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Examining Communication Between Florida Agriculture and Natural Resource Organizations' Leaders and Membership to Foster Policy Engagement

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Abstract

The agricultural sector has been influenced significantly by agriculture and natural resources (ANR) policies voted in by elected officials. Many agricultural organizations and their members have sought to provide a 'voice' for the ANR industry and communicate with policymakers about emerging issues. It is necessary that such organizations and members be able to use that voice effectively. This study was conducted to examine the communication preferences of Florida agricultural organization members and factors that may encourage them to contact elected officials about an ANR policy. Respondents in this study least preferred to be contacted by their organization(s) via phone call or text message. They also identified local Extension offices and the university as the most trustworthy sources of communication regarding ANR policy. When contacting members to spur involvement in ANR policy decisions, organizational leaders should use a variety of communication mediums, including email magazines and printed newsletters and magazines, to promote engagement in ANR policy discussions. Future research is needed to examine other factors that may influence agriculture organization members' communication with elected officials, as well as the types of messaging strategies organizational leaders can use to further members' engagement in ANR policy decisions.

Keywords: agriculture and natural resources; agricultural organization members; communication; policy engagement

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Introduction

The U.S. agriculture sector produces an abundant supply of food and resources for the nation and world (Enns et al., 2016). In Florida, the agriculture industry is robust, with more than 47,000 farms spanning nearly 9.5 million acres and commodities accounting for approximately $4 billion in U.S. exports (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 2018). In Florida and other areas across the United States, the agricultural industry has consistently been shaped by agriculture and natural resource (ANR) policies pertaining to a variety of topics, such as the implementation of

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innovative practices and technologies, production, trade, energy use, food modification and labeling, and environmental and natural resources conservation (Effland, 2000; Kaufman et al., 2008; National Academy of Sciences, 2016; Florida Farm Bureau, 2018). Moreover, ANR policies and associated regulations have become closely connected to the income and livelihood of farmers and ranchers (Kaufman et al., 2008). Such policies and regulations have often been determined by and voted on by elected officials (Effland, 2000). As such, the actions of elected officials have become key influencers in the functionality of agricultural operations.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of sources of communication that influence policy, such as constituents and opinion leaders (Lawson et al., 2020; Noble, 2005; Salazar, 2015; Shipley, 2000). ANR organizations and their members are key constituents well-positioned to share first-hand stories and pertinent information to elected officials. Lawson et al. (2020) examined the influence of communication from select sources on local elected officials' decision-making about ANR policies and found that communication from farmers or ranchers would most impact their decision making. Local elected officials in this study also identified agricultural specialists as the most trustworthy sources for information about ANR issues (Lawson et al., 2020). The findings from Lawson et al. (2020) support the use of ANR organization members as opinion leaders in ANR policy processes. While many ANR organizations and their members have sought to engage in this manner and serve as a "voice" for the Florida ANR industry (Florida Farm Bureau, 2010), information from these organizations may not reach policymakers to the degree intended. With more organizations making a push for their members to email, call, and/or write their representatives, it is imperative to identify the best routes for establishing communication between members of ANR organizations and their elected officials.

To better influence ANR policy, it is important for organizations to first identify and utilize effective methods of communicating ANR policy information to their members, as well as be cognizant of methods to prepare and facilitate members' communication with elected officials (Effland, 2000). Communication it is an ongoing process of making sense of events or circumstances that, ultimately, serves as a springboard for action (Mills, 2003). Such grassroot efforts to influence elected officials' decision-making regarding ANR policies can be better focused if organizations have an understanding the communication preferences of both their members and officials (Salazar, 2015). Regarding the communication preferences of elected officials, Lawson et al. (2020) found that local elected officials preferred to be communicated to via face-to-face scheduled meetings and email. Further, they preferred to be communicated to using a story-telling format from those personally impacted by a proposed policy (Lawson et al., 20202). Little research has been conducted, however, to identify best methods of encouraging members of ANR organizations to communicate with elected officials about a proposed policy and how it will impact them.

