional Workers in State Agricultural Experiment Stations and Other Cooperating State Institutions, 1981-82,* USDA Agricultural Handbook 305. All listed individuals were considered but those without at least a "college staff" and/or "station staff" assignment code were excluded from the sample given a primary interest in the responses of research/teaching agricultural economics faculty.

[2] No attempt was made to discriminate between "types" of journals (e.g., agricultural economics, economics, specialty, etc.) for ranking purposes. Our objective was to elicit professional opinions on the quality and usefulness of all major journals considered of interest to *agricultural economists* at land-grant universities. It is certainly possible and likely probable that a different professional group (e.g., general economists) with their own unique interests and needs would exhibit different rankings for the group of journals considered (as an ex., see Kagann and Leeson).

[3] Among other journals, the following were listed and ranked most frequently among the top ten journals (the number of respondents is given in parentheses): *J. of Environmental Econ. and Mgt.* (20), *J. of American Stat. Assn.* (16), *J. of Econ. Literature* (14), *Econ. Development and Cultural Change* (11), *J. of Econometrics* (9), *J. of Law and Econ.* (8).

TABLE 2. OBSERVED MEAN RANKINGS OF JOURNALS BY AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS FACULTY MEMBERS AT LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES, 1982

| Journal | Professional quality | | Personal usefulness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean ranking[a] | Number of respondents | Mean ranking[a] | Number of respondents |
| Agricultural Administration | 20.0(25) | 42 | 20.1(25) | 33 |
| Agricultural Economics Research | 10.1(12) | 113 | 7.3( 6) | 114 |
| Agricultural Finance Review | 13.5(17) | 67 | 11.1(13) | 63 |
| American Economic Review | 3.1( 1) | 143 | 5.9( 4) | 138 |
| American Journal of Agricultural Economics | 3.8( 2) | 202 | 2.8( 1) | 207 |
| Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics | 11.7(16) | 66 | 12.0(16) | 56 |
| Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics | 11.4(15) | 81 | 11.3(15) | 73 |
| Econometrica | 4.6( 3) | 101 | 8.7( 9) | 86 |
| Economic Journal | 9.9(11) | 60 | 13.7(19) | 54 |
| European Review of Agricultural Economics | 17.5(24) | 41 | 17.4(24) | 37 |
| Food Policy | 16.0(22) | 49 | 14.1(21) | 42 |
| Journal of Agricultural Economics | 14.7(20) | 55 | 14.8(23) | 47 |
| Journal of Development Economics | 16.3(23) | 53 | 14.0(20) | 48 |
| Journal of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers | 14.5(19) | 85 | 9.4(11) | 79 |
| Journal of Finance | 14.2(18) | 47 | 14.6(22) | 42 |
| Journal of Northeastern Agricultural Economics Council | 15.6(21) | 74 | 12.2(17) | 63 |
| Journal of Political Economy | 5.6( 4) | 97 | 8.3( 7) | 96 |
| Land Economics | 7.8( 7) | 113 | 6.5( 5) | 102 |
| North Central Journal of Agricultural Economics | 11.1(14) | 100 | 8.3( 7) | 93 |
| Quarterly Journal of Economics | 7.0( 6) | 81 | 10.4(12) | 71 |
| Review of Economic Studies | 8.9(10) | 68 | 12.6(18) | 58 |
| Review of Economics and Statistics | 6.1( 5) | 98 | 9.0(10) | 81 |
| Southern Economic Journal | 10.8(13) | 72 | 11.2(14) | 61 |
| Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics | 8.2( 8) | 132 | 5.3( 2) | 133 |
| Western Journal of Agricultural Economics | 8.5( 9) | 114 | 5.5( 3) | 116 |

[a] Actual mean sample ranking with implied ordinal rank shown in parentheses.

number of faculty respondents who ranked specific journals. When journals were assessed on the basis of professional quality, the *American Economic Review (AER)* ranked first with a mean ranking of 3.1; the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics (AJAE)* ranked second with a mean ranking of 3.8, *Econometrica* ranked third with a mean ranking of 4.6 and the *Journal of Political Economy (JPE)* ranked fourth with a mean ranking of 5.6. On the basis of professional quality, the four regional agricultural economics journals were ranked in the following order: *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics (SJAE)* with a mean ranking of 8.2, *Western Journal of Agricultural Economics (WJAE)* with a mean ranking of 8.5, *North Central Journal of Agricultural Economics (NCJAE)* with a mean ranking of 11.1, and *Journal of the Northeastern Agricultural Economics Council (JNAEC)* with a mean ranking of 15.6.

