

Budget cuts and time pressures among key concerns for IFAJ survey respondents

By Jim Evans*

Thanks to 12 IFAJ E-News readers who responded to this feedback question in a recent issue: "What dangers do you face in your work as an agricultural journalist or editor?"

Following is a summary of their reported concerns, from strongest to weakest. Respondents could choose more than one of the listed areas of concern.

Budget cuts	50%
No time to look ahead	42%
Failing to try new ideas	25%
Media convergence	25%
Losing journalistic integrity	25%
Emergence of new media - blogs, internet news sites, etc.	25%
Physical dangers	17%
Freedom of expression	8%
Other dangers	8%

Listening for echoes from 46 years ago

"Are ag journalists afraid?" asked a journalist from the United States. "Where is the word 'danger' coming from? There's never been a time of so much opportunity. If anyone is afraid or thinks their job is in danger it's probably because they're lazy and unwilling to adapt to the changes that have always been happening."

The term "danger" was used in this survey to invite comparison with some perspectives offered 46 years ago by an agricultural editor, Donald R. Murphy, in his book, *"What farmers read and like"*. Murphy described the following as the "greatest dangers" in agricultural editing:

- Doing this year exactly what you did last year and failing to test new ideas.
- Imitating some drastic change made by a contemporary publication without testing its appeal to your particular audience.
- Being influenced by a few letters, some from folks with an ax to grind and some by a few subscribers who are either radically for or radically against some proposal.
- Failing to try to look five or ten years ahead, to try to see what audiences and publications may be like then.
- Forgetting that sociology, anthropology, psychology and history are also fields in which farm editors need skills. Farm families are people as well as hog raisers and corn raisers.

A couple of similarities appear

How do these two sets of concern compare, across time and locations? No hard and fast comparisons can be made. However, both lists reflect these two areas of concern:

Failing to look ahead

Failing to try new ideas.

And IFAJ respondents describe some new or different challenges. What concerns seem new or different in the minds of these IFAJ respondents today, compared with 46 years ago?

1. **Pressures from time and budgets.** It seems likely that agricultural journalists have always felt such pressures, globally. However, current responses appear to reflect greater pressures today from budgets and time (workloads). "More letters in less time...made me stop working there," said one Dutch journalist about a former affiliation.
2. **Media convergence.** A Canadian farm publication editor observed: "In Canada, and particularly the prairie region, ag media convergence is a very real issue. One parent company alone controls at least 7 ag pubs. Approximately 5.5 million people live in the prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and of that number, only about 155,000 are classified as farmers. In reality, that's a lot of ag news for a very [small] group of people. The challenge is how to make each publication distinct and fresh."
3. **Journalistic integrity.** Another European journalist expressed concern about "companies pressing their influence on articles."
4. **Political conflicts.** A respondent from Nepal reported: "The political conflicts (e.g., Madheshi Movement) have restricted free movement... in Nepal [and] are posing threats to the journalist. As well, a vested interest of a particular political party...[is] exerting pressure on fair [journalism and editing]."
5. **Low priority.** Another journalist from Bangladesh says that agricultural journalism is regarded as 'less prominent' in his country. "There has not been developed an enabling environment to flourish agricultural journalism. Even the government institutions have a little sponsorship to promote agricultural journalism. Social-political turmoil [and] crimes are prominently covered in the media in the commercial view point. Media gate keepers show a little interest to cover agricultural news rather than political news."
6. **An urban world that does not know agriculture.** From Spain, another respondent observed: "Today there is too much news all around - blogs, internet, TV, radio...but journalists need to add value to the news. From my point of view, there is an opportunity for agricultural journalism. We live in an urban world that [does not] know agriculture, farmers and farming style of life. Today, we need to inform how farming is, with true news... There are a lot of people waiting for us!!!"

Please share our thoughts about professional concerns - and opportunities - that agricultural journalists in your area are facing, may face and/or should pursue. Send them to IFAJ E-News management editor Liz Harfull at lizk@adam.com.au

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