# 7.

## More Experiments in Readership

WHAT GOOD has this testing done the two papers? If you put readership scores on a long chart, you find a lot of zig-zags but no impressive gains over the years. Like another famous character, by running as fast as we could, we have managed to stay in the same place.

For a brief illustration, look at the readership scores for *Wallaces Farmer* in March 9, 1940 and January 16, 1960.

How many non-readers then and now?

| | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|
| **1940** | **23%** | **20.7%** |
| **1960** | **18** | **24.5** |

A look at the 20 year report on non-readers indicates a little change. Allow for bad weather, rush seasons, etc., and you come out in about the same place.

What about readership scores? Another small sample shows.

| Lead editorial | Read Most — Men |
|---|---|
| **1940 "Sell More Lard"** | **53.3%** |
| **1960 "What Do Price Supports Do"** | **54.5** |

"Country Air," for women, in 1960 scored within a few points of the 1940 figure. Copy on hogs ran a little higher in 1960.

If you look at the long chart, it seems that the war period brought an increase in readership. It brought more important news on farm programs, ceilings, etc. There was also less chance to get away from home on account of gas rationing.

Crises bring more readership. We don't know what the AAA period in the 'thirties would have scored since we didn't survey then. A guess is that scores would have been high. When everything is going smoothly, readership drops. When there is an early frost, a drop in the price of hogs or a new farm program, readership picks up.

It should be remembered that since 1940, television has come into its own. Farmers are getting more magazines. The competition for attention is greater. Perhaps it is something for a farm paper to have held its own.

We guess that reading habits have changed even though scores have not. Today, for instance, we are fairly sure that a good many readers pick up the paper for a few minutes, lay it down, then pick it up again later. The ideal reader who settles down in his chair and reads the paper for two hours is getting scarcer.

Actually we have no early figures on this, because we

didn't start asking this question until a few years ago. But in *Wallaces Farmer* (October 18, 1958), Starch found this:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Less than one-half hour** | **19.5%** |
| **One-half hour to less than 1 hour** | **26.0** |
| **One hour** | **19.5** |
| **One to less than 2** | **15.0** |
| **Two to less than 3** | **14.0** |
| **Three hours or more** | **5.5** |
| **Not stated** | **0.5** |

Another change probably has come in what is called "reading days." If you pick up the paper to read it on Monday, that's one day; if you repeat on Tuesday, that gives you two days, etc. We have checked this and find the average is close to three reading days.

If you look at a 1940 issue, you may be inclined to say that 1960 issues look more readable. For one thing, type is larger.

When we began our surveys in Iowa we were using 8-point Bodoni on a 9-point slug for narrow measure copy — 12½ picas — and 10-point on a 12-point slug for full page, 17 pica columns.

We have stayed by 10 on 12 for the full page copy or for any place where we can use a wide line — 17 to 22 picas. On narrow measure, however, we have moved up to 9 on 11.

The face has changed. In Iowa we shifted from Bodoni to Paragon for body type, but found it a little weak. A heavier, blacker face seemed desirable. Experiments by other people confirmed this view. So we moved over to Corona; wide measure, 10 on 12; narrow. 9 on 11.

*Wisconsin Agriculturist* moved to Excelsior with 8 on 10 for narrow measure, 10 on 12 for wide, and recently shifted to Times Roman with 10-point for narrow and 12-point for wide measure.

Why are we using larger type? The Minnesota Poll (*Minneapolis Tribune*) reports that of its readers, seven out of 10 adults wear eyeglasses. In our Iowa sample, 62 per cent wear glasses. Some of these glasses, moreover, may be the dime store variety. Lighting is bad in some farm homes. Thus, it seems that large, clear type has an advantage.

For the most part, we have taken the word of other experimenters in this field. We ran one split in Wisconsin which threw some light on the use of leading.

On the editorial page, we ran one version in 10-point solid and the other in 8-point on a 10-point slug. It was interesting to note that several people said, "Why test the obvious? Of course the bigger type will get more readers."

It didn't. The extra leading made up for the difference in type size. The 8-point came out a little better than the 10-point.

As noted elsewhere, we have run wide (22 picas) 10-point against narrow (12 picas) 9-point and couldn't find much difference. In a slightly different split, however, we ran 10-point (16½ picas) against 9-point (12 picas) in a half-page space (Figure 7.1).