Therefore, research is needed to examine best practices for delivering information to ANR organization members and methods of communication that may increase the likelihood they will, in turn, communicate that information to elected officials. Hinkle et al. (1996) proposed a model to better examine and explain the intentions of members to become active in the grassroots, political endeavors of their organizations. According to Hinkle et al. (1996), the communicated felt norms and social pressures of the organization play a large role in motivating members to act on behalf of the group. In the context of this study, clear communication from organizational leadership regarding the need to contact elected officials about an ANR issue may influence the likelihood members will contact an elected official about that issue. It may also be important for organizational leaders to consider the framing of the messages being communicated to their members (Telg et al., 2005). According to Telg et al. (2005), an issue must be framed to appeal to ANR members' sense of responsibility to fellow farmers, their community, and the agricultural industry as a whole. Further research is needed to better understand how leaders of ANR organizations should frame and deliver messages to their members to increase the likelihood of their engagement in ANR policy decision processes.

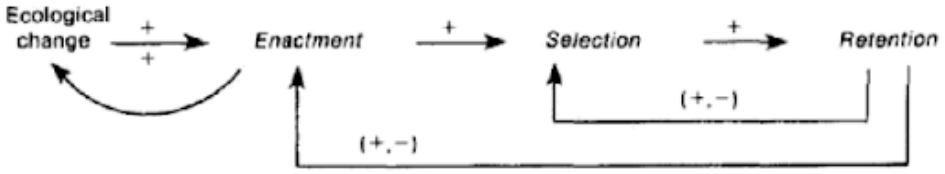
Conceptual Framework and Review of Literature

Weick's (1979) Model of Organizing was modified by the researchers to propose a comprehensive framework for examining agricultural organizations members' communication preferences and the forms of communication that may encourage them to engage with their elected officials (see Figure 1). The Model of Organizing addresses how individuals receive, retain, and utilize information from organizations, which is what the researchers examined in this study. Additionally, this study was conducted to examine the impact of communication on individual motivation, which is also addressed by this theory. As one of the first of its kind studies, and with consideration given to the lack of published findings specific to the scope and population of this study, the researchers felt that the use of a more traditional framework to guide the study was appropriate.

Organizations can be defined as "structures of mutual expectation, attached to roles which define what each of its members shall expect from others and from himself," (Vickers, 1967, p. 109). When communicating with members, organizations both have expectations of their membership and are held to expectations by their membership. Per the proposed model, communication between agricultural organizations and their membership follows a linear model, beginning with an ecological change that spurs information enactment, selection, and retention.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model to Explain ANR Organization Members' Communication Preferences and Motivation (Reprinted from "Model Of Organizing" by Weick, K. E., 1979)



An *ecological change*, also referred to as an environmental change, can be any disruption in standard practices, activities, rules, laws, systems, or organizations that are cause for discussion or concern (Haveman, 1992). Ecological changes primarily involve (a) an actor, organization, or change agent; (b) an action; and (c) an unanticipated consequence for the actor, organization, or stakeholders (Jennings & Greenwood, 2009). Once a change is occurring, organizational members decide how to make sense of and proceed with the change. Members often respond in one of two ways: (a) with the creation of new rules; or (b) by employing outside action (Weick, 1979). Organizations also have responses to ecological change. These responses may take the form of encouraging members to act or changing internal systems to address organizational problems or needs (Mumby, 2012). When it comes to ecological change, the agricultural industry is unique in that it is constantly in the midst of major structural change (i.e., changes in product characteristics, technology, scale, scope, and pace) while also facing constant change in industry regulations (Boehlje, 1999; Kaufman et al., 2007). In addition to being constant, change is quick and forces agricultural organizations to reply rapidly on behalf of their membership to proposed legislation, new regulations, and demands (Kaufman et al., 2007; Telg et al., 2005).

The *enactment* pertains to the fact that "when people act, they bring events and structures into existence and set them in motion," (Weick, 1988, p. 306). In a broad sense, enactment refers to an individual's response to a change, their motivations for their change and actions brought about because of their decision (Jennings & Greenwood, 2009). When organizations are working with members, broadening the number of ways members can interact and provide feedback to the organization is important, as well as the number of issues the organization pays attention to (Weick, 1979).

