

## **SUMMARY OF PROGRESS 2008**

### **I. Administrative**

#### **Staffing and operations**

- The ACDC staff continued to include Joe Zumalt as director of the Center, with graduate assistant Anna Pederson as webmaster and academic coordinator.
- Ryan Rogers, research programmer of ACES Library, provided technological support for the Center.
- Paul Hixson served as liaison with the Information and Communication Services (ITCS) unit of ACES College.
- Student assistants during parts of the year included Devi Annamalai, plant biology graduate student, and Chelsey Waltz, major in agricultural communications.
- Volunteer staff associates included Liz Harfull (Asia-Pacific Region) and Jim Evans (emeritus faculty, agricultural communications).
- More than a dozen other volunteers scouted for literature, provided documents, offered counsel and helped in other ways.

Staff members improved operations in several ways during the year. They:

- Reorganized the "Useful Links" area of the Center web site for easier searching.
- Added links to four rural journalist groups in Australia. The Center now identifies what is believed to be the largest existing collection of web sites of professional organizations for agricultural/rural communicators, internationally.
- Improved strategies for online research to identify documents.
- Began to test a new software program which may be useful in providing tutorials to help online visitors search the ACDC collection.
- Increased language translation capabilities of the Center through arrangements with four local residents who have native German language experience.

#### **Information system management**

- Efforts continued during the year to evaluate the current stability of the ACDC database system and review options for migrating to a more stable software and database environment.
- Planners identified several desired enhancements through these discussions: (a) improve stability of the database search system, (b) permit retrieval of larger numbers of citations per keyword search, (c) create a capability for authorized Center staff to submit citations from off-site, (d) provide capability for more than one person at a time to submit citations online, (e) provide user access to the database while citations are being added, (f) establish a means for automatically adding new keywords/subject terms to the online thesaurus, and (g) provide means to update and change existing keywords more easily.

## Strategic planning and actions

- Improvement of the system (described above) remained a high priority for long-term enhancement of resources and services of the Center.
- Center staff successfully completed a third year of partnering with the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists and, through discussions, initiated plans for continuation during the year ahead. This collaboration is strengthening the professional development mission of IFAJ as it strengthens international relationships and resources of the Center.
- Planning and efforts continued for developing an international network of volunteer staff associates to broaden the search for documents.

## II. Programming and Services

### Collecting documents

- The ACDC collection contained 33,406 documents at the end of 2008, an increase of 1,818 documents during the year. This met a goal of adding at least 100 documents a month. The average of 153 additions per month exceeded that of 132 documents per month during the previous year.
- Documents in the ACDC collection represent agriculture-related communications in 170 countries.
- An increased share of documents was retrieved in digital format, through online research.
- Staff members continued to find agricultural communications literature in a surprisingly broad range of journals. For example, documents added during 2008 came from scholarly journals as diverse as *Food Product Design*, *Ecological Economics*, *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, *Environmental Modeling and Software*, and *Food and Chemical Toxicology*.
- High priority was placed on identifying timely research papers presented at conferences in various parts of the world. Papers added to the ACDC collection during 2008 came from more than 20 conferences, most of them recent.
- A Center staff member reviewed the research and international program files of the Information Technology and Communication Services (ITCS) unit of the College of ACES. More than 100 documents added to the ACDC collection from those files represent activities of that unit from the 1950s into the 1990s.
- Review of the Agricultural Publishers Association Collection in the University Archives continued during 2008. This large collection, tracing back to the 1920s, is providing valuable historical documents about agricultural publishing in the United States.
- Winning entries in the Oscars in Agriculture program between 1995 and 2002 were identified, reviewed and added to the collection. This respected national program was administered by the agricultural communications faculty at the University of Illinois during that period. Winning entries hold special value for users of the ACDC collection because they represent recognized excellence in agricultural reporting in magazines, newspapers, radio and television.
- During late 2008 the Center received from Farm Progress Companies a large collection of materials of historical significance. They include readership studies of *Prairie Farmer*, *Wisconsin Agriculturist* and *Indiana Prairie Farmer* from the 1940s to the late

1990s. Also, they include reports of opinion polls taken among Illinois farmers about a wide range of agricultural topics. These poll reports also trace from the 1940s into the late 1990s. Center staff members will review these materials and enter citations for selected documents into the searchable ACDC database. Arrangements were initiated for the materials to become part of the University Archives.