In this split in *Wallaces Farmer* (January 16, 1960) women came out even but men scored as follows:

| | A (wide 10-point) | B (narrow 9-point) |
|---|---|---|
| **Read Some** . . . . . | **54%** | **50%** |
| **Read Most** . . . . . | **50** | **41** |

An unchanged ad on the same page gave an edge to A (32 to 26) but the Read Some on the sales copy was in B's favor — 13 to 17. A breakdown by age on the article showed more difference:

| | A (wide 10-point) | B (narrow 9-point) |
|---|---|---|
| **Men of 50 and up** . . | **62.2%** | **41.9%** |

The size of the sub-sample was 37 for A and 43 for B.

Women, 50 and over, showed the same preference for larger type. There was a similar approval from women who had only been to school from one to eight years.

We are inclined to think that the larger type (with plenty of white space) may be a help to older people. It is possible that younger folks, educated to big type in magazines, may also show the same preference. It would take more experiments, however, to be sure of this.

* * *

One continual argument on the staff is about the way dirt copy is to be handled. Is it enough to say, "Do this and that for your hogs," quote experiment station results and stop?

Or should we go in the field, interview several farmers, quote them and then add experiment station results?

The second method costs more. Presumably it makes the reader feel that the paper is thinking in terms of farm people like himself. But is it worth the expense and trouble?

This is a vital issue, but a hard thing to test. As

noted in the chapter on illustrations, it seems that readers do look for pictures and quotes of people they know. But this may be a long time effect. Measuring one article, written in different ways, may not be enough.

We have attempted this experiment several times. *Wisconsin Agriculturist* in splits has not been able to find that the farm visit and quote method pulled in any more readers than the desk copy.

*Wallaces Farmer* tried a split (September 20, 1958) with personalized dirt copy against desk copy with a few quotes and had somewhat different results.

Heads and leads of the two versions follow:

| | |
|---|---|
| **A—(Head)** | **"I got my bellyfull of the stuff." So says one Iowa farmer. But grain sorghum still looks like a good crop.** |
| **(Lead)** | **"I swore last fall that I'd never raise grain sorghum again," said . . .** |
| **B—(Head)** | **Harvest sorghum early. Better count on using a crop dryer too. Sorghum lodges easily soon after frost.** |
| **(Lead)** | **Combine your grain sorghum early and dry it, etc.** |

In the body of the article A, a few personal touches were added to the description of the men interviewed. A quoted two farmers not quoted in B. A had 46 lines of quotes; B had 27 lines of quotes.

It should be noted that B wasn't pure desk copy. Interviews were used, but not to the same extent as in A.

| Men | A | B |
|---|---|---|
| **Read Some** . . . . . | 54% | 27% |
| **Read Most** . . . . . | 47 | 22 |

Women also had a two to one margin ratio for A.

Sorghum raisers presumably would be more interested than non-raisers. A had 66.7 per cent Read Most for raisers against 50 per cent for B. For non-raisers, A had 44 per cent and B 13.7 per cent.

As usual, the frills counted more with readers who were not greatly interested. Sorghum raisers were apparently ready to read the article whether or not it had quotes and people.

Space is a problem here, of course. It takes more room to get in these personal descriptions, colorful quotes, etc. Yet the local angle and the personal angle are important. But to work these angles takes staff, expense money and time.

* * *

One series of experiments dealt with the use of boxes — whether to put a rule around a box or let white space set it off. For example, a box on corn supply with an article on the same theme, *Wallaces Farmer* (November 5, 1949) used a sample of 98 men in A and 97 in B.

| | A (Rule) | | B (No rule) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Box — Men | No. | | No. | |
| **Read Some** . . . . | 22 | 22.4% | 41 | 42.3% |
| **Read Most** . . . . | 22 | 22.4 | 40 | 41.2 |

The unchanged article copy gave B a 4.5 point advantage on Read Most. The changed box gave B (no rule) an advantage of 18.8 points. Allowing for this 4.5 shift in scores on unchanged A and B copy, we have a net advantage of 14.3 percentage points for the box without the rule (Figures 7.2, 7.3).

This was a characteristic response, where the box

was closely related to the article and was run at the bottom of the page. We found, however, that when the box was blown up to a large size with a cut it took on the nature of a separate article and the rule made no difference.

Later tests in *Wisconsin Agriculturist* indicated that a box above the head on a two-column article scored equally well with or without the rule.

White space is probably as good as a rule and sometimes better since the rule may check the movement of the eye. However the unexpected result of the series of tests was something else.

We kept finding out that the box, no matter how handled, usually scored lower than the copy it accompanied and always lower than a good photograph. For example, in *Wallaces Farmer* (March 16, 1957) the article in A scored 67 Read Most while the boxed chart (more dramatic than the usual box) scored 47 Read Most. In B the article scored 69 Read Most and the boxed chart 44 Read Most. The box, with or without the rule, was no great help to the article. A photograph would have done much more.