Organizations interact with their environment by not only responding to changes but also by what they choose to pay attention to (Mumby, 2012). As a part of the communication process, enactment presents yet another challenge for agricultural organizations event when members act. Public participation in science-legislation related action, whether through public hearings, conferences, demonstrations, or other events, is made complex by legislations' or organizations' ability to successfully host, much less have attended, events that promote discussion and educate policymakers or the public (Janse & Konijnendijk, 2007).

Sense-making may also influence ANR members' communication preferences and motivation to communicate with elected officials. Sense-making is one of the primary functions of organizational communication (Neher, 1997) and accounts for the process by which issues are "turned into situations that serve as a springboard to action" (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 275). The sense-making process is ongoing, instrumental, social, and easily taken for granted, positioning its central role in determining human behavior (Weick et al., 2005). When new issues arise, individuals go through a multi-step process to try and find meaning. Individuals first look to reasons for the issue, whether institutional constraints, traditions or organizational standards, that may have caused the issue (Mills, 2003). Individuals then seek information, often from organizations or other opinion leaders, about the issue and its direct impact on their day-to-day lives. As a person begins to understand the issue, sense-making accounts for the process by which meaning materializes, and informs action (Mills, 2003; Weick et al., 2005). Communication in a central component of sense-making in that it is an ongoing process of making sense of events or circumstances that, ultimately, serves as a springboard for action (Mills, 2003).

The *selection* of information refers to the process by which information is made meaningful (Weick et al., 2005). As individuals make information meaningful, the number of possible meanings gets reduced as a combination of mental models, articulation, and retrospective attention reduce the amount of information available into a coherent idea or option (Weick et al., 2005). Selection is often seen as the most complex of the organizational communication process, as it can be difficult to define, encompasses various components, and the criteria can be attributed to an infinite number of sources (Simon, 1957; Weick, 1979). Selection criteria are paramount for organizations and decision-makers considering that the cues they use, why they use those cues, and the process of scanning and monitoring information all have an impact on an organization's communication (Weick, 1979). Selection criteria expand beyond existing knowledge, however, as trust plays a large factor in an individual's acceptance of information from an organization (Settle et al., 2017). Individuals become affiliated with a group or organization when they inherently support what the group does, which is particularly true in agriculture (Telg et al., 2005; Hinkle et al., 1996). Individuals, even when misinformed or uninformed, will rely on trusted organizations to shape their opinions on science-based issues (Brossard & Nisbet, 2017). If an individual trusts an organization, they are more likely to trust an organization's communications (Brossard & Nisbet, 2007). Therefore, understanding individuals' communication preferences when interacting with agricultural organizations is paramount for organizations hoping to inform, educate, and connect with members to influence policymakers (Shanley & Lopez, 2009).

Retention refers to an individual's storage of information for future application (Weick, 1979). Every day, individuals receive thousands of messages, both directly and indirectly, in attempts to change their opinion, attitudes, behaviors, or purchasing decisions (Hunt, 2004; Funkhouser & Parker, 1999). Retention explores information's ability to compete with other messages and make a lasting impact in an individual's memories (Mumby, 2012; Weick, et al., 2005). Most often, an individual's retention of specific information is based on their previous experiences and prioritizations. These previous experiences serve as frames, continuously building on earlier actions and reactions (Jennings & Greenwood, 2009). As an individual becomes more familiar with a message, change, or communication, they begin to have better message retention on a particular topic (Mumby, 2012; Jennings & Greenwood, 2009). Communicating with elected officials can be challenging for agriculture

community members, although policymakers often turn to trusted industry representatives for information on policy and stakeholder impacts (Lawson et al., 2020; Shanley & Lopez, 2009). Information about scientific findings is often inaccessible, equivocal, and underreported, and seldom takes into account the calendars of executive or legislative policymakers (Gregrich, 2003).