- The Center received issues of the *USDA Broadcasters Letter* for the most recent 14 years. These complement issues already in the ACES Library. Citations for selected content within the issues will be entered into the searchable ACDC database.

## **Serving users**

Online usage. Numbers of successful page requests were not available for 2008 via the University Library server. According to Google Analytics, the ACDC web site hosted visits from 117 countries, averaging about 50 countries a month.

ACDC News. Center staff members prepared and published 20 issues of this electronic newsletter during 2008. The newsletter is used to identify a sampling of materials being added to the collection, announce approaching events of interest to agricultural communicators, recognize excellence in agricultural journalism and communications, and highlight issues and developments in the field. Among the topics highlighted during the year:

- Agriculture-related uses of new social media
- Local to international dimensions of a "digital divide"
- Farm groups getting more secretive
- Challenges facing rural community newspapers
- Growing public interest in local foods
- Rediscovering agricultural advisory/extension services
- Role of agriculture libraries in an electronic era
- Media coverage of food from clones

Partnership with IFAJ. Center staff members completed a successful third year of partnership with the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists, an organization that represents about 5,000 agricultural journalists in 30 countries. The Center provided professional development support in these ways:

- Contributed nine professional development features to *IFAJ News*, an electronic newsletter published five times a year for members and others.
- Prepared 10 professional development features that were posted on the IFAJ web site.
- Met requests of IFAJ information-seekers on an individual basis.
- Provided 20 issues of *ACDC News* to IFAJ members and, in the newsletter, frequently "pointed" to news and information on the IFAJ web site.
- Contributed suggestions for helping visitors find professional development resources on an IFAJ web site as it was being redesigned during 2008.
- Identified a local team of native German speakers as translators. On a pilot basis, the Center generated German translations of four features for posting on the IFAJ web site, as companion options to accompany the English versions online.

- A representative of the Center attended the 2008 IFAJ Congress that took place in Austria and Slovenia.

Partnership with AgNIC. The University of Illinois continued to serve as national "center of excellence" in agricultural communications as a partner in the Agriculture Network Information Center (AgNIC) of the National Agricultural Library. ACDC serves as the portal for information about agricultural communications within this worldwide agricultural information system on the Web. The Center provides online access to information and personalized assistant, upon request.

Special searches, requests, visits and contacts.

1. Center personnel continued to respond to a steady stream of requests for information and searching assistance. Here is a sampling of topics involved in those requests:

- Trends in presenting agricultural news on the Web
- Role of extension in sustainability of the pig and poultry industries
- Communications as the missing link in participatory agricultural research
- Public views of farmers, farming and agriculture in the U. S.
- Rural publishing in Nepal
- Staffing, organization and editorial decision making in agricultural publications
- Building private-public collaboration in international trade agreements
- Information contact about agriculture in Malawi.
- Theoretical landscape of agricultural communications
- Why there are specialized journalists in agriculture, but not in some other sectors
- Communicating environmental management among Australian primary producers
- Internet usage by sorghum producers and website development for serving them
- Identification and contributions of women in agricultural journalism and communications (resources for a new university course)
- Animal rights - struggling with the definition of "humane"
- Cultural roots of the public images of farmers
- Agricultural and rural development factors for dry land in Botswana
- Documents from the *Summary of Research in Extension*
- Equipping an agricultural organization with communications skills
- Improving PowerPoint presentations
- Challenges for journalists covering rural-urban issues
- Rules of the road for agricultural blogging
- Viewpoints on animal rights
- History of agricultural communications, with emphasis on broadcasting
- Communications methods used in the early years of extension services
- Information sources for rural and agricultural safety and health

2. Center staff used ACDC resources to suggest joint activities that might strengthen the international orientation of local agricultural communications students, as well as students in Argentina who are interested in this career field.