When journals were assessed on the basis of personal usefulness, the *AJAE* ranked first with a mean ranking of 2.8, the *SJAE* ranked second with a mean ranking of 5.3, the *WJAE* ranked third with a mean ranking of 5.5, the *AER* ranked fourth with a mean ranking of 5.9 and *Land Economics* ranked fifth with a mean ranking of 6.5. On the basis of personal usefulness, the four regional agricultural economics journals were ranked in the following order: *SJAE, WJAE, NCJAE, and JNAEC.*

A detailed analysis of journals by region of employment was beyond the scope of this article. However, the following regional results were thought to be noteworthy: (1) the *AJAE* was ranked first in professional quality and personal usefulness within each region, (2) the *SJAE, NCJAE and JNAEC* were ranked second in professional quality and personal usefulness by the Southern, North Central and Northeastern Regions, respectively, (3) the *WJAE* was ranked second in professional quality and personal usefulness by the Pacific Region and the Mountain, Plains and Southwest Region, and (4) participation with regional journals was not limited to faculty members employed in their respective regions.[4]

## PERCEIVED CHANGES IN JOURNAL QUALITY

To identify trends in journal quality, respondents were asked to indicate whether they believed that the quality of individual journals had changed during the past 5 years. Table 3 reports the percentage of faculty members reporting in each category. The *WJAE* received the largest percentage of "improved" responses (68 percent), followed by the *SJAE* (59.2 percent) and the *NCJAE* (49.4 percent). Approximately one-third of the faculty respondents felt that the *AJAE* had improved in quality during the past 5 years.

[4] Participation with more than one regional journal was characteristic of, but not limited to, transitional states or states located on the fringes of their regions.

TABLE 3. PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGES IN JOURNAL QUALITY BY AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS FACULTY MEMBERS AT LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES, 1982

| Journal | Faculty perceptions of changes in quality during past 5 years | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Respondents | Improved | Unchanged | Declined |
| | Number | Percent | | |
| Agricultural Administration | 30 | 16.7 | 80.0 | 3.3 |
| Agricultural Economics Research | 97 | 31.9 | 55.7 | 11.3 |
| Agricultural Finance Review | 54 | 27.8 | 63.0 | 9.3 |
| American Economic Review | 112 | 16.1 | 58.0 | 25.0 |
| American Journal of Agricultural Economics | 179 | 33.0 | 41.3 | 25.1 |
| Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics | 53 | 20.8 | 73.6 | 3.8 |
| Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics | 65 | 29.2 | 64.5 | 6.2 |
| Econometrica | 76 | 11.9 | 72.4 | 14.5 |
| Economic Journal | 45 | 4.4 | 91.1 | 4.4 |
| European Review of Agricultural Economics | 28 | 21.4 | 78.6 | 0 |
| Food Policy | 38 | 36.8 | 63.1 | 0 |
| Journal of Agricultural Economics | 39 | 15.4 | 76.9 | 7.7 |
| Journal of Development Economics | 39 | 17.9 | 74.4 | 7.7 |
| Journal of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers | 67 | 25.4 | 71.6 | 3.0 |
| Journal of Finance | 34 | 23.5 | 76.5 | 0 |
| Journal of Northeastern Agricultural Economics Council | 61 | 42.6 | 50.8 | 6.6 |
| Journal of Political Economy | 71 | 21.1 | 69.0 | 9.9 |
| Land Economics | 85 | 43.5 | 47.1 | 9.4 |
| North Central Journal of Agricultural Economics | 81 | 49.4 | 48.1 | 2.5 |
| Quarterly Journal of Economics | 55 | 10.9 | 78.2 | 9.1 |
| Review of Economic Studies | 43 | 7.0 | 86.0 | 7.0 |
| Review of Economics and Statistics | 73 | 19.2 | 78.1 | 1.4 |
| Southern Economic Journal | 53 | 24.4 | 69.8 | 5.6 |
| Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics | 117 | 59.2 | 35.0 | 5.1 |
| Western Journal of Agricultrual Economics | 103 | 68.0 | 29.1 | 2.9 |