Purpose and Objectives

This study addresses the American Association for Agricultural Education national research priority one: Public and policy maker understanding of agriculture and natural resources (Enns et al. 2016) by exploring best methods for informing policy makers on ANR issues through the engagement of ANR organization members. Specifically, this descriptive study was conducted to describe best communication methods ANR organizational leaders may use to reach their members and facilitate their members' engagement in ANR policy. The following objectives guided this study:

1. Describe how often and through which communication methods Florida ANR organization members prefer to receive information from their organization(s).
2. Describe Florida ANR organization members' perceived trustworthiness of select communication sources and channels for receiving ANR policy information.
3. Describe the degree to which methods of communication from Florida ANR organizations would facilitate members' likeliness to contact local, state, or national elected officials about an ANR issue or policy.
4. Describe the degree to which types of impact of a policy facilitate Florida ANR organization members' likeliness of contacting a local, state, or national elected official about the policy.
5.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The targeted population of this study consisted of active listserv members of the following Florida agricultural organizations: Florida Farm Bureau (n = 839); Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (n = 3,934); Florida Cattlemen's Association (n = 5,920); Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association (n = 1,061); and Wedgworth Leadership Institute (n = 306). Useable responses were collected from a total of 439 members across all organizations. 306 were collected from Florida Farm Bureau for a 36.47% organizational response rate; 46 from Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association for a 1.16% organizational response rate; 299 from Florida Cattlemen's for a 5.05% response rate; 61 from Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association for a 5.75% response rate; and 59 from Wedgworth Leadership Institute for a 19.28% response rate. However, it should be noted that multiple organizational membership was high among this population, and participants were asked to take the survey only once. A true response rate could, therefore, not be reported due to the possibility of study participants being members of more than one organization. In addition, data collection methods did not allow for the random sampling of non-respondents to compare to respondents. As such, nonresponse bias was assessed by comparing early to late respondents (Miller & Smith, 1983). To better inform readers of the risk of Type II error, the statistical test used, number of respondents in each group, statistical power, and results of each test are reported (Johnson & Shoulders, 2017).

Early respondents (those responding prior to the third reminder email; n = 316) were compared to late respondents (n = 123) on randomly selected items from each section of the instrument, i.e., communication preferences, communication types to motivate engagement with an elected official, and perceived trustworthiness of information sources, using two-tailed independent t-tests at the .05 alpha level; the power of all tests were 1.00 for a medium effect (*Cohen's d* = 0.50 [Cohen, 1988]). There were no significant differences between early and late respondents on the selected communication preference item "email newsletter" [early M = 3.98, SD = 1.01; late M = 3.98, SD = 1.03; $t(429)$ = .01=2; p = .99]. Regarding communication types that would motivate members' engagement, no

significant differences were observed between early and late respondents on the randomly selected item "a phone call from my organization would motivate me to contact an elected official about an ANR issue" [early $M = 3.32$; $SD = 1.28$; late $M = 3.35$; $SD = 1.32$; $t(429) = -.20$, $p = .84$]. Lastly, two items from the source trustworthiness section were randomly selected. No differences were observed between early and late respondents on the item "lobbyists" [early $M = 2.75$; $SD = .87$; late $M = 2.74$; $SD = .97$; $t(430) = .086$, $p = .93$], and no differences were found for the item "internet news sources" [early $M = 2.72$; $SD = .86$; late $M = 2.63$; $SD = .90$; $t(427) = 1.07$, $p = .29$.