Another experiment in *Wisconsin Agriculturist* (November 5, 1955) had the same moral. There was a men's score of 80 per cent on the copy and a score of 56 per cent on the box. Stated in another way, of the 129 men who read some of the copy, only 87 also looked at the box.

This was a high scoring article (on Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Benson and his policies), and the box may have suffered on this account. Yet the purpose of the box is to stop the straying eye and coax it into the copy. This didn't happen.

Our tentative conclusion, therefore, is that the box, in any form, isn't likely to do what it is supposed to do; namely, draw attention to itself and the article. Putting a rule around the box — if at the bottom of the page — probably hurts it.

Today, we rarely use boxes except in the case of poll articles where the results are summarized. We even have some doubts about this.

* * *

Is it worth while running a table of contents near the front of the magazine? *Wallaces Farmer* tried to check on this (March 16, 1957).

The A section ran an article; the B ran a table of contents. Both were two columns (Figure 7.4).

More people read the article than looked at Contents. (Read Some, 65 to 50 for men; 56 to 27 for women). But did Contents help the articles it plugged?

Seventeen plugged articles — Read Some — were matched with 17 non-plugged articles.

Where the articles were not plugged in either A or B, the A sample had an advantage of 14.1 percentage points. Apparently the A and B samples were not well-matched in this experiment. The plugged articles in A had only an 11.5 percentage point advantage over the unplugged articles in B. The corrected difference was 2.6 points. As far as this experiment shows, the plugs in the Table of Contents did not help the respective articles.

Other experiments with plugs on the cover show much the same thing. The cover plug may help to pull the respondent into the magazine; it apparently does not help the score of the particular article plugged.

There is one big exception to this. When the cover

picture, the head and the caption are linked together to plug one article inside, there is evidence that the plugged article does gain.

* * *

A curious (to an editor) complaint comes up once in a while. An advertiser may say that editorial copy is too interesting; it diverts attention from the advertising.

Actually any advertiser wants an interesting magazine. Otherwise he'd have no readers. But an advertiser on page 31 may think that pages one to 29 and pages 32 to 100 should be exciting. Only the editorial copy on page 30, facing his ad on page 31, should be dull. (1)

To any editor, this seems nonsense. But the notion pops up once in a while. Roy Eastman in *Printers' Ink* (1951) said, "When you get your ad next to particularly absorbing 'reading matter' you just buy yourself a handicap, for even your 'visibility' is decreased."

It doesn't work that way for a state farm paper. We used a split on this. Scores are Read Most for editorial copy and Any This Ad for the ad. Men's scores are:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Copy A** . . . . . | **30%** | **Ad C** | **20%** |
| **Copy B** . . . . . | **51** | **Ad C** | **32** |

Now Ad C was the same in each case; only the editorial matter was changed. The editorial copy in B happened to be more interesting than that in A. The more interesting editorial copy pulled up the ad scores.

We ran seven splits of this kind, with scores for both men and women. Since the copy in each case was aimed at men, the men's scores were higher and the results probably more useful.

Of the seven men splits, an increase in the score of the editorial matter facing the ad was accompanied by an increase in the score of the ad in five cases. In two cases, a slight increase in the editorial score was accompanied by a drop in the ad score.

With women, the result was the same — five out of seven.

So far as we can tell, therefore, the chances are that an interesting article will help the ad next to it. (2)

My own hunch is that Eastman may have been thinking of fiction running from one page to the next. If a reader got bound up in the fortunes of Jack and Jill, he might overlook the accompanying ad. However, when no article is carried beyond the spread on which it starts, a reader must lift his eyes and the ad, if attractive, has a chance.

## Bigger Type for Old Folks

The articles on the next page are the same except for type size and column width. The upper article is set in 9-point Corona on an 11-point slug and the columns are 12½ picas wide. The lower article is set in 10-point Corona on 12, 16½ picas wide.

For men, the bigger type seemed to help readership. It apparently made little difference with women.

Age break-downs for men showed a considerable edge for the larger type with older men.

| Read Most | Wide, 10-point | Narrow, 9-point |
|---|---|---|
| **Men of 50 and up . . .** | **62.2%** | **41.9%** |

A number of splits in this field give a slight but not decisive margin to somewhat larger type.

*Wallaces Farmer, January 16, 1960*

Figure 7.1

Read Most

9-point type

**Men 41%**

*When did you last . . .*

# Smell a skunk?

IN HARKENING back to the days of my boyhood, I think it is more than a nostalgic reason that prompts me to suggest that maybe the lowly skunk merits a conservation measure.

In the days long past, not only did he do his share in holding down an overabundance of insect and small rodent pests, but also he brought contentment to many a farm boy—by providing him with spending money.

