


Kentucky Farmers' Needs and Sources of Information

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By A. N. Halter*

What kinds of information do Kentucky farmers use in setting up and operating their farms? How important are those kinds of information to them? How and where do Kentucky farmers get information they need? What kinds of information do Kentucky farmers find difficult to get? These and other questions concerning Kentucky farmers' needs and sources of information will be discussed in this report.¹

Although the data presented in this report do not apply to all Kentucky farmers, let us look at the characteristics of the Kentucky farmer whose needs and sources of information we will be discussing. He is about 50 years old and has more than two dependents, a three-year average gross farm income of \$6,600, an average net worth of \$36,000, total assets of over \$43,500, and over \$2,200 worth of debts.

Of the Kentucky farmers that you might see like him, 9 out of 10 of them have grown up on a farm, 7 out of 10 have farming as their only source of income, 8 out of 10 are not former members of a 4-H club or F. F. A. chapter, 55 out of 100 attend two or more county agent and extension specialist's meetings each year, and 5 out of 10 attend two or more farm organization meetings.

This Kentucky farmer manages about 216 acres of land, of which he owns 150 acres and rents 66 acres. Out of 100 of this kind of farmer, 33 consider tobacco their main crop, 32 consider hogs their main livestock product, 24 consider grain or livestock other than hogs their main product, and the remainder call some other product their main one.

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¹The data for this report came from a survey taken in 1954 in Daviess, Henderson, McLean, Union, and Webster counties. The farmers interviewed were those living on non-urban commercial farms with a gross income of \$2,500 or more and who were considered as the sole managers of their farms. A simple random sample of area segments based on the 1950 census was drawn, and every farmer in the segment fitting the above description was interviewed. Thus, the information presented in this publication is considered representative of the entire population with the same characteristics. The needs and sources questions were part of a larger questionnaire concerned with the decision-making process. A total of 124 farmers were interviewed; however, some questions were asked only of a portion of the total. See each section for the number of farmers asked specific questions.

With reference to the type of farming they are doing, 32 out of 100 are in fat stock farming, 30 have tobacco and fat stock, 26 have cash crops and fat stock, and the remainder are either dairy farmers or general farmers. You would also find that this Kentucky farmer has operated a farm for himself for more than 21 years and has run the place that he is living on for almost 16 years. Also he has had almost 9 years of formal education, but 8 out of 10 chances he has not had additional training outside of school.

Information This Kentucky Farmer Would Use in Setting Up a Farm

In response to the question, "What should a farmer find out before setting up a farm in a strange area for a strange family?", five kinds of information were mentioned in the following frequency:²

Price information	3
Production information	54
Information about new technical developments	1
Information about farmer or self, self-environment of farm, other individuals, neighbors as a group, community populace as a group	35
Information on institutions	<u>25</u>
Total	118

It is interesting to note that at least one of the five kinds of information was mentioned by 23 out of 100 farmers, two kinds were mentioned by 46 out of 100, three by 26 out of 100, and only 5 out of 100 mentioned none of them.

The frequency of specific content for each kind of information mentioned was:

Price information

Cost of living and farming - 3.

Production information

Breeds of livestock - 1; water supply - 7; varieties of crops - 3; fertilizer and fertilizer use - 3; irrigation possibilities - 1; general nature of soils - 8; handling characteristics of soils - 4; topography and profile of soils - 6; types and kinds of soils - 7; productivity of soils - 24; fertility and acidity of soils - 10; drainage and tiling - 6; moisture in soils - 1; history of the use of soil - 2;

²Asked of 61 farmers.

adaptability of soils to crops - 24; management practices for soils - 3; tillage practices for soils - 1; weather - 6; farm buildings - 3; fencing - 4; machinery and equipment - 3; diseases and insects - 1; crop yields - 2; kinds of crops grown - 1; general history of farm - 3; farm composition - 5; type of farming area - 2; kind and quality of farm - 3.