Agriculture organization members who participated in this study were members of: Florida Farm Bureau ($f = 306$; 70%); Florida Cattlemen's Association ($f = 299$; 68%); Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association ($f = 61$; 14%); Wedgworth Leadership Institute ($f = 59$; 13%); and Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association ($f = 46$; 10%; note that percentages may not add up to 100% due to the ability for respondents to be members of more than one organization). The majority of respondents were white ($f = 403$; 92%), male ($f = 334$; 76%), and were distributed evenly across age categories ranging from 30 to 69 years old. Few respondents were 29 years of age or younger ($f = 17$; 4%) or 70 years of age or older ($f = 46$; 10%). More respondents ($f = 167$; 38%) reported a yearly household income $75,000 to $149,999 than any other income bracket. Regarding their political beliefs and affiliations, half of the respondents ($f = 221$; 50%) held conservative beliefs, and the majority ($f = 321$; 73%) identified as Republican. Lastly, half of the respondents ($f = 221$; 50%) lived on a farm in a rural area, and the majority ($f = 348$; 79%) were currently involved in agriculture for a living.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	*f*	%
Sex [a]		
Male	334	76.1
Female	92	21.0
Age Category [b]		
20 to 29	17	3.9
30 to 39	68	15.5
40 to 49	92	21.0
50 to 59	92	21.0
60 to 69	102	23.2
70 to 79	40	9.1
80 or older	6	1.4
Race [c]		
White	403	91.8
Black or African American	2	0.5
Asian or Pacific Islander	3	0.7
Hispanic	9	2.1
American Indian or Alaska Native	5	1.1
Multiracial	6	1.4
Other	6	1.4
Income [d]		
$24,999 or less	5	1.1
$25,000 to $49,999	31	7.1
$50,000 to $74,999	56	12.8
$75,000 to $149,999	167	38.0
$150,000 to $249,999	86	19.6
$250,000 or more	71	16.2
Political Affiliation [e]		
Republican	321	73.1
Democrat	43	9.8
Independent	37	8.4
Non-affiliated	9	2.1
Other [e]	17	3.9
Political Beliefs [f]		
Very liberal	2	0.5
Liberal	19	4.3
Moderate	107	24.4
Conservative	221	50.3
Very conservative	80	18.2
Type of Residence [g]		
A farm in a rural area	221	50.3
Rural area, not a farm	68	15.5
Subdivision in a town or city	57	13.0
Urban or suburban area outside of the city limits	76	17.3
Downtown area in a city or town	10	2.3

[a] Responses missing from 13 participants
[b] Responses missing from 22 participants
[c] Responses missing from 5 participants

[d] Responses missing from 23 participants
[e] Responses missing from 12 participants
[f] Responses missing from 12 participants
[g] Responses missing from 7 participants

Data Collection

Data was collected using an online survey questionnaire. Leaders of each organization were contacted and asked to distribute an introductory email, as well as three follow-up reminder emails to the members of their organization. Each email included a brief description of the study and an online link to the survey questionnaire. The lack of direct contact between researchers and the population of this study may have posed limitations to the effectiveness of the data collection efforts. The agricultural organization leaders were not willing to provide the researchers contact information for their members due to privacy policies, but they did agree to distribute the initial email with a link to the online survey and follow-up reminder emails on behalf of the researchers. The lack of ability to report an exact response rate due to the possibility of multiple membership was also a limitation of this study.

Instrument

An original questionnaire developed by the researchers served as the instrument for this study. The questionnaire was reviewed for face and content validity by an expert panel that consisted of three agricultural communication faculty members, executive directors from three Florida ANR organizations, an ANR organization policy director, a communications director, and one agricultural leadership organization director. The panel provided feedback to enhance the alignment of the questionnaire with the goals of this study and the interests of the participating organizations. The panel provided recommendations for edits to the questionnaire regarding item wording, item inclusion, and response option scales. These recommendations were taken into consideration by the researchers to produce the final questionnaire, which was deemed acceptable by the panel. The inability to access members of the population to obtain a sample for employing test-retest reliability measures was a limitation of this study.

The first section of the instrument included ten items designed to examine how often and through which methods Florida agriculture organization members preferred to receive ANR information from their organization(s). First, respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they like to receive information from their organization(s) (e.g., daily, twice a week, once a month, etc.). Respondents were then asked to indicate their degree of preference for being contacted by their organizations via various communication channels (e.g., email newsletter, phone call, social media posts). The communication channels included were identified by the participating organizations as those they were using currently or had interest in using in the future. Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert-type scale: 1 = *not at all preferred;* 2 = *slightly preferred;* 3 = *moderately preferred;* 4 = *very preferred;* and 5 = *extremely preferred.* Members who indicated some degree of preference (i.e., slightly, moderately, very, or extremely) for receiving information via social media platforms were asked to indicate, by checking all that apply, which social media platforms they would like their organization(s) to use.

The second section of the instrument was designed to measure agricultural organization members' perceived trustworthiness of sources of ANR information. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of trustworthiness associated with 21 items, such as "internet news sources," "local TV news channels," and "federal agriculture and natural resource organizations/agencies." Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = *very untrustworthy;* 2 = *untrustworthy;* 3 = *neither trustworthy nor untrustworthy;* 4 = *trustworthy;* and 5 = *very trustworthy.*

The third section of the instrument was intended to examine which methods of communication from agricultural organizations would motivate members to contact an elected official about an ANR issue or policy. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with eight statements, such as "an email newsletter from my agricultural organization(s) would motivate me to contact an elected official about an agriculture or natural resources issue" and "a phone call from my organization(s) would motivate me to contact an elected official about an agriculture or natural resources issue." Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = *disagree strongly*; 2 = *disagree*; 3 = *neither disagree nor agree;* 4 = *agree;* and 5 = *agree strongly*.

