

CASE STUDY

Instructional Media Developed As Part of Course Revision

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Abstract

This paper reports on a course revision which integrated text and lecture material with specific examples of agricultural marketing operations. The project was funded by the Center for Educational Development, University of Minnesota.

The curriculum of many four year agricultural colleges and two year technical agricultural programs includes a course in the principles of agricultural marketing. This class generally consists of lecture-based introduction to macro-distribution and business policy situations. The endless series of distribution channels describing different segments of the agricultural industry, however, provide a difficult and somewhat rigid learning situation.

The author was made aware of this situation through class evaluations in which an ambivalent attitude was expressed toward the subject matter. Investigation revealed that the course materials, including the text, did not acquaint the student with a typical example of a marketing business. Lack of this perspective made students apathetic toward the textbook discussion. Students apparently could not associate textbook material with their existing knowledge of the agricultural industry.

Another gap in knowledge limiting the traditional course is the lack of introduction to the technology of manufacturing in different areas of the food industry. Such information complements the distribution phase of the agricultural business very well.

The Grant

The author applied to the University of Minnesota Educational Development Center for a grant to revise the existing course. The grant funded creation of a slide-tape series dealing with the detailed characteristics of dairy, livestock, grain, and vegetable industries from the time products leave the farm until they are merchandised to the consumer.

Data for the slide-tape series was collected during the summer of 1976. A representative business was chosen for each phase of the agricultural industry. A total of 15 businesses were surveyed. A student interviewer visited each business and posed the following questions:

1. What types of products do you buy and sell?
2. What is the history of this business?

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3. Is your business part of another corporation? If so, how is it related?
4. Describe the operation of your business, including management decisions and difficulties experienced.

Slides were also taken of aspects of the industry where permitted. These slides include exterior and interior views of the facilities. Additional slides of the manufacturing technology were incorporated where the need existed.

Evaluation

After the slide-tape presentation was completed, students in several classes of Agricultural Marketing (AgMk 1-053) evaluated the total presentation. Questions were designed to elicit an open response to the presentation.

The results were:

1. Describe how the presentation improved your understanding of the firms involved in agricultural marketing.

Typical Replies:

Deeper understanding of business functions.	28%
Better knowledge of market system and its coordination.	28%
Characteristics of specific firms.	44%

2. How well did the presentation complement other course materials?

Very well.	9%
Well.	73%
Somewhat related.	18%
Unrelated.	0.

3. Do you feel the presentation was designed:

a. At too low a level of complexity?	36.4%
b. At the right level of complexity?	63.6%
c. At too high a level of complexity?	0.

4. Do you feel that you understand the operation of the food and fiber system:

a. A great deal better after this presentation.	40.9%
b. Somewhat better after the presentation.	54.6%
c. About the same after the presentation.	4.5%

5. What parts of the presentation were the most interesting to you?

Management structure and functions.	37%
Examples of decision making in action.	25%
Opinions of managers shared.	13%
Specific look at industries.	25%

Summary

The slide-tape presentation apparently filled a gap in the teaching of a specific course. It provided a good introduction to how specific agricultural businesses operate. The most common response in the questionnaire was that it provided excellent examples of the text and lecture materials. Also, it seems to integrate the material in agricultural business management and other areas with the area of marketing and distribution.