

CULTIVATING THE FARM BILL:
THE EFFECT OF PRINT MEDIA COMMUNICATION ON AGRICULTURAL
LEGISLATION

HONORS PROJECT

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DEDICATION

To my loving and supportive family, who told me I could do anything I set my mind to; introduced me to the wonders, trials, and tribulations of agriculture; talked me through innumerable drafts of the farm bill; and reminded me that my best could always be better. Were it not for you, I would not have pushed so hard nor accomplished so much.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On Sunday, July 2, 2006, *The Washington Post* ran the first of a series of articles entitled “Harvesting Cash: Working a Farm Subsidy.” The series was intended to illustrate to its audience how American farmers negotiate the farm subsidy program to maximize their profits through government aid. Its timeliness was crucial: Congress had been working toward a new farm bill proposal for 2007.

The Farm Bill enacted in 2002 was met with great negativity by many. In a March 14, 2005, editorial in *The Washington Post*, economic policy analyst Tad DeHaven called the bill “economically and fiscally disastrous” and railed against its “harmful farm policy” (2005). After Farm Bill 2002’s expiration, much debate has centered on the policy for 2008.

The news media is the public’s main source of information, especially in government affairs, and it is often held responsible for some aspects of human behavior. The media are especially adept at influencing politics. For example, increasingly negative newspaper coverage of a Conservative Party candidate in Great Britain’s 1997 race for prime minister was a major deciding factor in the outcome of the election (Crewe et al., 1998). In principle, if enough attention is given to a particular issue, the populace will respond in one form or another. The concept of an “active audience” asserts that people utilize the media for certain purposes, whether learning important information or inducing meaningful experiences. It also indicates that significant effects can occur over time as a direct consequence of viewer or reader intent (Baran & Davis, 2003).

Swaying public opinion is not a simple task, but, according to Krosnick and Miller, “It has become clear that the media do indeed shape public opinion...New media effects have been identified as well, including agenda setting and news media priming” (2000, p. 301). Priming essentially increases a person’s ability to recall information about a specific topic that is given and can also influence the judgments that people construct concerning that particular topic (Miller & Krosnick, 2000). The *Washington Post* series on farm subsidies and other agricultural relief programs demonstrates an excellent example of media priming where the media continually covers a topic and helps individuals construct meaning.

Agenda setting also plays a key role in influencing media audiences. Agenda setting is the news media’s most effective tool in the political arena. By attracting attention to an issue, communications professionals indicate that the issue is of national importance. Editors and journalists, therefore, possess a degree of command over the topics that Americans deem newsworthy and politically critical by covering them (Miller & Krosnick, 2000). Agenda setting may be accomplished by the framing of articles. Journalists may frame articles by utilizing sources that strongly influence the terminology printed in news text, allowing them to recommend certain opinions, interpretations, and definitions of an issue (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Andsager, 2000).

These media trends could have an impact on the future of agricultural legislation. The intense media attention to Farm Bill 2008 provides information to the public at large, but its potentially negative tone regarding certain areas of the industry could influence legislators’ constituents—not to mention the legislators themselves—to view farm aid programs as imperfect solutions to the problems facing the industry. As Farm Bill 2008

reaches fruition, such media scrutiny could have a powerful role in shaping the new legislation. The farm bill is a piece of legislation, reviewed and renewed every five years, that governs federal farm and food policy. The farm bill provides an opportunity for policy makers to address most of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's programs and can create a broader coalition of support for policies that, individually, might not survive the legislative process (Johnson, 2008).

The increasingly small number of Americans involved in agriculture has contributed to the decrease in agriculture-related media literacy (Frick, Kahler, & Miller 1991). As early as the 1970s, researchers noted that the lack of education about agriculture caused the majority of Americans to be totally ignorant of knowledge directly related to their lifestyles, family economics, and survival (Frick, Kahler, & Miller, 1991). Though some of the most visible communication issues of the past five years involve agriculture, and impact even those Americans uninvolved in the industry, knowledgeable reporting on ag-related topics is minimal (Lundy, Telg, & Irani, 2006). "The changing nature of agriculture and its impacts on the American economy mean that agricultural communications is crucial to the creation of agriculturally literate public" (p. 59). Raising the agricultural literacy of the American public will produce informed citizens who can contribute to the establishment of a more globally and domestically competitive industry (Frick, Kahler, & Miller, 1991).

