
Agricultural Periodicals

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NOT LONG AGO GRANT CANNON, editor of *The Farm Quarterly*, published an inspired satirical essay which he called "The Last Farmer." Projecting upon past and current trends, he predicted that by the year 1997 the number of agricultural bureaucrats would outnumber practicing farmers and that in the year 2101 the last farmer would disappear. In his short treatise, Mr. Cannon took no account of agricultural periodicals, but had he done so he probably could have shown that his last farmer disappeared under a paper blizzard of serialized printed matter dealing with various aspects of agriculture.

All evidence indicates that as the number of people devoting their energies to agriculture becomes smaller, the number of periodicals relating to agriculture becomes greater. And the periodicals are becoming more numerous at an ever-increasing rate. The main reason for this growth is technological progress—the amazing agricultural revolution of the 20th century which had its forerunner in the industrial revolution of the 19th century. The agricultural revolution has changed the entire rural scene, increasing production enormously, yet removing millions of workers from farms. At the same time it has of necessity created a vast body of continuing literature to sustain its dynamic condition.

In the U.S. Commissioner of Agriculture's report for 1867, an attempt was made to list titles of all magazines "devoted to the advancement of agriculture, horticulture, and kindred interests within the United States." Fifty-six weeklies and monthlies comprised the total. In 1909 the United States Department of Agriculture Library was receiving 1,575 titles; in 1936 the total had grown to 3,871 titles. In 1960 the Library was receiving approximately 21,500 current serials.^{1, 2}

The above figures require some interpretation if they are to be

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completely meaningful. Much of the rapid growth includes foreign publications which were not received in earlier years. Other increases include journals in such fields as chemistry, biology, and sociology, relating directly or indirectly to agriculture. Library semantics is also involved; there is a very thin line of demarcation between *serials* and *periodicals* in agricultural publications. Nevertheless, there are now more than twenty thousand titles appearing more or less regularly which the United States Department of Agriculture Library considers of such importance that they must be acquired for the present and future use of agricultural research workers.

The rapidity with which new titles appear is indicated by the *Bibliography of Agriculture's* monthly listing of "New Periodicals and Serials." Over the past 5 years the number of new titles has kept a steady pace of around 25 per month, occasionally reaching 40. It would be conservative to forecast that in the 1960's agricultural librarians can expect to confront at least one new periodical every day of the year. These might not all be "periodicals" in the sense that librarians use the word, but as noted above there is very little difference between a monthly journal and a bulletin series which appears irregularly several times a year.

The history of American agricultural periodicals is usually dated from 1810 with the publication of *The Agricultural Museum* at Georgetown, D.C. *The Agricultural Museum* did not survive the first year of the War of 1812. However, its two-year span was about the average survival time for most agricultural weeklies and monthlies of the 19th century. As there was little specialized agriculture in the United States until late in that century, early agricultural periodicals were general in coverage, usually being divided into departments or columns on poultry, dairying, crops, horticulture, etc. This was the pattern for agricultural publishing for almost a century, but only a few of these general periodicals survived after the appearance of the specialized journals which make up the broad range of agricultural literature today.

Of the 56 periodicals on the Commissioner of Agriculture's 1867 list, only 9 are still alive today, and if one may judge from the appearance of some of these few survivors, their days also may be numbered. All of them still attempt to cover all aspects of agriculture, but all are now limited to state or regional areas.

Since the demise of *The Country Gentleman* in 1954, only one general "farm paper" can be said to be truly national in influence, *The*

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Farm Journal, with well over 3 million subscribers. *The Progressive Farmer*, by issuing several state editions in the South, runs well above a million in subscriptions. After combining with *Southern Agriculturist*, *Farm and Ranch* also maintains over a million readers concentrated in the South and West. *Successful Farming* has a circulation over a million across the nation, but is directed primarily toward upper-income farmers in the Middle West. *Capper's Farmer*, national in circulation but also dominantly Midwestern in viewpoint, ceased publication in 1960. *Prairie Farmer*, *Wallace's Farmer*, *California Farmer*, *Rural New Yorker*, and other general farm papers have great influence only in the geographical sections which they cover.

