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## EC1620 Agricultural Review of Nebraska Weekly Newspapers

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA  
AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE EXTENSION SERVICE

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November, 1925

Extension Circular 1620

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Agricultural Review  
of  
Nebraska Weekly Newspapers

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
CO-OPERATING

# Agricultural Review of Nebraska Newspapers

BY ELTON LUX AND VIRGIL MICHAEL

This circular is a report to the Nebraska weekly newspaper editors of a survey of 147 papers made over a six weeks period in August and September of 1924. The authors were particularly interested in the news of Agricultural Extension work and made the survey to determine how much of such news is published and how well it is placed in comparison to other agricultural news in the weekly papers of the state.

Many more than the 147 papers came in irregularly during the period. The report does not include them, but an incompleted summary of them showed no great variation from the averages obtained from the 147 which were completed. Those upon which the report is based came from 79 of the 93 counties of the state and seemed to be representative.

This report will give facts obtained regarding the use of Extension Notes, County Extension Agent news, special stories, other Extension news, market reports, and miscellaneous agricultural news. More detailed information about the conduct of the survey is given on the last page of the circular.

## EXTENSION NOTES

The only regular publication sent to the weekly papers from the Agricultural College Extension Service at Lincoln is a multigraphed sheet called the Agricultural Extension Notes. This single sheet per week contains short paragraphs of timely suggestions telling how to do things that are to be done around every farm home and on every farm. All these suggestions are either written by or have the approval of the College authorities. They are not intended as propaganda for the college but as a real service to the readers of weekly papers who can profit by following the suggestions. They are regarded by the Extension Editor as secondary in news value to good local community news.

Fifty-five per cent of the papers used Extension Notes at least once during the period, 31 per cent of the 882 issues of these papers contained Notes, and 22 per cent of the 4,851 Notes furnished the 147 papers during the period were published. These conclusions were drawn from the figures: The sheet comes to the attention of more



than half the editors of the state; almost one-third of the issues of Nebraska weekly papers contain information furnished them directly from the Agricultural College; and more than one of five of the total number of Notes were published.

Sixty-three per cent of the papers using Notes printed them in columns or groups, sometimes with a special heading but most often with only the headings sent out on the sheets. Thirty-seven per cent scattered them thru the paper and seemed to use them as filler. Those papers which were most regular about printing them used them in columns or groups, however, and seemed to consider them as departments of the papers. In no paper was there noticed any material change in the wording or that of the paragraphs.

It was hoped before the survey began that most of the papers were using the Notes either as columns and groups or as fillers, so the Notes of the future could be more particularly prepared for one use or the other. The College had no preference between the two ways, realizing that each had its value. The percentages of 63 and 37 are each large enough to warrant attention of the Extension Editor to both uses.

Some editors who use the Notes separately have asked that reference to the source of the facts be made in each paragraph so each of them will stand alone as copy for which the editor will not be responsible. These editors do not wish to take the blame if some practice which is generally recommended for the state does not work in their territory, for example. They are justified in asking that such phrases as "according to the Agricultural College," be attached to the first or second sentence of each paragraph, yet this very addition spoils the Notes for the editor who prints them all in a column or group.

The Extension Editor will continue to include the phrases mentioned above and similar ones wherever necessary in the Notes. He will expect the editors to strike them out before they set them up in columns and then place the source of information in their heading if that seems necessary. At the time of the survey, very few editors were careful enough to strike out these phrases and the repetition must have been tiresome to the readers.

Extension Notes filled 3,430 inches of the 147 papers during the period. They represented over 30 per cent of all the agricultural news published by these papers. The average length of the Notes was 3.2 inches.



## COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT NOTES

Most Nebraska county extension agents gather news of their work among the farms and homes and write notes for their papers Saturday or Monday, mailing them to the papers for Wednesday to Friday issues. A few agents depend upon reporters' visits to their offices. Seventy-eight of the 147 papers came from counties where agents are employed and all but three counties having agents in the state were represented.

Seventy-four per cent of these papers used agents' news at least once during the period; forty-two per cent used them more than half the time; and five per cent used them every issue.

The agents' news totaled 2283 inches and averaged 22 inches per issue in which they appeared. Not so much at a time but more often would seem to be a sensible criticism. The survey was made at one of the busiest times of the year for the agents, however, some of them being out of their counties at the State Fair for over a week.

Only 22 per cent of the issues had agents' notes in them. This is the same percentage as found for Extension Notes. Agents' news, because of its local value, should have filled much more total space in more issues than paragraphs of the type of Extension Notes. County extension agents should either submit news more regularly or establish a better contact with their editors.