New technological information

Machinery, equipment, and labor-saving devices and practices - 1.

Farmer or self, self-environment of farm, other individuals, neighbors as a group, community populace as a group

General personal qualities - 6; education and experience - 6; credit rating and financial status - 5; work attitudes and orientation - 3; managerial ability - 7; health and age - 1; religion and religious practices - 1; general and specific aspects of his preference system - 5; family characteristics - 6; location and setting - 4; businessmen - 1; general characteristics of neighbors as a group - 5; general characteristics of community populace - 5.

Information on institutions

Neighborhood - 4; general structure and service facilities of community - 2; community as a unit - 3; kind and quality of school - 1; general character of schools - 10; general character of churches - 9; distance to and location of markets - 3; kinds and quality of market - 1; general character of markets - 4; transportation systems - 4; taxes - 2; policies and programs of federal government - 1; labor market and general labor situation - 1.

Information this Kentucky Farmer Would Use in Operating a Farm

In response to the question, "What kinds of information do you think a farmer ought to keep up with in order to operate a going farm business to get the greatest profit?", five kinds of information were mentioned in the following frequency:³

Price information	62
Production information	71
Information about new technical developments	16
Information about farmer or self, self-environment of farm, other individuals, neighbors as a group, community populace as a group	5
Information about institutions	<u>22</u>
Total	176

³Asked of 105 farmers.

In regard to these major information categories, 42 out of 100 farmers mentioned at least one of them; 42 out of 100 mentioned two; 13 out of 100, three; 2 out of 100, four; and only one out of 100 did not mention any.

The frequency of specific content for each kind of information mentioned was:

Price information

General interest in prices - 4; prices paid by farmers - 8; prices received by farmers - 19; support price information - 3; long-range trends in prices - 2; general economic outlook - 3; seasonal prices - 1; current prices and short-term trends - 13; past prices - 1; cost of living and farming - 4; current market conditions - 23; supply outlook - 10; demand outlook - 4; price lookout - 5; grade of product - 1; time of marketing - 1.

Production information

General livestock production - 1; breeds of livestock - 1; grains and roughage feeds - 1; feeding rates and practices - 6; water supply - 1; general crop production - 2; varieties of crops - 13; timing of crop production - 2; crop rotations - 6; crop insects and diseases and weeds - 2; crop management - 4; fertilizer and fertilizer use - 26; general soil information - 2; handling characteristics of soil - 1; topography and profile of soil - 1; type and kind of soil - 1; productivity of soil - 6; fertility and acidity of soil - 11; drainage and tiling - 1; soil moisture - 2; adaptability of soil - 6; management practices for soil - 8; tillage practices - 3; erosion - 1; weather - 2; farm buildings - 2; fencing - 1; machinery and equipment - 1; diseases and insects - 4; general crop outputs - 1; kinds of crops - 2; general livestock output - 1; kinds of livestock - 1; marketing weights of livestock - 1; information on which crop will do best - 1; other livestock information - 2; other crop information - 1; unspecified production methods and factors - 6; enterprise combinations - 2; general interest in category without specific content - 7.

Information about new technical developments

Disease, insect, and weed control - 1; machinery, equipment, and labor-saving devices and practices - 3; fertilizer and fertilizer rates - 4; crop and soil production practices - 5; livestock production practices - 1; buildings, fencing, and non-land real estate - 1; general interest without specific references - 7.

Information about farmer or self, self-environment of farm, other individuals, neighbors as a group, and community populace as a group

Education and experience - 1; credit rating and financial status - 1; managerial ability - 1; county agents - 2; watch hired hands - 1.

Information about institutions

Distance to and location of markets - 1; kinds and quality of markets - 3; general reference to markets - 9; transportation systems - 1; politics and political parties - 2; national government unspecified - 1; policies and programs of national government - 6; national government organizations - 2; private credit arrangements - 2; non-government organizations - 1; foreign and world news and affairs - 2.