The fourth section of the instrument was designed to determine the types of impact that would motivate Florida agriculture organization members to contact an elected official about an ANR issue. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with four items such as "I would contact a local, state, or national elected official about legislation that has a direct negative impact on me," and "I would contact a local, state, or national elected official about legislation that has a direct negative impact on Florida farmers." Responses were collected using the previously mentioned 5-point Likert-type scale of agreement.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the SPSS26 statistical software package. All objectives were assessed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages.

Findings

Objective One

Objective one sought to describe agricultural organization members' preferred methods of being communicated to by their organization(s). Nearly one-fourth of respondents (f = 315; 72.9%) identified email newsletters as very or extremely preferred methods of communication, and a little more than half of respondents (f = 228; 56.1%) identified printed magazines as very or extremely preferred methods of being communicated to by their organization(s) (see Table 2). Regarding methods relatively less preferred, more than half of respondents (f = 215; 53.9%) identified phone calls as a communication method not at all preferred (see Table 2).

Table 2

Florida Agriculture Organization Members' Preferences For Communication Methods Used By Their Organization(S) To Communicate ANR Information To Them

Method	Not at all preferred		Slightly preferred		Moderately preferred		Very preferred		Extremely preferred	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Email newsletter	12	2.8	25	5.8	80	18.5	160	37.0	155	35.9
Printed magazine	36	8.8	43	10.6	100	24.6	124	30.5	104	25.6
Printed newsletter	83	20.6	61	15.1	117	29.0	93	23.1	49	12.2
Social media posts	147	36.6	62	15.4	84	20.9	55	13.7	54	13.4
Videos delivered via social media	136	34.7	76	19.4	81	20.7	57	14.5	42	10.7
Text message	134	33.3	69	15.7	111	27.5	64	15.9	25	6.2
Webinars	153	39.5	97	25.1	77	19.9	46	11.9	14	3.6
Phone call	215	53.9	64	16.0	78	19.5	29	7.3	13	3.3

Objective Two

Objective two was to describe Florida agriculture organization members' perceived trustworthiness of select communication sources and channels for receiving ANR policy information.

Respondents identified several sources as trustworthy sources of ANR information (see Table 3). The communication channels identified as either trustworthy or very trustworthy by the largest numbers of respondents included fact sheets (*f* = 342; 79.3%), technical reports (*f* = 339; 78.8%), peer-reviewed journal articles (*f* = 326; 75.7%), and seminars or conferences (*f* = 323; 74.8%; see Table 3).

Table 3

Respondents' Perceived Trustworthiness Of Communication Channels For Receiving ANR Policy Information

Channel	Very untrustworthy		Untrustworthy		Neither		Trustworthy		Very trustworthy	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Peer-reviewed journal articles	6	1.4	9	2.1	90	20.9	208	48.3	118	27.4
Fact sheets	2	0.5	7	1.6	80	18.6	251	58.2	91	21.1
Technical reports	3	0.7	3	0.7	85	19.8	248	57.7	91	21.2
Seminars or conferences	1	0.2	4	0.9	104	24.1	253	58.6	70	16.2
Community events	6	1.4	28	6.5	172	39.9	205	47.6	20	4.6
Magazines	22	5.1	54	12.5	208	48.3	139	32.3	8	1.9
News radio channels	27	6.3	83	19.3	203	47.3	111	25.9	5	1.2
Local TV news channels	35	8.1	83	19.2	195	45.0	117	27.0	3	0.7
Newspaper	50	11.5	99	22.9	181	41.8	95	21.9	8	1.8
TV programs (not news)	53	12.4	118	27.6	184	43.0	73	17.1	0	0.0
National cable TV news channels	84	19.4	104	24.0	173	40.0	70	16.2	2	0.5
National network TV news channels	113	26.2	120	27.8	128	29.6	69	16.0	2	0.5
Social media	91	21.1	131	29.8	185	42.8	24	5.6	0	0.0

Regarding sources of ANR information, those perceived as either trustworthy or very trustworthy by more respondents than other sources were agricultural specialists (*f* = 381; 87.9%), University of Florida (*f* = 379; 87.3%), and their local Extension office (*f* = 376; 87%; see Table 4). Respondents held more neutral views about lobbyists and internet news sources, with roughly half of respondents having identified these sources as neither trustworthy nor untrustworthy (see Table 4).

