

## 2.

### **Front Covers That Attract Readers**

A FARM PAPER EDITOR is in some ways like the publisher of a picture magazine who tries to build up his newsstand sales. But the farm paper's newsstand is the table in the front room where the mail is dumped. Which paper or which magazine in that collection will catch the eye of the possible reader?

We have to keep in mind that in Iowa half of the farm homes take four or more farm publications and three or more general non-farm magazines. Wisconsin farmers read a little less avidly, but the competition is still severe. And in both states, almost everybody takes a newspaper and has a radio and a television set.

The non-reader problem is a major one for an editor. And it ties directly into the use of the front cover.

How do we define a non-reader? He is any adult who lives in a family where the paper is received and who doesn't read the issue being surveyed.

Farm papers are not the only ones that have trouble.

A good co-op newspaper, the *Midland Cooperator*, surveyed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, had 44 per cent of its possible men readers in the non-reader class, and 33 per cent of the women. (1) A well-edited house organ of a feed company reported one internal survey which showed a non-reader problem of somewhat the same nature.

If page one demands attention, the potential non-reader may pick up the copy. If the bait is good enough, he may open up the paper and read something inside.

When you look over the score for non-readers, you realize how important page one is. *Wallaces Farmer*, for instance, has a 20 issue mean of 14.5 per cent men non-readers and 17.9 per cent women non-readers. The *Wisconsin Agriculturist* has a mean over 19 issues of 16.8 per cent men non-readers and 16.1 per cent women non-readers.

Remember that a 20 per cent non-reader figure does not mean that 20 per cent of the households on the subscription list sample had no readers of the issue surveyed. The non-reader figure deals with individuals, not with households. In visiting 10 households, one of our interviewers may find 16 readers and four non-readers (20 per cent non-readers), but he may also find that the 16 readers are so distributed that there is, at least, one reader in every household.

The Advertising Research Foundation in its "Continuing Study of Farm Publications" found that *Wallaces Farmer* had 1.76 readers per copy in spite of the fact that the non-reader percentage for that issue was fairly high. (2)

One way to try to find out which cover is doing

the job is to check non-readers. *Wallaces Farmer* did best with men in March 1954 and March 1952. In the 1954 issue, the non-reader score was 6.8 per cent. In the 1952 issue, the non-reader score was 9.2. What kind of cover was used in each case?

Each had a timely theme appropriate to the month and the season, a big head playing up this theme, a picture to illustrate it and a caption written in article style. In each case, plugs were added.

In March 1954, the page scored 94 with men; the copy scored 75 per cent Read Most for men; the head, not scored, was "Got Manure Hauled?" Four plugs, all aimed at men, scored Read Some 63 for men and 32 for women.

Did these two covers score high because they were effective or because farmers do more reading in March? There is some evidence that these March covers did not score high simply because they were in March. We have had some low March scores. As reported later, we have had high scores in September, April and November.

Yet this does illustrate the value of the split run. Any effect of the season on the score is wiped out when we have a cover split. On the November 6, 1954 issue of *Wisconsin Agriculturist* the shift from a dairy cover (A) to a farm family cover (B) showed a marked difference among women in favor of B. November weather made no difference. A and B were affected the same.

In Wisconsin, we find that the lowest (therefore best) three non-reader scores for men appeared in the following issues:

March 3, 1951 (non-reader score 9.7 per cent)

November 2, 1957 (non-reader score 12 per cent)

April 2, 1960 (non-reader score 10.7 per cent on A copy).

Of these, the 1957 issue used the standard head above the cut and a somewhat weaker caption than some of our other good-scoring pages. The page score was 93 for men. The caption scored 70 for men.

The 1951 issue used a strong head also, but mortised it in the lower part of the cut. The caption was written in article style. Men scored 91 on the page and 79 on the copy.

Of these issues with a low non-reader score, only the April 2, 1960, A version broke the pattern. It had no head, a short caption, and fairly strong plugs. Score for the page was 90 for men, for the plugs 52 and for the caption 51.