In response to the question, "What kinds of information do you think a farmer ought to keep up with in order to operate a going farm business for the greatest satisfaction of his entire family?", five kinds of information were mentioned in the following frequency:⁴

Price information	4
Production information	8
Information about new technical developments	2
Information about farmer or self, self-environment of farm, other individuals, neighbors as a group, community populace as a group	5
Information about institutions	18
Information about home technology	9
Cannot think of anything	18
Miscellaneous	6

The frequency of specific content for each kind of information mentioned was

Price information

General economic outlook - 1; cost of living and farming - 1; supply outlook - 2; demand outlook - 1.

Production information

Breeds of livestock - 1; fertilizer and fertilizer use - 1; general reference to soils - 1; productivity of soils - 1; adaptability of soils - 1; management practices on soils - 3; labor uses - 1; farm buildings - 1; enterprise combinations - 1; general interest in category - 1.

⁴Asked of 54 farmers.

Information about new technical developments

Crop and soil production practices - 1; new ways of building up farm - 1.

Information about farmer or self, self-environment of farm, other individuals, neighbors as a group, community populace as a group

Managerial ability - 2; interest in farming - 1; food and clothing - 1; high school agriculture teacher - 1; sociability of neighbors as a group - 1; cooperativeness of neighbors as a group - 1.

Information about institutions

General structure and service facilities of community - 1; community activities - 2; kind and quality of schools - 3; school activities - 2; school politics - 1; general reference of schools - 4; church activities - 3; general reference to churches - 5; social, recreational, and entertainment facilities and activities - 4; national government policies and programs - 1; private credit arrangements - 1; non-governmental farm organizations - 1; foreign and world news and affairs - 2.

Importance of Five Kinds of Information to this Kentucky Farmer

The question was asked, "In the light of your own experience in getting information to set up and run your farm to get the most out of life, which of these types of information have you found to be the most important to you?" The frequencies of the different degrees of relative importance attached to the five kinds of information are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 - NUMBER OF FARMERS ASSIGNING DIFFERENT DEGREES OF RELATIVE IMPORTANCE TO THE FIVE MAJOR INFORMATION CATEGORIES

Degree of Importance by Kind of Information	Number of farmers
<u>Most important</u>	
Prices	48
Production information	30
New developments	7
Human information ^a	7
Information about institutions	14
<u>Second most important</u>	
Prices	22
Production information	36
New developments	13
Human information ^a	13
Information about institutions	15
<u>Least important</u>	
Prices	9
Production information	7
New developments	26
Human information ^a	32
Information about institutions	17
<u>All equally important</u>	12
<u>Could not rank any</u>	4
<u>Question not answered</u>	2
Number of farmers interviewed	124

^aRefers to farmer or self, self environment of farm, other individuals, neighbors as a group, community populace as a group.

Source of Information that this Kentucky Farmer Uses in Getting Information

The Kentucky farmer that we described uses both communicative and non-communicative ways of getting his information. Under communicative source he can use mass media, public supported sources, private supported sources, and other individuals for information. By non-communicative ways he can use his own or others' past experience, experimentation or reasoning to get information. The number of farmers using these sources of information and ways of getting information about the five major categories are shown in Tables 2 to 6.

TABLE 2 - NUMBER OF FARMERS USING MASS MEDIA TO OBTAIN FIVE KINDS OF INFORMATION^a

Kind of Information	Kind of Media				
	Farm Magazines	News-papers	Radio	TV	Mail Advertising
<u>Prices received</u>					
Past and trends	17	9	9	1	1
Current and changes	6	26	31	3	2
Outlook	22	18	15	2	2
<u>Prices paid</u>					
Past and trends	6	5	3	1	1
Current and changes	3	8	6	3	2
Outlook	12	9	6	2	2
<u>Production factors</u>					
Existing varieties of crops and livestock	15	6	4	0	1
Existing methods of production	15	5	3	0	1
Climate, soil, and disease conditions	10	9	10	2	1
<u>New developments</u>	18	6	5	0	0
<u>Human factors</u>					
People you have to deal with	0	1	0	0	0
People whose reactions are important	0	1	0	0	0
<u>Information about institutions</u>					
General economic conditions	10	19	14	1	1
Local informal groups	1	4	0	0	1
Non-government groups	3	5	1	0	1
Federal, state, and local government	7	14	8	0	1

^aAsked of 64 farmers.

