

What is New in Agricultural News: A Content Analysis of a TV News Show in Agriculture

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Introduction

In the United States, national television news remains a dominant and widely consumed medium, delivering timely and relevant information across a vast spectrum of issues (Greico & Mitchell, 2019). According to the Pew Research Center (2024), 63% of U.S. adults get their news from television at least occasionally. The way news is framed significantly influences public perception and decision-making. This is particularly true in the agricultural sector, where stakeholders rely on media coverage to stay informed (Alam, 2014). However, televised news only presents a fragmented representation of complex realities, shaping social perspective through selective framing and contextualization (Sucháček et al., 2023). Given the critical role of agricultural journalism in shaping industry discourse, examining how news frames evolve and the implications for stakeholders is important. This study investigated the U.S. Farm Report's framing shifts to understand how agricultural news prioritizes information for stakeholders and informs media strategy (Maj & Lewandowsky, 2020). This study aimed to identify the frames used by the U.S. Farm Report and how these frames changed from 2022 to 2024.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Framing Theory, which explains how elements of a perceived reality or an issue are emphasized to shape perception or assign greater importance to specific narratives (Entman, 1993). Framing arranges news content in ways that benefit journalists in their reporting and those who depend on their interpretation (Brüggemann, 2014). In television broadcasting, framing strategically illustrates the tone of the message, identifies key factors, and defines the fundamental characteristics of a topic (Khan et al., 2020). Examining news stories' frames provides insight about audience understanding and public trust in the media.

Methodology

A quantitative content analysis was conducted to explore and identify the frames reported in an agricultural television news show. Systematic random sampling was used to select one episode per month from February 2022 to December 2024. U.S. Farm Report was chosen because its episodes were available online. A codebook was developed based on approaches proposed by Ghosh and Sharma (2014) and Matthes and Kohring (2008). This codebook described the main characteristics of television news, including topic, airtime per headline, depth of spread, method of delivery, source, and USDA priority area. For the framing analysis, elements such as tone of coverage, nature of the issue, actors or stakeholders involved, and mentioned benefits, and barriers were based on Essary et al. (2022). A total of 35 episodes were selected and downloaded for analysis. The headlines, averaging 12 per episode, were analyzed using descriptive statistics for the frequencies of the elements detailed in the codebook. This information was used to compare the presentation of frames in episodes from 2022 and 2024. The codebook developed based on previous framing research, was revised by an expert in the field for validity. Three coders were trained to ensure reliability in the coding process, with each coder analyzing three episodes. A Krippendorff's alpha was used to measure intercoder reliability, obtaining an average of .81 for the codebook elements.

Findings

According to Table 1, 20.13% of the headlines in 2022 were related to environment and natural resources ($n = 30$), 23.17% of 2023 headlines were related to market and economy topics ($n = 38$) and 20.63% of 2024 headlines were related to market and economy ($n = 32$). However, the headlines with more airtimes were related to the food industry in 2022 (86 minutes) and 2023 (102 minutes) while in 2024 it was market and economy (78 minutes).

Table 1

Comparison of Modes from 2022 to 2024 News (N = 469)

Variables	2022 ($n = 149$)	2023 ($n = 164$)	2024 ($n = 156$)
Most mentioned headline	Environment and natural resources ^c	Market and economy ^b	Market and economy ^c
Most airtime headline	Food industry ^a	Food industry ^b	Market and economy ^c
Agricultural priority	Advancing justice, equity, opportunity, and prosperity	Advancing justice, equity, opportunity, and prosperity	Creating more, better, and new market opportunities
Depth of Spread	National	National	National
Source	Expert	Government	Expert
Method of Delivery	Package	Package	Package
Nature of the issue	Economy	Economy	Economy
Actor and stakeholder	Producer	Producer	Producer
Benefit mentioned	Producer	Producer	Consumer
Risk mentioned	Producer	Producer	Producer

^a Positive tone; ^b Neutral tone; ^c Negative tone

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations/Impact

The findings revealed a shift in the predominant topics covered; market and economy-related headlines gained prominence in 2023 and 2024, contrasting with the focus on environment and natural resources in 2022, a year marked by extreme weather conditions (NCEI, 2022). However, the focus on the food industry remained consistent across both years. Additionally, there was a notable change in the sources of information, with government sources being utilized more frequently in 2023 compared to experts in 2022 and 2024. Despite these variations, depth of spread, method of delivery, nature of the issue, and key actors/stakeholders remained relatively stable across both years. These findings have several implications for agricultural stakeholders, policymakers, and media practitioners. The shift towards market and economy-related topics suggests a potential change in audience interests or media priorities, potentially influencing decision-making and resource allocation within the agricultural sector (Levendusky, 2022). The consistency in framing elements such as method of delivery and nature of the issue implies a certain level of continuity in how agricultural news is presented to the public, which can help maintain trust and credibility in the media. Several recommendations can be made to enhance the effectiveness and impact of agricultural television news. This medium of communication should continue to diversify its coverage to reflect the dynamic nature of the agricultural sector while ensuring balanced and accurate reporting on traditional and emerging issues. Future research could explore the influence of framing on audience perceptions and behaviors regarding agricultural issues, providing valuable insights for media strategy and communication practices in the agricultural sector.

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