

Zarii (Agriculture) Digest as a Source of Agricultural Information for the Farmers

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ABSTRACT

Zarii Digest, a quarterly agricultural publication of the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad has been disseminating agricultural technologies among farmers for the last more than three decades. The present paper deals with the evaluation of Zarii Digest as a source of agricultural information for the farmers. The data were collected from the regular members with the help of a mailed questionnaire. The analysis of the data shows that the Digest was popular among farmers of all age categories. It appeared to be relatively more popular among owner cultivators having higher level of education. All the attributes used as determinant of publication standard were perceived to be reasonably good except the use of graphics/pictures. The annual subscription/price of the publication was reported to be reasonable. However, a large majority of respondents complained about the delayed delivery of the Digest.

Key Words: Agricultural information; Dissemination; Zarii Digest

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural development may mainly be explained as a function of application of the latest agricultural technologies by farmers. This in turn depends upon their knowledge about the technologies, which ultimately demands that farmers be exposed to the latest information. Farmers who have more information contacts are likely to be more aware of agricultural recommendations, and resultantly are better adopters than those who have little or no exposure (Muhammad & Garforth, 1995). Agricultural extension services have a central role in facilitating the exposure of farmers to a variety of information sources.

Print media is one of the many sources commonly used by the agricultural agencies to make farmers aware of the latest agricultural technologies. Pierce (1990) argues that publications remain a primary delivery system even in an electronic age. Nothing has proven to be more user friendly than well written, well design, and neatly produced publications. According to Muhammad (2001), a written message is generally considered as more authentic than a verbal message. It minimizes the dependence on memory and can be referred to as and when required. Muhammad and Garforth (1999) found that mass media proved relatively more popular than the direct face-to-face contact. According to them printed material was perceived as the most effective communication channel by farmer respondents. However, print media were used as source of information by only 11% of the respondents. It implies that if the access of the farmers to print media is improved, it could yield much positive result as information source especially for literate farmers.

Zarii Digest is a quarterly agricultural publication of the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (UAF). It has been successfully disseminating the latest information relating to

agriculture and allied disciplines among the potential users. How far it has been effective as a source of information for the farmers seems to be an important area to look into. The popularity of the Digest as information source among the farmers would reflect its reliability and credibility in the eyes of its readers. The present study attempts to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Zarii Digest as perceived by the farmers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Zarii Digest has its circulation all over the country. All the regular members served as the population for this research study. The data were collected with the help of a survey questionnaire designed in Urdu. The questionnaires were mailed to the members of Zarii Digest in the year 2001. Out of total 260 questionnaires, only 84 were received back. The data thus collected were analysed to draw conclusions for the improvement of the publication standard in future. In order to measure the publication standard, a four point scale with weighted score 1-4 was used against each attribute used for this purpose. The score for each attribute was computed by multiplying the weighted score with the frequency percentage and then by summing up the same to work out the overall score. The weighted score computed in this way for each attribute may range from 100-400 with 250 being the average.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economics aspects. The respondents were asked about their socio-economic aspects. The data in this regard are presented in Table I.

Period of membership of Zarii Digest. Period of membership serves as an indicator of popularity of

Table I. Socio-economic aspects of the respondents

Aspect	Number	Percentage
Age		
up to 40 years	46	54.76
Above 40 years	38	45.24
Education		
Up to Primary	02	02.38
Up to Middle	04	04.76
Up to Matric	20	23.81
Up to Intermediate	18	21.43
Up to Graduation or above	40	47.62
Nature of farming		
Self-cultivation	70	83.33
Cultivation by others	14	16.67
Tenancy status*		
Owners	60	83.33
Tenants	08	11.11
Owner-cum-Tenants	04	05.56
Size of land holding**		
Up to 12½ acres	30	39.47
12½ to 25 acres	18	23.68
Above 25 acres	28	36.85

*N=72; **N=76

Table II. Distribution of respondents based on their period of membership

Period (years)	Number	Percentage
Up to 4	62	75.60
Above 4 to 8	10	12.20
Above 8 to 12	06	07.32
Above 12	04	04.88

N=82 (2 respondents did not respond to this question)

Table III. Sources of information about Zarii Digest

Source	Number	Percentage
Neighbours/Friends/Relatives	24	29.27
Univ. of Agri., Faisalabad.	24	29.27
Department of Agriculture	20	24.39
Agricultural Publications	06	07.31
News Papers	04	04.88
National Horse and Cattle Show	02	02.44
Radio	02	02.44

publication among its readers. It also shows the trend whether with the passage of time the membership of the publication is increasing or decreasing. The data in this regard are presented in Table II.