Insofar as number of titles is concerned, the trend of *general* agricultural periodicals is definitely down. In all other areas of agricultural serial publishing, however, the trend is sharply upward.

It is not easy to classify modern agricultural periodicals for purposes of evaluation. There are perhaps three major categories, but many titles do not fit well into any group, and some might fall into more than one. Roughly, the three main types are (1) popular farm papers, (2) trade magazines, and (3) scholarly journals.

The popular farm papers include not only general publications as indicated above, but the state periodicals such as *Michigan Farmer*, *Ohio Farmer*, *Wisconsin Agriculturist*, and so on through all the leading agricultural states. Many other popular publications are concerned with specific divisions of agriculture; for example, *Poultry Tribune*, *Hoard's Dairyman*, *American Livestock Journal*, *American Vegetable Grower*, *American Fruit Grower*, *Flower Grower*, *American Small Stock Farmer*, *Sheep and Goat Raiser*, *Western Horseman*, *National Hog Farmer*, and *Flying Farmer*. These periodicals seldom publish serious scientific articles but in simple language may "interpret" scientific discoveries for their readers. In general they resemble the varied middle-class periodicals appearing on American newsstands, with bright-colored covers, numerous illustrations and advertisements, informal presentation of text, and large numbers of how-to-do-it articles. Usually a sort of chumminess is maintained between editors and readers through such devices as letters-to-the-editor columns. A few of the older papers still dress themselves in old-fashioned newsprint, but even the most conservative ones now appear with liberal splashes of colored ink upon their faces.

Most librarians have a low opinion of the value of this class of periodicals, and only the very largest libraries retain them perma-

nently. But, of course, no one knows how important they may be a century away in time. Their prototypes of the 19th century are only now beginning to be discovered as mother lodes of raw material, not only for the use of agricultural historians but also for social historians and even folklorists.

The second major class, the trade magazines, are a 20th-century phenomenon of agricultural publishing. The number of titles continues to multiply at an astonishing rate, and the variety of subjects seems infinite. They have a protozoan tendency to change form abruptly, to divide by fission, and to unite by conjugation. A fertilizer periodical becomes a farm chemicals magazine. Two struggling periodicals covering agricultural aviation unite into one strong publication. New titles may be created to form satellites around the original; e.g., a national poultry magazine spins off three monthlies dealing separately with eggs, broilers, and turkeys.

An agricultural trade magazine may or may not be supported by an organization, but usually it must show a profit or at least pay its way to insure continuance. A trade magazine is usually concerned with something specific, such as *American Hereford Journal*, *Soybean Digest*, *Seed World*, *Quick Frozen Foods*, *Implement and Tractor*, *Feed Bag*, *Agricultural Chemicals*, *Dairy Record*, *American Milk Review*, and *Timberman*. No nook or cranny of agriculture is so small or esoteric that some one has not started or is not planning to start a trade magazine to report its activities. Unfortunately their rate of use in libraries, after being bound and placed upon the shelves, declines by geometric progression.

The trade magazine wastes no space in being folksy with its readers; it is all business from its prosaic front cover to the advertisement on the back cover. Advertisements usually fill over half its pages, sometimes as much as 90 per cent of total space. The trade magazine serves as a market place for buyers and sellers in the field represented—a certain breed of swine, or seed for a specific crop, or new farm machines, or chemicals which kill weeds. Along with this merchandising appear news of the trade, reports of organization meetings, production and price statistics, or governmental actions. A few important articles on new scientific or technical advances may appear first in trade magazines. In fact, some trade magazines are hybrids, exhibiting attributes not only of their own class, but also of the scholarly journals.

The scholarly journals, the third major class of periodicals, are the founts of modern agricultural scientific and technical knowledge.

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Through the back files of these periodicals can be charted the beginnings, the development and flowering of our present 20th-century agricultural revolution. Each new agricultural experiment has its roots in previous findings reported in these journals; almost all new books on agriculture derive from them.