Among the journals receiving the largest percentage of "declined" responses, the *AJAE* ranked first with 25.1 percent, the *AER* ranked second with 25.0 percent, and *Econometrica* ranked third with 14.5 percent. With 25.0 percent "declined" and 16.1 percent "improved", the *AER* may have experienced the greatest decline in quality in the past 5 years, as viewed by responding agricultural economists.

Evaluations of changes in the quality of the *AJAE* , *AER* and *SJAE* by faculty rank are shown in Table 4. These data indicate that the majority of assistant professors surveyed felt that the *AJAE* had improved in quality during the past 5 years. In contrast, the majority of associate professors and professors felt that the quality of *AJAE* had not changed during this period. The *AER* received about one-half as many "improved" evaluations as received by the *AJAE*. Professors tended to give the lowest quality ratings to the *AER* while a majority of the assistant professors felt that the quality of the *AER* had not changed. Relative to the *AJAE* and *AER*, the *SJAE* received almost twice the percentage of improved responses across all faculty ranks. Approximately two-thirds of the professors surveyed felt that the *SJAE* had improved in the past 5 years.

## JOURNAL USE

Faculty members in the survey were asked to report their involvement with various journals, Table 5. The *AJAE, SJAE,* and *WJAE* ranked first, second and third, respectively, in the number of current subscribers among faculty surveyed. The *AJAE* also ranked first in frequency consulted, followed by the *SJAE, Agricultural Economics Research* and the *WJAE.*

Approximately three-fourths of the faculty members surveyed had submitted a paper(s) for publication in the *AJAE* , while 34.5 and 26.8 percent had submitted a paper(s) to the *SJAE* and *WJAE,* respectively. Approximately 66, 28, and 22 percent of the respondents had published in the *AJAE, SJAE,* and *WJAE,* respectively. When contrasting the percent of faculty members who had submitted papers during their

TABLE 4. PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGES IN THE QUALITY OF THE *AJAE, AER* and *SJAE* BY AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS FACULTY MEMBERS AT LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES BY RANK, 1982

| Journal and rank | Faculty Perceptions of Changes in Quality During Past 5 Years | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Respondents | Improved | Unchanged | Declined |
| | No. | Percent | | |
| *American Journal of Agricultural Economics (AJAE):* | | | | |
| Professors | 88 | 31.8 | 44.3 | 22.7 |
| Associate Professors | 47 | 29.8 | 42.6 | 27.7 |
| Assistant Professors | 43 | 39.5 | 35.0 | 25.6 |
| *American Economic Review (AER):* | | | | |
| Professors | 53 | 17.0 | 49.1 | 32.1 |
| Associate Professors | 30 | 16.7 | 63.3 | 20.0 |
| Assistant Professors | 28 | 14.3 | 71.4 | 14.3 |
| *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics (SJAE):* | | | | |
| Professors | 56 | 66.1 | 26.8 | 7.1 |
| Associate Professors | 30 | 50.0 | 46.7 | 3.3 |
| Assistant Professors | 30 | 60.0 | 36.7 | 3.3 |

careers to those who had published during their careers, 86, 81, and 80 percent of the individualsfaculty submitting papers were found to have published in the *AJAE, SJAE,* and *WJAE,* respectively.[5] Approximately 59, 29, and 24 percent of the respondents had served in some editorial or review capacity for the *AJAE, SJAE,* and *WJAE,* respectively.

## CONCLUSIONS

Agricultural economics faculties publish in and consult a wide variety of professional journals. In this study, an attempt was made to gain insight regarding the use and perceived quality of agricultural economics, economics and other journals considered to be relevant to the profession.

