Why use Newsletters with Producers

Many Extension agents and specialists use newsletters to deliver non-biased, research-based information to agricultural producers to improve their farming operation and introduce new production practices or technology (Coffin, 2007). Also, Extension agents and specialists utilize newsletters to market upcoming programs and deadlines for government applications (e.g., Farm Service Agency loan applications, Natural Resource Conservation cost share program applications, and crop insurance applications). Kerrigan (1993), stated newsletters continue to be an effective method for reaching a targeted audience. According to (Garton, et al., 2003), newsletters are a cost-effective, valuable delivery method for educational and training programs.

Recent Research on Producers and Newsletters

Twelve focus groups were held with 94 producers in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Virginia to discuss their preferred learning methods and what that means for Cooperative Extension program development and delivery. Each participant completed a questionnaire consisting of 25 learning methods. They were asked to check “prefer” or “do not prefer” for each learning method. Fifty-two percent of the producers preferred newsletters as a learning method.

Why Producers Prefer to Read Newsletters?

The agricultural producers in this study preferred newsletters as a learning method if the newsletters (a) provided site specific information, (b) included production related information, and (c) were written in a simple, easy to read format.
**Site Specific Information**
Producers believed that effective newsletters should include site specific information (e.g., topics relevant to the local area). One producer said, “Possibly a newsletter like we receive from our Extension agent. You know it’s site specific, that’s what I need. Yeah, I mean if you’re growing peaches in --- County and this is due on this date, that really applies to me.” A second producer stated, “The newsletter lists programs and events that are going to happen in the area. If you want more information on it you can get in touch with the agent.” Another producer answered, “The county agent sends out a newsletter. I find that real informative and specific to what we do and where we do it.” A producer stated, “I will read the deadlines or the upcoming workshops.”

**Production Related Information**
Producers were more likely to read newsletters that addressed production related topics (e.g., crawfish production). A producer said, “I learned a lot from the crawfish newsletter. I just got into it four or five years. By reading the crawfish newsletters, I found helpful information about the depth of water.” Another producer stated, “That’s what I like about the newsletter we get from the county agent. You know it’s like getting ready for crawfish this week, that’s what you need to be looking for. I probably get more information out of that.” A producer replied, “The newsletter gives a schedule for the apple growers, viticulture, and sometimes other meetings like the sustainable farming workshop.”

**Simple, Easy to Read Format**
To improve the effectiveness of Extension newsletters, agents and specialists should use basic terminology and avoid technical jargon. One producer stated, I want it in the simplest format possible. A second producer said, “I find that real informative. You aren’t reading Progressive Farmer, all this technical stuff.”

**Why Producers Do Not Read Extension Newsletters?**
Agricultural producers said they don’t read Extension newsletters for various reasons. In particular they won’t read newsletters that don’t relate to their farming operation and they often don’t take the time to read.

**Don’t Relate to Their Farming Operation**
Producers decided not to read Extension newsletters because their educational needs were not adequately addressed. A producer confirmed, “I mean it, there’s almost nothing in there about, nurseries because nurseries are growing it’s mostly agriculture you know cows and corn and stuff.” One producer acknowledged, “I typically glance through what it is, see if there’s anything that applies to me. If not, I just throw it in the trash can.” Another producer replied, “I get a little bit of usefulness out of newsletters but I wouldn’t rely on it as my main source of information.”

**Don’t Take Time to Read**
Agricultural production consumes a large segment of the producers’ day leaving little time to read printed material especially Extension newsletters. One producer said, “It always gets tossed eventually. You will find it under the truck seat a few months later.” Another producer stated, “I’m not going to read newsletters, we get so much mail I don’t waste my time with it.”
**Tips for Extension Educators to Enhance Newsletters**

Newsletters can be an effective method for reaching producers who attend or don’t attend Extension educational programs. The newsletters are effective if the targeted audience receives and reads the newsletter. Extension professionals can improve newsletters by: (a) providing relevant and localized information, (b) providing up-to-date production information, (c) using lay terms instead of technical language, and (d) reducing the information covered in the newsletters. Also, Extension professionals can reduce the cost of newsletters by emailing newsletters to producers and placing the newsletter on Extension websites.

**References**