This question always comes up, "Why don't we get a 100 per cent score on a cover among readers of the issue? Doesn't a farmer notice the cover when he picks it up?"

Sometimes he doesn't. A farmer may turn directly to a special department like "What's Ahead." A woman may turn to the homemaking section. Each recognizes, by the different cover, that it is a new issue, but that is as much as some respondents will report.

In the listing above, women's scores on the cover have not been given. Mostly they were poor and for a good reason. The cover often did not have anything of interest for women.

There are some exceptions. In *Wallaces Farmer* (January 7, 1959), the theme was planning gardens.

In the B version, the women's score was 89 per cent for the cover.

Another issue (January 18, 1958) had farm records as the theme with a man and woman in the picture. Scores for the picture were 85 per cent for men and also for women.

Shifting to *Wisconsin Agriculturist*, we find the April 5, 1958 issue had one of the high scoring covers. Here color was used on a dairy picture, and plugs played up with plenty of white space were put in the upper right hand corner of the picture. (It might be noted that a *Wallaces Farmer* cover using plugs in about the same position also got good plug results on this placing.)

The *Wisconsin Agriculturist* cover scored for the picture, 85 for men and 84 for women; for the plugs, 69 for men and 51 for women.

Two more *Wallaces Farmer* covers also might be noted. In March 16, 1957, there was a big head overprinted "When Neighbors Stop To Chat." The picture score was 91 and 86; the caption 74 and 59. Here the caption was mortised in the lower part of the cut.

In the September 20, 1958 issue, the head was overprinted "You Helped Buy Them," a reference to a campaign to buy gilts for flood-hit farmers. The picture scored 90.5 for men and 74.5 for women. A split on this issue showed that an expanded plug set like a caption and crowded with too little white space produced a low score.

What good are plugs? We are fairly sure that they do not help the score of the article plugged. Splits have seemed to prove this. That is why we now leave off the

page number on the plug. What the plug does — if we are smart enough — is to pull readers into the issue.

An example is *Wisconsin Agriculturist*, October 3, 1959. On the cover split, we used "Harvest Time Comes to Wisconsin" as the A plug and "What Farmers Think of Khrushchev's Visit . . . Page 20" as the B plug.

The article on page 20 scored 58 per cent Read Most for men in A and 59 in B. For women, 45 in A and 45 in B.

\* \* \*

What kind of material goes best on page one? After going over reader-interest surveys for a number of years in both states, there seems a fairly strong case for the following ingredients:

1. Use a timely theme for picture, head and copy. If the theme deals with a subject likely to be on the farmer's mind at the time he gets the paper, he will probably look at the issue. This is standard editorial policy for planning timely articles.

**EXAMPLE:** On the October 5, 1957 *Wallaces Farmer* is a picture of a man greasing a combine. The head (below picture) is "Keep It Greased." The copy — handled like a short article — talks about soybean combining. Plugs also play up soybeans. The score for the page was 92 for men; 77 for women (Figure 2.6).

It might be noted also that the non-reader score for men in the October 5, 1957 *Wallaces Farmer* was 14.4, and for women 20.5. Yet, there was nothing on the cover for women readers. Another good cover was the September 15, 1956, *Wallaces Farmer* with the head "Feeders Moving Fast" below the cut. Copy, handled like a short article, dealt with late news on feeder shipments. Plugs hit other subjects.

2. A strong head, 42-point or bigger, seems desirable to emphasize the cover theme. This head can either be overprinted on part of the cut (provided it's that kind of a picture) or better—played up heavily under the cut.
3. The caption should be handled like a short article—large type and enough detail to stress the theme.
4. Plugs should include some references to women's copy, and should be lively enough to qualify as good bait.
5. Change the cover style from issue to issue in order to make sure that the reader knows he is getting a fresh copy. A big head can help on this—so can changes in layout.

#### NOTES ON COVER PAGES

Pick out the major theme for the issue, the most timely, the most important. Use a photograph that illustrates this theme and put it on page one. An example is the November 5, 1949 issue of *Wallaces Farmer*. Corn had blown down early in the fall and there was the big job of picking up fallen ears. The cover played this up and got a page score of 96.4 per cent for men and 86.7 per cent for women. The same theme was used on page five, where men had a Read Most score of 65.1 and a page score of 89.2.