During my young days, there were no rabid skunks, at least I never heard of one. And it was not the skunk's fault that his kind became so afflicted.

Forty or 50 years ago, the countryside didn't just teem with skunks—it swarmed with them; morning, noon, and night. In earlier days, it was not at all uncommon for a wood pussy to venture in plain sight on a farmer's yard while the sun was still high in the sky.

**He may have come only for a drink—but it could have been for a meal of chicken, too.**

With my Dad in the fields, Mother never took a chance. More than once I can remember her, with the questionable help of the family dog and a long stick, battling a yard-visiting skunk.

Nowadays, an evening breeze wafting the near or distant presence of a wood pussy is capable of causing almost as much interest as a partial eclipse of the sun.

In my teenage years on the farm, a prime skunk pelt properly skinned and dried fetched $1.25. On Saturdays, and on Sundays after church services, I'd go skunk hunting on my bicycle. My parents were among the few in the immediate neighborhood who had their farm debt clear and could afford to buy a bicycle for their only boy.

The only equipment I needed on my skunking expeditions was a single-shot, 22-caliber rifle and a bamboo fishing pole with a short length of barbed wire fastened around its one end.

**Because of this faster means of travel, I was able to cover more territory than my competitors and I got more skunks.**

During the daytime, the favorite hiding places of wood pussies were the narrow culvert tunnels in the country roads, and to be roughly prodded with a barbed-wire fishing pole was a discomfort an skunk could endure for long.

One day I poked out 15 big, fat, waddling wood pussies from a single small culvert. They emerged so fast I could not shoot them fast enough with a single shot rifle.

Rather than have even one escape I grabbed up a length of board that had luckily dropped off a farmer's hayrack, ran after them and laid out one after the other with a blow on the head. By the time I had the last one hurt, it seemed I might choke in the crisp, autumn air.

**But imagine a 14-year-old boy's reaction to the thought that he had acquired $12.50 worth of pelts in just one day!**

I think it was that year I earned enough money from my pelts to buy an Edison phonograph with a gorgeous flower-decorated horn and about two dozen cylinder records.

"Trapping skunks was popular, too. A boy was considered a "sissy" until he came to school once smelling like a skunk.

I now recall how one warm summer's day I dug out four of the cutest wood pussy kittens at their weaning age and carried them home.

Placed in an enclosure and fed fresh cow's milk they grew and sleeked even faster than domestic kittens and became every bit as tame. Not once did they use their nature provided weapon, even when picked up and fondled.

Then came the day when I fed them "forbidden fruit" by bringing them each a mouse. Unmistakably this brought their carnivorous instinct forth and caused them to dig under the wired enclosure to freedom on our farmyard.

All might have gone well for a while yet if they hadn't made contact with an old crack-brained, faster-multiplying a batch of ducklings. The fight the old hen waged to save her waddling brood from the ferocious pets was terrific to behold.

My parents' ultimatum was for me to get rid of my four pets. I found a couple of gunnysacks and put two in each sack and then on my bicycle I pedaled them a full four miles from our farm and released them. I have no doubts but that they made out all right.

I look back upon those days with fondness, but now wonder if maybe skunks don't deserve some extra protection.

By William Schramm.

Read Most

10-point type

**Men 50%**

*When did you last . . .*

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Then came the day when I fed them "forbidden fruit" by bringing them each a mouse. Unmistakably this brought their carnivorous instinct forth and caused them to dig under the wired enclosure to freedom on our farmyard.

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By William Schramm.

Figure 7.2

## Copy Split A

Read Some, Box

## Men 22.4%

## Rule Versus White Space

If you run a box with an article, do you put a rule around the text or let white space divide the box from the rest of the copy?

A series of experiments indicates that on copy like that in Figure 7.2 and Figure 7.3, white space does better than a rule.



*Washington Wire*

# Will New Farm Law Help You?

*Your Share — If You Raise Corn, If You Milk Cows, Or If You Raise Hogs*

WASHINGTON, D. C.—Every farmer wants to know—right away—what the new farm law will do for the prices of things he sells in 1950. Here are some of the answers:

**CORN GROWER:** The new parity is $1.47 per bushel, as compared with the present parity of $1.55. Under the act, you take which-ever is higher. That means the corn loan next year will be about the same as this year.

**HOG RAISER:** New parity is $20 per hundred. Sounds good? Yes, but wait. The secretary of agriculture can support hog prices at any point between 0 and 90 per cent of parity. Which point will he choose?

Suppose he picks 90 per cent of parity. That means he'll have to buy a lot of pork to support the market. Then what does he do with the pork?