Two types of agents' news were found, one of straight news style and well worth the space it occupied, and the other a mixture of propaganda and news. The former seemed most attractive when printed as community news and placed according to its relative news value in the paper, not as a special department or column. The latter was always found in a Farm Bureau or County Extension Agent Section and would have been out of place in any other part of the paper. Good news paragraphs were often snowed under in these columns when they should have been printed as some of the most important news of the week. Both editor and agent could be blamed, the editor for not seeing the news value in the paragraph and placing it accordingly, and the agent for submitting it in such a snowdrift of other material.

The ideal use of agents' news was found several times, however, in the opinion of the surveyors. In these examples, the news paragraphs were printed by the editor on the news pages and headed and placed according to their importance, and the other material was written as farm editorials and published in the proper place. The



surveyors believe more editors could depend upon their county extension agents for the suggestions, at least, for farm editorials, and also that this feature of Nebraska's weekly papers needs more attention of the editors.

### **SPECIAL STORIES**

The Agricultural Extension Service circulated the advance news of the purebred sire train which traveled over the state in the fall. The period of the survey was early in the better sires campaign so only the preliminary releases were included. All the material was mimeographed and mailed weekly with about three sheets in each letter.

Papers in towns where the train stopped printed two and a half times as much copy as those in other towns, showing that the news had a special and localized interest. However, 53 per cent of the papers used some of the stories even tho the train visited only 31 towns of the state. Every paper except one from the towns where the train stopped used the preliminary stories and treated them well.

Every story but one released during the period was printed in exact copy, proving that a story which might appeal to one editor might not appeal to another. This was the excuse for volume in each mailing. About two-fifths of the stories were rewritten by editors to fit in with news they wrote about local arrangements for the visits of the train. The survey showed that editors of the weekly papers are community minded men ready to boost an improvement campaign, this particular example being the encouragement of more purebred dairy sires on Nebraska farms.

### **OTHER EXTENSION NEWS**

This group included several stories prepared and sent upon special request of individual papers or to all the papers of certain counties. Naturally, the use of them was nearly 100 per cent. The survey included this group more to show positions which the stories occupied than to check their use. Seventeen stories were used which totaled 217 inches. All of them were in good position.

### **MARKET REPORTS**

Market reports included in the survey were only those of local markets. Only fifty per cent of the papers printed such reports during the period. Twenty-four per cent of the issues contained reports. Only five papers printed them regularly and only 17 more than half

the time. The average length was 2.9 inches. Generally speaking, the position was not good.

### MISCELLANEOUS AGRICULTURAL NEWS

This division of the survey included news about county fairs, fall farmer's festivals, general agriculture, etc., but did not include news of a personal interest such as an item that some farmer marketed hogs this week.

Only 27 per cent of the issues surveyed contained any news of this general nature. The 361 stories averaged 10.4 inches in length and totaled 3,751 inches or 33 per cent of the space occupied by news included in this survey. In other words, Nebraska weekly papers were getting about two-thirds of their farm news from the Agricultural Extension Service and its County Extension Agents.

### COMPARISON — COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT VS. NON-AGENT COUNTIES

The surveyors had no intention of comparing the papers from the agent and the non-agent counties until after the data had been recorded and summarized. A comparison at that time showed that the 78 papers from agent counties contained an average of 99.4 inches of agricultural news each while the 69 papers from non-agent counties contained but 51.2 inches. Excluding agents' news, the 78 papers averaged 70 inches as compared with 61 inches of the 69 papers.

This comparison led the surveyors to figure the sizes of the papers and their proportionate amounts of advertising. The average paper in agent counties contained 980 inches of print space and 296 inches of home advertising. The average paper in non-agent counties contained 1111 inches of space and 314 inches of home advertising. Considering these figures, the surveyors concluded that there is very little difference in the financial ability of papers in the two groups to use news. Therefore, Extension work has directly and indirectly created a greater interest in agriculture in organized counties employing agents.

### DETAILS OF THE SURVEY

The surveyors wrote a letter to each editor of a Nebraska weekly paper explaining the survey and asking that one copy of each issue in the period be sent to the Agricultural College at Lincoln. Addressed clippings were furnished. The letter carried the endorsement of the Nebraska Press Association thru Ole Buck, Field Manager, to whom



the surveyors are indebted for many suggestions also. It was intended that a second survey should be made just six months later so the data would represent a year instead of just a season. This second survey could not be made because of other pressing work.

The Rural Economics Department of the College thru Prof. J. O. Rankin, Rural Sociologist, assisted in outlining the survey and drawing up the record blanks.

It was intended that the survey should also include relative amounts of home print, home advertising, and agricultural news, but the surveyors did not have the time to spend which it would have taken to get all this data. Therefore no complete comparison could be made between the agricultural news and all the other news of the papers.

Each paper was measured and the inches, position, and key number of each item in which the surveyors were interested were recorded. Compilations were made on summary sheets from which this report has been made.