\* \* \*

A caption under the cover picture should not be too long or too tight. In the A version of the January 17, 1959 *Wallaces Farmer*, a four-line caption (Vogue 12-point) was stretched out to 47 picas. It scored badly, especially with women, against a caption set in 12-point Corona, with short lines (14 picas). The score with women in A was 49; B, 70. This was women's gardening copy.

\* \* \*

Women and children, in a good picture, will draw men as well as women. The November 5, 1955, *Wisconsin Agriculturist* cover had a school scene in a close-up of children and teacher with a reverse head across top "How Well Can Johnny Read." There was no caption (probably a mistake) and plugs. Men scored 85.2 per cent and women 81.5 per cent for the page (Figure 2.1).

\* \* \*

Another problem is the dirt picture vs. human interest picture. The November 6, 1954 *Wisconsin Agriculturist* ran a split of different covers. In A was a dairy picture (Bang's test) with a head "Blood Will Tell" and expanded caption. In B, was a farm family at the store buying clothes with a head "Sure Sign of Winter" and expanded caption. Both pictures did well; women gave B a little preference. Each had a big head, expanded caption and plugs. Each was timely.

	Men		Women	
	A	B	A	B
Any This Page	93.4%	95.3%	81.8%	93.5%
Picture . . .	92.0	92.9	80.9	90.7
Plugs . . . .	50.0	54.1	38.2	56.5
Caption . . .	79.2	65.9	55.4	69.4

\* \* \*

If you want women to read the issue, play to them on the cover. In October 5, 1955 *Wallaces Farmer*, the A issue of the split had a picture of a Master Farm Homemaker. B did not have a picture of a woman. The score for the page was 96 per cent for A with women, 62 per cent for B.



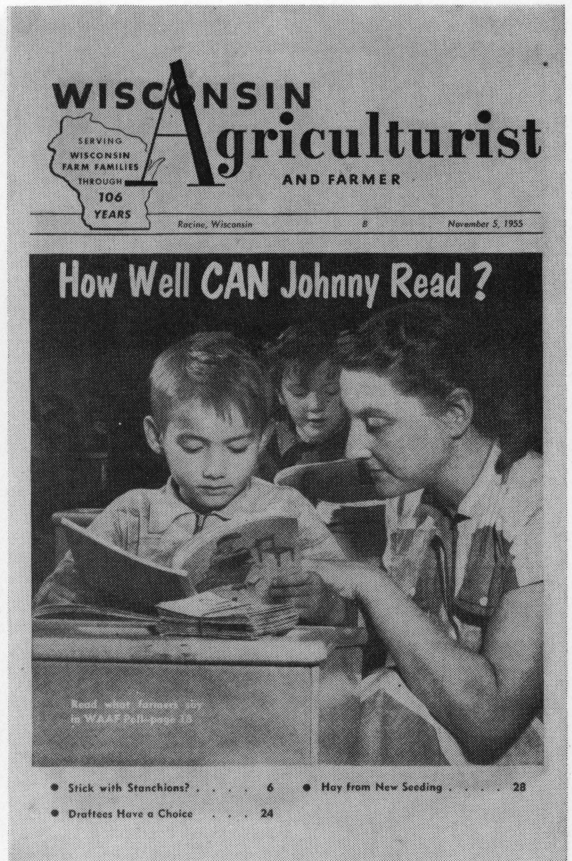
Figure 2.1

## Cover Page

Page Score

**Men 85.2%**

**Women 81.5%**



## Covers That Pull Readers

Not every reader of an issue really looks at the cover. Some turn directly to the department they usually read. But an attractive cover can draw the attention of men and women who might otherwise be non-readers.

This *Wisconsin Agriculturist* cover did well with both men and women. It also built up an audience for the article on page 18 that was plugged by the cover and the caption. That article on Johnny and his reading habits scored 59.5 Read Most with women.