Table 4

Respondents' Perceived Trustworthiness Of Sources Of ANR Policy Information

Sources	Very untrustworthy		Untrustworthy		Neither		Trustworthy		Very trustworthy	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Local Extension office	5	1.2	3	0.7	48	11.1	213	49.3	163	37.7
University of Florida	4	0.9	7	1.6	44	10.1	220	50.7	159	36.6
PIE Center	4	0.9	4	0.9	56	12.9	227	52.4	142	32.8
Agricultural specialists	1	0.2	5	1.2	46	10.6	260	60.0	121	27.9
State ANR organizations or agencies	7	1.6	16	3.7	96	22.2	250	57.9	63	14.6
Federal ANR organizations or agencies	12	2.8	27	6.2	130	30.0	229	52.9	35	8.0
Lobbyists	50	11.6	87	20.1	223	51.6	66	15.3	6	1.4
Internet news sources	48	11.2	99	23.1	220	51.3	59	13.8	3	0.7

Objective Three

Objective three sought to describe agricultural organization members' level of agreement that select forms of communication from their organization(s) would motivate them to contact an elected official about an ANR issue or policy. Compared to other forms of communication listed, more respondents agree or strongly agreed (f = 313; 71.5%) that an email newsletter from their organization(s) would motivate them to contact an elected official about an ANR policy (see Table 5). Additionally, slightly more than half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a printed letter or phone call from their organization would motivate them to contact an elected official. Compared to the other communication forms, the fewest number of respondents agreed that webinars would motivate them to contact an elected official (see Table 5).

Table 5

Respondents' Agreement With Select Methods Of Communication From Their Organization(S) As Motivating Them To Contact An Elected Official About An ANR Issue

Method	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Email newsletter	10	2.3	17	3.9	98	22.4	228	52.1	85	19.4
Printed letter	23	5.3	35	8.0	124	28.5	195	44.8	58	13.3
Phone call	61	14.1	48	11.1	100	23.1	140	32.4	83	19.2
Printed magazine	32	7.4	60	13.8	155	35.6	155	35.6	33	35.6
Text message	72	16.8	43	10.0	119	27.7	148	34.5	47	11.0
Social media posts	87	20.5	64	15.1	113	26.6	130	30.6	31	7.3
Videos delivered via social media	88	20.6	67	15.7	133	31.1	110	25.8	29	6.8
Webinars	92	21.5	93	21.7	160	37.4	69	16.1	14	3.3

Objective Four

Objective four sought to describe the degree to which the type of impact resulting from ANR legislation would motivate Florida agriculture organization members to contact a local, state, or national elected official. More than three-fourths of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all types of impacts as being those that would motivate them to contact an elected official. High agreement was particularly observed for the statements "I would contact a local, state, or national elected official about legislation that has a direct negative impact on me," and "I would contact a local, state, or national elected official about legislation that has a direct negative impact on my community" (see Table 6).

Table 6

Respondents' Agreement With Types Of Impact That Would Motivate Them To Contact An Elected Official About An ANR Issue

Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
"I would contact a local, state, or national elected official about legislation that has…"	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
A direct negative impact on me	1	0.2	3	0.7	27	6.2	179	40.9	228	52.1
A direct negative impact on my community	0	0.0	7	1.6	27	6.2	224	51.1	180	41.1
A direct negative impact on Florida farmers/ranchers	0	0.0	4	0.9	47	10.7	205	46.8	182	41.6
A direct negative impact on agriculture in Florida	0	0.0	3	0.7	47	10.7	218	49.8	170	38.8

Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

This study aimed to address the gaps in literature pertaining to ANR organization members' communication preferences and motivation to contact elected officials about ANR policies. While the methods used do not allow the results to be generalized beyond the scope of the participants, the results from this study help provide insight into the communication preferences and perceptions of this group of agricultural organization members that may hold implications for other agricultural groups. Regarding agriculture organization members' preferences for being communicated to by their organization(s) and perceived trustworthiness of information sources, the findings of this study revealed more Florida ANR organization members preferred to be communicated to via email or printed magazines. Members also identified information from local Extension offices and the university as the most trustworthy sources of information. One-fourth of members in this study identified national network TV news and social media as very untrustworthy. A possible recommendation for future research is to conduct qualitative research to identify the "why" behind perceptions of trustworthiness and credibility regarding ANR information sources. Further, despite prior research supporting the growth of social media as an avenue information sharing and engagement (Kerpen, 2015), members in this study identified social media posts and videos as only moderately or slightly preferred. These methods were also found to neither motivate nor discourage members to communicate with elected officials about ANR policies or issues. Future research should be conducted to examine discrepancies between this study and others regarding social media as an effective means of communicating information to members of agricultural organizations. With a growing population and changing agriculture industry (American Farm Bureau Federation, 2018), effective communication with elected officials is imperative to the successful shaping of agricultural policy. As such, further research on the communication behaviors of elected officials and members of agriculture organizations may help

provide a holistic picture of effective two-way engagement in communication between agriculture members and elected officials.

Policy in agriculture is created by elected officials and influenced, whether large or small, by agricultural lobbyists, agricultural and natural resource organizations, and ANR organization members (Shanley & Lopez, 2009). As such, this study sought to provide insight into how to motivate members of agricultural organizations to play an active role in ANR policy by contacting their elected officials. Respondents indicated email newsletters, printed letters, and phone calls to have the most influence when driving them to contact elected officials. This finding differs from those by Doerfert & Miller (2006), which indicated monthly newsletters and printed materials were not sufficient when meeting the information needs of agricultural audiences. Regarding the findings of this study, it should be noted that some differences were observed in members' preferred methods of being communicated to by their organizations and the types of communication they identified as motivating them to contact an elected official about an ANR policy. While phone calls were the least preferred methods of being communicated to by their organization(s), members identified email newsletters, printed letters, or phone calls as the types of communication from their organization(s) that would most motivate them to contact an elected official. As such, it is recommended leaders of agricultural organizations utilize different methods of communicating with their members depending on the purpose of the communication. Janse and Konijendijk (2007) noted the range of stakeholders with varying perspectives in agriculture and natural resources makes accomplishing a successful communication process among members complex and, therefore, advised the use of multiple communication methods.

Whether communicating to share information or motivate members to contact elected officials, organizational leaders should still utilize the sources of information members perceived as most trustworthy to effectively deliver the necessary information. As members in this study indicated they would most likely contact an elected official about an ANR policy that had a direct, negative impact on them or their community, organizational leaders should make efforts to share trustworthy information with members that encourages members to act on changing internal systems to address organizational problems or needs (Mumby, 2012). Further, this information should highlight the personal and communal impacts of the ANR policy about which they want members to contact elected officials.

Future research should seek to further explore the findings of this study by quantifying the influence of communication methods on members' communication with elected officials. For example, it may be beneficial to examine the emails, newsletters, and phone calls delivered to agricultural organization members that spurred the highest click-rates, discussions, or results of contacting electing officials to provide insight to which forms of communication are given the most attention. If possible, research similar to this study should be conducted in a setting that allows for random sampling of respondents and inferential analyses. Such research may be useful in examining the influence of demographic characteristics on the targeted outcome of communicating with elected officials. Glass (2007) suggested different generations have different communication preferences. While this study did not analyze the influence of demographic characteristics on members' communication preferences, future research of such nature may provide insight into the current communication landscape of ANR organizations' members by demographic characteristics and key data on how to effectively disseminate messages using the most effective channels based on those characteristics.

Lastly, this area of research could benefit from qualitative inquiry. Further research should involve interviews or focus groups to understand why certain communication channels are preferred over others or why certain communication sources are perceived as trustworthy. Additional research should examine how often elected officials use each of the sources identified in this study.

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