3. Staff member Jim Evans represented the Center on an international panel of judges that evaluated state finalist entries in the 2008 Australian Star Prize for Rural Journalism.

### **Advancing agricultural communications scholarship and practice**

Staff members of the Center contributed to agricultural communications scholarship and practice during 2008 in ways other than the resources gathered and services provided, day to day. They also contributed through their reports of research they conducted or reviewed, drawing substantially upon resources in the ACDC collection.

- Director Joe Zumalt prepared four professional development features for the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) newsletter. These reports described specialized online information sources that agricultural journalists can use in their reporting: multi-language and multi-subject resources of Wikipedia; AGRIS, the online information service of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; "Open" journal resources available online; and the Internet Archive as a research tool.
- Associate Jim Evans prepared 12 features during the year, 11 of them for the IFAJ newsletter and professional development section of the IFAJ Web site. These ranged across selected topics such as award-winning rural radio skills, use of color and photographs to boost rural readership, dangers facing agricultural journalists in some parts of the world, issues in rural-urban reporting and use of database analysis for investigative agricultural reporting. A co-authored journal article published during 2008 introduced an international framework and agenda for agricultural communications research.

### **Marketing efforts**

1. Major search engines remain probably the broadest among marketing channels for the Center. During 2008, the ACDC web site continued to rank as one of the top three sites among more than 87,000 identified through a Google search on the term "agricultural communications."

2. The newsletter, *ACDC News*, helped maintain a continuing presence for the Center among teachers, researchers, students, professionals, public officials and others interested in effective agricultural communications. Apart from reaching those who read this newsletter on the web site, issues were distributed to four listservs that reach an international audience of more than 600.

3. Center staff members provided information that permitted establishment of live links to the Center web site from the Canadian Forum for Nepal and the International Special Interest Group of the Association for Communication Excellence in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Life and Human Sciences (ACE). They also provided information about the Center for use in the newsletter of the North American Agricultural Journalists (NAAJ) organization.

### **Encouragement from users and reviewers**

1. The *Scout Report* from the University of Wisconsin describes the Center as "a fine way to learn about the latest developments throughout the world of agricultural journalism." This respected report cited the size and diversity of the ACDC collection, the newsletter, the detailed search engine and the RSS feed.

"No piece of agricultural journalism is overlooked here, as topics covered here range from the world of agricultural knowledge frameworks to analyses of pork, beef and poultry advertising."

2. During 2008, users of the Center continued to provide encouragement through their responses to information or counsel provided by staff, newsletter features and other services. Here is a sampling of the messages received:

"I always enjoy reading your site, you do a great job."

"Thank you both for such prompt, helpful and informative replies to my inquiry. (The Center search system) is indeed a useful research tool for communications and rural development - thank you."

"What a great resource you are!"

"Many, many, many thanks for the leads."

"Thanks very much for your advice, counsel, observation and direction during the preparation of my luncheon address."

"I always appreciate your newsletter... It does indeed remind me that 'science communication' is in some ways an heir of agricultural communication efforts, and that both have progressed a great deal over our careers."

"Thank you so much for helping. These articles were exactly the type of articles I needed."

"Your tips this weekend really helped."

"Thanks for all your good advice for my AAEA/LPC presentation last week."

"The ACDC contributed papers to this review, making it possible for us to look at relevant projects/reports from around the world which was extremely useful and greatly appreciated."

"I appreciate all of the extra advice and information that related to my thesis."

"Thank you for your encouragement, it means a lot."

"I thoroughly enjoy these little blurbs with links to more info."

"As always, your database is awe inspiring."

"We learn new things from every issue of the newsletter."

"Thank you for your quick response to my request."

"Thanks for your latest dispatch -- as always, it is informative and, better still, thought-provoking."

"The link you provided worked and the article is very good. This documentation center will become a great new resource for me now that I know it's out here!"

"Thank you for all of your assistance. I will use your suggestions."

"Thanks - this is just what I was looking for. ...Keep up the good work."

"This is excellent information and I will definitely use this in my presentation."