TABLE 3 - NUMBER OF FARMERS USING PUBLIC SUPPORTED SOURCES TO OBTAIN FIVE KINDS OF INFORMATION^a

Kind of Information	Source				
	County agents, voc. ag. and ag. college representatives	Demonstrations, meetings and lectures	Publications, extension services	Government people	Formal school
<u>Prices received</u>					
Past and trends	8	1	4	3	1
Current and changes	4	1	2	1	1
Outlook	11	2	1	3	1
<u>Prices paid</u>					
Past and trends	3	1	1	0	1
Current and changes	2	1	1	0	1
Outlook	7	2	1	2	1
<u>Production factors</u>					
Existing varieties of crops and livestock	37	1	6	3	1
Existing methods of production	43	2	6	1	1
Climate, soil, and disease conditions	41	0	4	7	1
<u>New developments</u>	18	3	3	1	1
<u>Human factors</u>					
People you have to deal with	2	0	0	0	0
People whose reactions are important	2	0	0	0	0
<u>Information about institutions</u>					
General economic conditions	4	1	0	5	0
Local informal groups	1	0	0	0	0
Non-government groups	1	0	0	2	0
Federal, state, and local government	13	1	0	21	0

^aAsked of 64 farmers.

TABLE 4 - NUMBER OF FARMERS USING PRIVATE SUPPORTED SOURCES TO OBTAIN FIVE KINDS OF INFORMATION^a

Kind of Information	Source			
	Truckers, cus- tom operators, and route drivers	Dealers, salesmen and buyers	Bankers and lending agents	Profes- sional farm managers
<u>Prices received</u>				
Past and trends	1	6	1	2
Current and changes	1	15	3	2
Outlook	1	8	3	4
<u>Prices paid</u>				
Past and trends	1	18	0	2
Current and changes	1	46	0	2
Outlook	1	21	3	5
<u>Production factors</u>				
Existing varieties of crops and livestock	2	8	0	6
Existing methods of production	0	2	0	3
Climate, soil, and disease conditions	0	0	0	2
<u>New developments</u>	0	16	0	0
<u>Human factors</u>				
People you have to deal with	1	8	9	0
People whose reactions are important	0	0	1	0
<u>Information about institutions</u>				
General economic conditions	0	0	1	2
Local informal groups	0	0	1	0
Non-government groups	0	0	0	0
Federal, state, and local government	0	0	0	0

^aAsked of 64 farmers.

TABLE 5. - NUMBER OF FARMERS USING OTHER INDIVIDUALS AS SOURCES OF FIVE KINDS OF INFORMATION^a

Kind of Information	Source			
	People from farm or organizations	Publications of farm organizations	Neighbors and relatives	Auctions
<u>Prices received</u>				
Past and trends	2	2	5	2
Current and changes	1	2	2	5
Outlook	1	3	6	2
<u>Prices paid</u>				
Past and trends	1	1	4	1
Current and changes	1	2	1	2
Outlook	1	2	4	1
<u>Production factors</u>				
Existing varieties of crops and livestock	4	2	17	0
Existing methods of production	4	1	11	0
Climate, soil, and disease conditions	1	1	3	0
<u>New developments</u>	1	2	12	0
<u>Human factors</u>				
People you have to deal with	0	0	28	0
People whose reactions are important	0	0	7	0
<u>Information about institutions</u>				
General economic conditions	0	1	9	0
Local informal groups	3	0	4	0
Non-government groups	9	8	3	0
Federal, state, and local government	3	2	3	0

^aAsked of 64 farmers.