*Wisconsin Agriculturist, November 5, 1955*

# Wallaces Farmer

FEBRUARY 4, 1961



IOWA'S LEADING FARM NEWSPAPER



**KIDS ENJOY** Iowa winters even if many groupies have lost their appreciation of the cold months! These happy young men are Ronald, 8, and Bob, 6, sons of the Len Jacobsons, Adair county, Iowa. (A)

- ★ What limits corn yields?
- ★ Lighting your living room
- ★ How to balance hog rations

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE IOWA LEGISLATURE — PAGE 16

Figure 2.2

## Cover Split A

Page Score

**Men 97%**

**Women 91%**

## Close-up Does Better

In this cover split on *Wallaces Farmer*, both the close-up A version and the long shot B version did well with both men and women. However, the close-up A picture not only scored higher with readers, but also had fewer non-readers among those exposed to the issue.

This cover did an unusually good job in pulling women into the issue without scaring off men. Farm children in Adair (or Pocahontas) County, Iowa, appeal to farm men and women in Iowa.

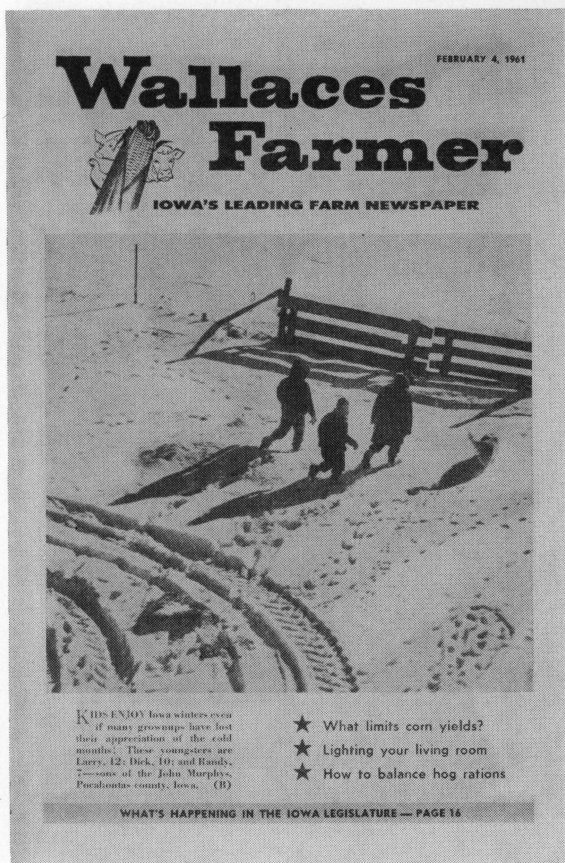
Figure 2.3

## Cover Split B

Page Score

**Men 86%**

**Women 81%**



Scores for A and B follow. Note that readership held up fairly well down through the plugs at the bottom of the page.

	Men		Women	
	A	B	A	B
Any Page 1 . . . . .	97%	86%	91%	81%
Picture . . . . .	95	85	89	90
Caption . . . . .	64	61	65	51
Plugs . . . . .	68	68	59	41