The data given in Table II highlight that a large majority (75.60%) of the respondents has been regular members of Zarii Digest for the last up to four years. An equal number (12.20%) of respondents belonged to categories of above 4-8 and above eight years. It may imply the either the membership of Zarii Digest has increased during the last few years or the old members have discontinued their membership.

Sources of information about Zarii Digest. It would be interesting to know above the source through which farmers generally get acquainted with Zarii Digest. This information may be very useful for the University to extend the range of

circulation of Zarii Digest. The data in this regard are presented in Table III.

The data given in Table III indicate that neighbours/friends/relatives, UAF and Department of Agriculture served as the major sources of information for the farmers about Zarii Digest. Other sources included print media, National horse and cattle show and radio. These sources need to be utilized properly for getting more and more farmers acquainted with Zarii Digest.

Timely availability of Zarii Digest. In time availability of a publication seems to be an important variable determining the success of the publication. The information received late when at all it is not required would be of no use to the intended receivers. The respondents were asked whether or not they received Zarii Digest in time. Their responses are given in Table IV.

Table IV. Distribution of respondents based on timely availability of Zarii Digest

Category	Number	Percentage
Always available on time	26	31.71
Mostly available on time	30	36.59
Rarely available on time	12	14.63
Never available on time	14	17.07

N=82

The data given in Table IV depict that a large majority (about 70%) of the respondents has not been receiving Zarii Digest on time. Since above 30% of the respondents always received Zarii Digest on time, it may lead to a conclusion that either the University has failed to dispatch the publication to all its members well in time or the majority could not receive it because of delayed delivery by postal service.

The respondents were further asked about the period of delay in the delivery of Zarii Digest. Majority (56.43%) of the respondents pointed out that they received the publication with one month delay or even more. Thus this aspect needs to be given due consideration.

Annual membership/price of Zarii Digest. Annual membership/price of a publication is also an important consideration, which generally affects the circulation of a publication. Poor farmers are unlikely to be regular members of agricultural publications if they are too costly. The data regarding the annual membership/price of Zarii Digest are given in Table V.

Table V. Views of the respondents about the annual membership/price of Zarii Digest

Category	Number	Percentage
Too much	-	-
Much	06	07.14
Reasonable	66	78.57
Low	-	-
Very low	-	14.29

It is evident from Table V that the annual membership/price of Zarii Digest was perceived to be quite reasonable as perceived by a large majority (78.57%) of the respondents. Even there were some respondents (14.29%) who regarded the annual membership/price as very low. Only a fraction (7.14%) of the respondents regarded it bit expensive.

Publication standard. Publication standard may be explained as a function of a number of attributes like language, technical contents, use of graphics, clarity of information, perceived usefulness of information quality of paper etc. The data relating to these aspects are presented in Table VI in terms of weighted score.

Table VI. Publication standard of Zarii Digest

Attribute	Weighted Score
Language/wording	342.56
Technical contents	303.76
Use of graphics/pictures	275.62
Clarity of information	339.02
Usefulness of information	346.23
Quality of paper	354.75

The data presented in Table VI depict that all the aspect relating to publication standard were perceived to be above average. The quality of paper used in Zarii Digest got the highest score, which may imply that the respondents were highly satisfied with this aspect. Usefulness of information disseminated through Zarii Digest got the second highest score followed by language/wording, clarity of information, technical contents and use of graphics/pictures. Use of graphics got the lowest score, which implies that this aspect of publication was not up to the mark. In fact visual symbols are fundamental to man's understanding. When words fail, pictures communicate. The use of graphics can make your 'package' more attractive, clarify your message and extend retention by your audience (Hermance, 1990). Carey (1999) argued that visual aids increased learning by 35% and retention of information by 50%. Thus this aspect of the publication needs to be given due consideration, which will improve the existing standard of the publications.

CONCLUSIONS

Zarii Digest appeared to be almost equally popular among small and large farmers of all age groups. However, it was found relatively more popular among owner cultivators with higher levels of education. A large majority of the respondents was found to be regular members of Zarii Digest for the last four years. Neighbours/friends/relatives, UAF and Department of Agriculture appeared to be the main sources through which farmers became aware of Zarii Digest. A large majority of the respondents complaint about delayed delivery of Zarii Digest. In most cases the delay was reported up to one month or even more. However, Annual subscription/price of the publication was perceived as reasonable by a large majority of the respondents. The publication got more than average scores with respect to all determinants of publication standard except the use of graphics/pictures, which got the lowest score. This aspect needs to be given due consideration.

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