TABLE 6. - NUMBER OF FARMERS USING NON-COMMUNICATIVE WAYS OF GETTING THE FIVE KINDS OF INFORMATION^a

Kind of Information	Ways of Getting Information					
	Past experience	Keeping written records	Observing experience of others	Trial and error on whole operation	Experi- menta- tion on a limited scale	Reasoning from in- formation known to be true
<u>Prices received</u>						
Past and trends	29	21	1	0	0	2
Current and changes	9	2	0	0	0	3
Outlook	4	0	0	0	0	5
<u>Prices paid</u>						
Past and trends	19	12	0	0	0	0
Current and changes	8	0	0	0	0	0
Outlook	6	1	4	0	0	5
<u>Production factors</u>						
Existing varieties of crops and livestock	26	3	22	6	10	0
Existing methods of production	28	7	19	6	8	1
Climate, soil, and disease conditions	23	0	7	3	6	1
<u>New developments</u>	2	0	23	3	11	1
<u>Human factors</u>						
People you have to deal with	28	0	2	0	2	0
People whose reactions are important	12	0	4	0	0	1
<u>Information about institutions</u>						
General economic conditions	7	1	1	0	0	11
Local informal groups	3	0	3	0	0	0
Non-government groups	2	0	2	0	0	2
Federal, state, and local government	6	0	2	0	0	6

^aAsked of 64 farmers.

Difficulty in Getting the Five Kinds of Information by this Kentucky Farmer

The question was asked, "In the light of your own experience in getting information then, which of these types has been the most difficult to get?" The frequencies of relative difficulties experienced in securing the five kinds of information are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7. -- NUMBER OF FARMERS INDICATING DIFFERENT RELATIVE DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED IN SECURING FIVE MAJOR KINDS OF INFORMATION

<u>Relative Difficulty by Kind of Information</u>	<u>Number of Farmers</u>
<u>Most difficult</u>	
Prices	23
Production information	12
New developments	9
Human information ^a	11
Information about institutions	15
<u>Second most difficult</u>	
Prices	9
Production information	12
New developments	14
Human information ^a	14
Information about institutions	11
<u>Least difficult</u>	
Prices	16
Production information	17
New developments	9
Human information ^a	10
Information about institutions	8
<u>All five are equally difficult</u>	40
<u>All five are equally easy</u>	3
<u>Could not rank any</u>	10
<u>Number of farmers interviewed</u>	124

^aRefers to farmer or self, self-environment of farm, other individuals, neighbors as a group, community populace as a group.

Summary

This report has: (1) been concerned with the needs for information of a segment of Kentucky farmers and (2) presented the sources of information used by this segment of Kentucky farmers.

In regard to the need for information, it was found that production information was needed most frequently in setting up a farm and in operating it for greatest profit. When the goal is "the greatest satisfaction for the entire family," then information about institutions was found to be needed most frequently.

In regard to the importance of the five major types of information, farmers said that price information was most important and that human information was least important. Also price information was reported as the most difficult to get, while production information was the easiest to obtain. The sources of information are presented in Tables 3 through 6. The interesting comparison that can be made there is between communicative and non-communicative ways of getting information. It is quite apparent (Table 6) that farmers use their own resources in getting information to practically the same extent that they use many of the other sources.

This report can serve, among others, the following two purposes: (1) as a basis of evaluating the existing sources of information in regard to the kind and amount of information being provided and (2) as a "benchmark" for further research. Since the data in this report are from a 1954 survey, the conditions in which farmers are making decisions may have changed. Thus the kinds of information they need may change accordingly. A second survey of this group of farmers or a similar sample would provide data for analyzing the changes in the needs and sources of information.

Other references on this topic and the decision-making process:

Interstate Managerial Project Committee, Summary Data from the Interstate Managerial Survey, Ky. Agr. Exp. Sta. Bul. 669, June 1959.

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