Some examples of scholarly journals likely to be found in all agricultural libraries are *Journal of Animal Science*, *Journal of Farm Economics*, *Journal of Forestry*, *Agronomy Journal*, *American Journal of Veterinary Research*, *Food Research*, *Journal of Dairy Science*, *Poultry Science*, *Rural Sociology*, *Agricultural History*, *Journal of Home Economics*, *Soil Science*, and *Veterinary Medicine*.

In addition, agricultural collections must be buttressed with the outstanding scholarly journals of botany, physiology, biology, chemistry, nutrition, geology, genetics, microbiology, antibiotics, bacteriology, economics, and a dozen or so other disciplines closely relating to agriculture.

The use of scholarly journals in libraries declines at a much slower rate than the use of farm papers and trade magazines. Over a five-year period, for example, *Poultry Science* might drop in use from an index value of 100 to 90, whereas in the same period *Poultry Processing*, a trade magazine, might drop from 100 to 50; and *Poultry Tribune*, a popular news monthly, might drop from 100 to 10. The demand for older scholarly journals is no doubt greater in libraries used by students than in libraries used exclusively by specialized research personnel. Because students are usually required to trace their research back to its recorded beginnings, it is important for agricultural college libraries to maintain holdings of scholarly journals from the first volumes.

Aside from *types* of agricultural periodicals, another means of selective approach is *geographical*. Only a handful of periodicals professes to deal with world agriculture, and then only in a limited way. More than 99 per cent of agricultural publications recognize some sort of geographical restriction in their content—a continent, nation, region, state, or county. As the science and technology of agriculture become more complex, geographical limits seem to grow more narrow, with more and more publications designed to serve the specialized needs of intensive areas of agricultural production.

Still another method of classification is by source of publication. National and local governments produce a vast number of serials. Thousands of others are sponsored by associations, societies, insti-

tutes, centers, or universities and colleges—which may or may not have governmental connections. There is a great deal of subsidization of agricultural serial publishing, direct and indirect.

Governments generally have taken a special interest in agriculture because that activity provides the governed with the basic necessities of life—food, clothing, and some elements of shelter. To keep farmers informed, to help them progress, to convince them of the necessity for certain agricultural policies, governments have long supplied them with a continuing supply of printed matter, a great amount of which is in the form of monthly, weekly, and even daily serials.

An examination of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's most recent list of serials (U.S.D.A. Miscellaneous Publication 765, 1958) indicates that at least one of every two titles is published by a government agency or quasi-governmental institution. Undoubtedly a considerable number of other titles issued by organizations are at least partially subsidized by governments.

It is worthwhile noting that the Department of Agriculture Library's serials list contains about 1,500 titles from its own department, a number which by no means includes all the periodic market news or outlook and situation reports which pour forth unceasingly from 170 Department field stations reporting on some 200 farm commodities and livestock products. These publications are so diverse and so numerous that several additional bibliographical serials are published only for the purpose of listing together all related serials. Serials vary in size from a single sheet to a hundred pages or more, and although some of them are issued mainly for use as news releases to the press, radio, and television, it must be remembered that they are the original documentary sources and must be considered by librarians as potential research material.

Librarians who have attempted to collect and use U.S.D.A. serials often suspect that their publication is controlled by lunatics. New titles come and go with every administration; mysterious code symbols, defying all bibliographical management, are used for release of the most indispensable data. Seldom is there any explanation of what is happening or of the relation of the new series to its predecessor.

In addition to the federal department's publishing program, each of the 50 United States has a similar, although more restricted, program. Almost every experiment station issues a monthly or quarterly periodical of general agricultural research, and some of the larger ones publish periodicals in specialized fields. Extension divisions also publish a variety of monthly, weekly, and daily bulletins as well as periodic

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releases to the communications media. Most states also have agricultural departments which are more or less independent of the federal government. They publish numerous serials, which are usually devoted to reporting local agricultural statistics. The state departments also cooperate with the federal Bureau of the Census in gathering and publishing reports, estimates, and forecasts concerned with every aspect of agriculture; many of these are issued in periodical form.