**He can give it away to schools for lunches, to charitable institutions, or he can trade it abroad—at a loss—for goods we need. That will take a lot of money.**

One estimate—a low one—says loss will add up to 100 million dollars for two years. It could cost a lot more.

So the hog raiser doesn't know what kind of supports he'll get. Not yet, anyway.

**DAIRYMAN:** The new law directs the secretary of agriculture to support dairy products at 75 to 90 per cent of parity. The new parity is $4.11 per hundred for whole milk, 70 cents per pound for butterfat. How does he do it? He buys cheese, butter, dried milk, and stores them.

Then what happens? As with pork, he can give them away to schools for lunches, charitable institutions, or dump abroad. As long as the money holds out.

**What happens to egg prices? Parity drops to 49 cents. But the secretary may support the price at anywhere from 0 to 90 per cent.**

Where does he put supports? It depends on how many dried eggs he has to buy to keep up the price, how many dried eggs he can sell, and how much money he is allowed to spend.

For wheat and cotton and tobacco—like corn—the future is clear enough next year. You get 90 per cent of parity on loans. And you stick to your allotment—or to your marketing quotas.

**Will corn have acreage allotments in 1950? Yes. How much will the cut be? Talk is about a 15 per cent cut, but we'll know for sure in a few weeks.**

Will corn farmers vote on marketing quotas? Maybe. Corn supplies are right on the line. The secretary could find good reasons for ordering an election on quotas—or for avoiding an election.

If marketing quotas come up to a farm election, the livestock man will face this prospect:

If quotas carry, and if he doesn't cut corn acreage, he'll have to lock up on the farm the corn grown on the surplus acres. He can't feed or sell that corn without paying a penalty per bushel equal to half the parity price.

How will the Department of Agriculture administer the new

*You Never Had*

## So Much Old Corn

**If you're like the average U. S. corn farmer, you have on hand more old corn than ever before. Even more than in 1940.**

**Look at the record of old corn carried over on October 1 of various years:**

| Year | Bushels Carry-Over |
|---|---|
| 1933 | 386,000,000 |
| 1937 | 65,000,000 |
| 1938 | 362,000,000 |
| 1940 | 644,000,000 |
| 1946 | 173,000,000 |
| 1948 | 125,000,000 |
| 1949 | 815,000,000 |

**It took from 1937 to 1940 to increase the corn supply by 600 million bushels. But it only took one year—from 1948 to 1949—to increase the supply by 700 million.**

**With another record crop this year, what will corn carry-over look like in 1950? And where will we put it?**

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Suppose he picks 90 per cent of parity. That means he'll have to buy a lot of pork to support the market. Then what does he do with the pork?

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* * * * * *

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Figure 7.3

## Copy Split B

Read Some, Box

## Men 42.3%

On other types of box, there seems little difference between the rule and no rule.

Most important is the fact that in almost all of the splits, the box, no matter how treated, scored lower than the accompanying article. A photograph apparently did more to get readers for the article than a box.

*Wallaces Farmer, November 5, 1949*

Figure 7.4

Read Some

**Men 50%**

**Women 27%**

## Does a Table of Contents Help Readership?

In this split, B carried a Table of Contents and A ran an article on school reorganization. The article got more readers than the Table of Contents.

| Read Some | Contents | Article |
|---|---|---|
| Men . . . | 50% | 65% |
| Women . . | 27 | 56 |

More important than the score is this question: Did the plugged articles in Contents do better than the unplugged articles? The answer is: No real difference.

*Wallaces Farmer, March 16, 1957*

# *In this Issue*

**March 16, 1957**

## New Features

### Livestock



### Marketing and Management



### Crops and Machinery



### For Everybody



### For the Home



## Old Friends

What do we think we have found out in the experiments reported in this chapter? Here are some tentative conclusions:

1. It pays to check back once in a while and see if your articles on a particular subject are scoring as well as they did last year, five years ago and 10 years ago. Don't feel too badly if you haven't gained. Competition is getting tougher. If you fall short in any particular area, start finding out why.
2. It costs more to interview and photograph many farm people in building up experience articles. We think it pays, but it is hard to get adequate evidence.
3. Personalized copy – details about Jim Smith – probably goes over a little better than copy without quotes and case histories. But, remember that the hero of every article should be the reader; he should say, "This fits my case."
4. Putting a rule around a box sometimes hurts and sometimes makes no difference. The important point here is that a box almost never scores as high as a photograph. To break up a page, a photograph makes more sense than a box.
5. An advertisement that runs next to a good article is likely to benefit. But when readership is high and continuous throughout the magazine, an ad anyplace will get readership in accordance with its merits.