Wallaces Farmer, February 4, 1961

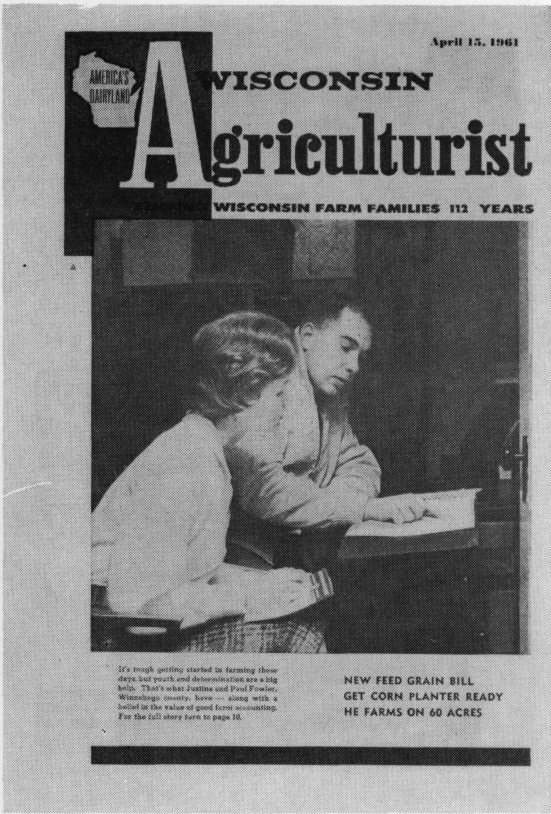


Figure 2.4

## Cover Split A

Page Score

**Men 86%**

**Women 85%**

## The Headline Helped

Does it pay to use a strong head on the cover? In this Wisconsin split, the A version uses no head; the B version uses a head. This is the only difference.

In cutting down the number of non-readers, the B cover (head) did much better than A with women and a little better with men. The readership scores also give an edge to B with men.

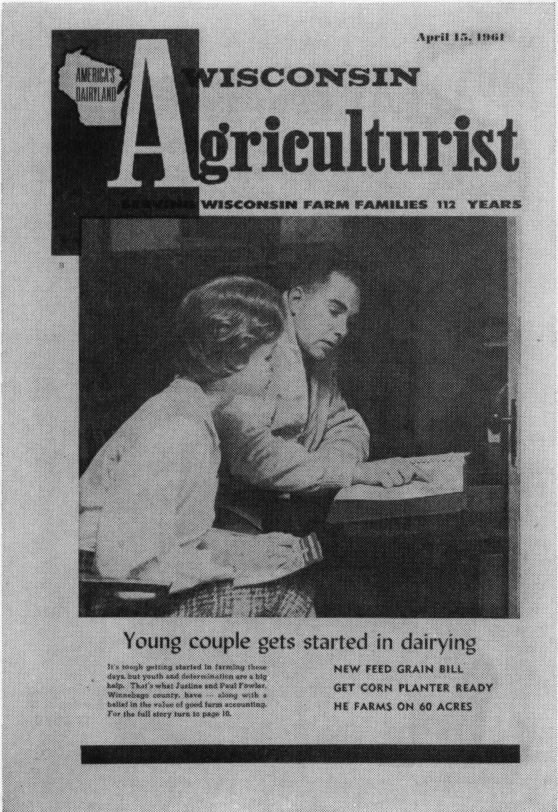
Figure 2.5

Cover Split B

Page Score

Men 94%

Women 83%



The head in B also pulled up the score for the caption in B. Men's scores were 52 for the caption in A and 70 in B.

The combination of picture, head and caption directed interest toward the article plugged. On page 10, this article showed a higher score in B for both men and women.

Read Some	A	B
Men . . . . .	52%	64%
Women . . . . .	24	33

Wisconsin Agriculturist, April 15, 1961



# WALLACES' FARMER and Iowa Homestead

IOWA'S LEADING FARM NEWSPAPER

OCTOBER 5, 1957



## Keep it greased ★

### Soybeans

When to sell . . . . . page 8

How to harvest . . . . . 52

SOYBEAN COMBINING starts off the fall work rush. You want to beat possible bad weather. And to get at corn picking—the season's last big share. Still, it's no time to skip regular and thorough greasing. Shown above is Ira Hartwick greasing one of those "hard to get at" spots you find so often. He operates a farm owned by Guy Miller in Davis county, Iowa.

Figure 2.6

Cover Page

Page Score

Men 92%

Women 77%

## Timely Theme Pays Off

Soybean harvesting reaches a peak in Iowa in early October. So a cover aimed at this timely theme scored well. A picture of a farmer greasing a combine (in Davis County, Iowa) scored 89 per cent for men and 77 for women.

In general, this is the pattern that has paid off in cover scores. Pick a timely theme, illustrate it with an Iowa (or Wisconsin) farmer doing something appropriate and use headline and caption to emphasize the topic.

*Wallaces Farmer, October 5, 1957*