The maintenance of some sort of bibliographical control over the continuous stream of agricultural information has long been a challenge to those concerned with its use, and in response to demand an entire new genus of periodicals has been developed for the purpose of recording, indexing, and abstracting the literature of agriculture. As long ago as 1890, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's monthly *Experiment Station Record* began publishing literature studies, lists of publications received, and extensive abstracts of Department of Agriculture and state experiment station publications. Some years later the Department's Library, with its various bureau branches, became engaged in indexing a still wider area of periodical content. In addition to separate subject bibliographies, the Library began publishing a group of bibliographies in serial form on such subjects as agricultural economics, agricultural engineering, entomology, forestry, and food processing. Entries usually include abstracts, varying from a sentence to several paragraphs.

In 1942 these series bibliographies were combined into the monthly *Bibliography of Agriculture*, which assumed the formidable task of indexing everything published about agriculture. At first an attempt was made to retain abstracts, but under pressure of space limitations the bibliographers were forced to shorten their notations and then gradually to drop them except for an occasional explanatory line.

Since 1916 the H. W. Wilson Company has published *Agricultural Index*, "a subject index to a selected list of agricultural periodicals and bulletins." Although *Agricultural Index* duplicates entries in *Bibliography of Agriculture*, the former offers certain advantages over the latter. First, the *Index* is arranged alphabetically by specific subject entries, while the *Bibliography's* entries are grouped by classes so that until the annual index appears in December, no approach is possible by specific subjects. Another advantage of the *Index* is its monthly cumulative alphabetic arrangement; the *Bibliography* is indexed by a numbering system which can become impedimentary at times. Although the *Index* attempts to include most of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and state experiment bulletin series, it restricts its regu-

larly-indexed periodicals to fewer than two hundred titles. In a way this stringent selectivity is an advantage; the searcher does not collect a clutter of references to insignificant articles. All entries in the *Index* are from English language periodicals, most of them American. The big disadvantage of the *Index* is its lack of author entries. In the main, these two bibliographic series complement rather than duplicate each other. A first-class agricultural library requires both.

Unfortunately, the *Experiment Station Record* ceased publication in 1946, but fortunately at the same time in Great Britain a new series of agricultural abstract journals had been developing, and they have served in part to fill the breach. It is not out of place in a study of American agricultural periodicals to include these special publications of the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux—*Herbage Abstracts*, *Nutrition Abstracts*, *Soils and Fertilizers*, *Field Crops Abstracts*, *Horticultural Abstracts*, *Plant Breeding Abstracts*, *Forestry Abstracts*, *Animal Breeding Abstracts*, and *Dairy Science Abstracts*. Almost all began publication in the 1930's, managed to survive the difficulties of the war, and now cover quite thoroughly the contents of outstanding American journals. Abstracts are carefully prepared. The lag between original publication and appearance in the bibliographies is not excessive. American support in the form of subscriptions no doubt has helped the Commonwealth abstracts series to grow in coverage and efficiency. They are indispensable adjuncts to all American agricultural collections.

Other serialized bibliographies essential in agricultural libraries are *Chemical Abstracts*, *Biological Abstracts*, and such highly-specialized periodicals as *Vitamin Abstracts*, *Alfalfa Abstracts*, and *Iodine Abstracts and Reviews*. A new international quarterly, *World Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Abstracts*, recently began publication, and a food technology abstract journal is presently in the planning stage.

Although no subject field is any better served with bibliographic controls than is agriculture, no researcher or librarian can be satisfied with available tools for retrieving the flow of knowledge recorded in periodicals. It is doubtful whether or not present controls can much longer keep abreast of output. The agricultural revolution will not wait; whether it moves gradually or swiftly into newer frontiers of discovery, it seems bound to pour out a phenomenal number of new periodicals.

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References

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2. *World Directory of Agricultural Libraries and Documentation Centres*. Hertfordshire, Eng., Harpenden, 1960, p. 154.