In terms of perceived quality, a number of economics journals were ranked above the regional agricultural economics journals, although only the *AER* was ranked above the *AJAE.* Alternatively, in terms of personal usefulness, the *AJAE, SJAE,* and *WJAE* were ranked first, second, and third, respectively. In terms of perceived changes in quality during the past 5 years, one-third of faculty members surveyed believed the *AJAE* had improved while 25 percent noted a decline. A majority of believed the *WJAE* and *SJAE* had improved in quality. A fourth indicated that both the *AJAE* and *AER* had declined in quality. Additionally, one-sixth of the respondents believed that the *AER* had improved in quality while a fourth noted that the quality had declined.

The *AJAE, SJAE,* and *WJAE* were ranked first, second, and third, respectively, with regard to the percentage of respondents with subscriptions, papers submitted for publication, papers published, and participation in editorial and review processes. Of the surveyed agricultural economics faculty members at land-grant universities who submitted papers for publication to the *AJAE, SJAE,* and *WJAE* during their professional careers, 86, 81, and 80 percent of them published in these journals, respectively.

TABLE 5. JOURNAL USE BY AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS FACULTY MEMBERS AT LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES, 1982

| Journal | Portion of faculty responding positively | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Presently subscribes to | Consulted this journal in past 5 years | Submitted paper for publication in | Has published in | Served in editorial or review capacity for |
| | Percent | | | | |
| Agricultural Administration | 1.2 | 9.8 | 2.4 | 2.0 | 0.4 |
| Agricultural Economics Research | 20.1 | 56.5 | 8.5 | 9.3 | 4.5 |
| Agricultural Finance Review | 6.1 | 29.3 | 4.5 | 3.7 | 1.6 |
| American Economic Review | 29.7 | 63.4 | 12.2 | 4.1 | 3.7 |
| American Journal of Agricultural Economics | 88.2 | 89.0 | 76.4 | 65.9 | 58.9 |
| Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics | 1.2 | 29.7 | 3.7 | 2.8 | 0.8 |
| Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics | 20.3 | 45.6 | 7.7 | 6.1 | 1.6 |
| Econometrica | 6.1 | 40.7 | 2.8 | 2.0 | 2.0 |
| Economic Journal | 0.8 | 24.8 | 1.2 | 0.0 | 0.4 |
| European Review of Agricultural Economics | 1.2 | 12.6 | 2.0 | 1.6 | 0.0 |
| Food Policy | 2.4 | 22.0 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 0.0 |
| Journal of Agricultural Economics | 1.2 | 19.1 | 2.8 | 1.6 | 0.8 |
| Journal of Development Economics | 0.4 | 19.5 | 5.3 | 2.8 | 2.0 |
| Journal of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers | 6.9 | 34.6 | 11.8 | 11.8 | 2.8 |
| Journal of Finance | 1.6 | 15.9 | 1.2 | 0.8 | 0.4 |
| Journal of Northeastern Agricultural Economics Council | 9.8 | 26.0 | 11.4 | 11.4 | 8.9 |
| Journal of Political Economy | 7.7 | 44.3 | 5.3 | 0.8 | 2.8 |
| Land Economics | 10.6 | 48.0 | 20.3 | 13.4 | 15.0 |
| North Central Journal of Agricultural Economics | 22.0 | 42.7 | 15.0 | 10.6 | 16.3 |
| Quarterly Journal of Economics | 1.6 | 34.1 | 3.7 | 2.0 | 0.8 |
| Review of Economic Studies | 0.8 | 26.4 | 2.4 | 0.8 | 0.0 |
| Review of Economics and Statistics | 1.6 | 40.7 | 8.1 | 3.7 | 3.3 |
| Southern Economic Journal | 2.0 | 28.0 | 4.9 | 4.1 | 1.6 |
| Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics | 36.2 | 62.6 | 34.5 | 28.0 | 29.3 |
| Western Journal of Agricultural Economics | 32.1 | 53.7 | 26.8 | 21.5 | 23.6 |

[5] These percentages of faculty who published in journals should not be confused with journal acceptance rates. The percentage of faculty who have published in a particular journal during their career is substantially greater than the journal's acceptance rate during the year (Colyer; Fettig).

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