Significance of the Study

Agricultural legislation poses a particular problem for politicians. It directly affects less than two percent of the nation's population, but it indirectly impacts the entire

country. No ag-related legislation faces more scrutiny than Farm Bill 2008, and its journey from inception to ratification has been well-documented by nationally recognized print media outlets. While this realization may comfort those who fear that agriculture is gradually “slipping between the cracks” of national awareness, it also raises questions of the effects of this close inspection on the formation and reception of the legislation itself.

The news media, in many ways, play a teaching role in the lives of their audience. While the mythical “bandwagon effect” commonly associated with intense media coverage may be exaggerated by critics, the media nonetheless help reinforce existing attitudes if not creating them (Weaver, 1996). The process of “crystallization” refers to the sharpening of attitudes toward a particular subject through media influence, implying that the media serve as teachers, rather than as converters, in part due to the salience and accessibility of the information they offer (Weaver, 1996). It can be assumed, therefore, that if the national news media serve as the public’s main source for information regarding agricultural policy (Lundy et al., 2006), the knowledge they provide will be used to form and crystallize the opinions of America’s voting population (Weaver, 1996). Voters, in turn, hold tremendous sway over the actions of their representative legislators, especially when dealing with economic issues that impact a significant portion of voters (Peltzman, 1984). Thus, it can be inferred that the news media exert indirect power over policy-makers (MacQuail, 1994). Understanding the messages reaching legislators and their constituents may help agricultural communicators close the gap between the nation’s farmers and Capitol Hill by striving for equal representation of information sources and analyzing current issues of interest to the news media and the public at large.

Purpose of the Study

Due to the high influence of the media on the public, and in turn legislative policy, it is important to understand how they are covering one of the largest agricultural bills in the country. Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze the quantity and nature of print media coverage of farm bill legislation by major newspapers. The study was narrowed to the controversial topic of farm subsidies as provisioned in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills. The articles selected for examination by this study were found in American newspapers with high national circulation: *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *USA Today*. Articles published during debate over the 2002 Farm Bill (2000-2002) and 2008 Farm Bill (2006-2007) were analyzed.

Objectives of the Study

The initial purpose of this study was to determine the possible consequences of widespread print media attention on the formation of agricultural legislation, using the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills as models. After reviewing the relevant literature, other, more specific goals were outlined. These objectives, which are presented below, helped describe the aim of the study and served as guidelines when collecting data. These objectives are:

1. To determine to what extent farm subsidy programs in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills were discussed;
2. To establish how farm subsidy-related articles were framed by the news media and how these frames change over time;

3. To determine the objectivity of stories concerning the farm bills and, specifically, farm subsidies;
4. To identify the sources utilized by news writers covering the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills by occupation, expertise and number
5. To describe the published articles in terms of physical placement within the newspapers.

Key Terms

Agenda setting: The idea that media do not tell people what to think, but what to think about (Baran & Davis, 2003).

Agriculture literacy: The possession of knowledge and understanding of the United States' food and fiber system; the ability to synthesize, analyze, and communicate basic information about agriculture (Frick, Kahler, & Miller, 1991).

Farm Bill: Legislation, reviewed and renewed every five years, that governs federal farm and food policy (Johnson, 2008).

Frame: Concept structure that defines problems, diagnoses causes, makes moral judgments, and suggests remedies (Entman, 1993).

Media: Forms of mass communication; for the purposes of this study, mass-market news outlets.

Media literacy: An individual's ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages (Baran & Davis, 2003).

Priming: The idea that media draw attention to some aspects of political life at the expense of others (Baran & Davis, 2003).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Prior to the start of the study, a literature review was conducted to provide background information about contemporary issues and concerns related to the following subject areas: historical trends in agricultural legislative policy; media influence on the policy-making process; agenda setting, priming, and framing as a theoretical foundation; and agricultural literacy as a growing issue. These sections serve as a framework for the review of literature.

Historical Trends in Agricultural Legislative Policy

Agriculture has always been an essential element in the United States' overwhelming success on the world's stage, and governmental policy affecting the industry is therefore subject to fervent debate and political dispute. Much of today's farm legislation has its roots in the agriculture policies of the 1920s and 1930s, when the Great Depression wreaked economic havoc on the entire nation (Garver & Trelogan, 1936). Farm organizations first rose to prominence in the early '20s, when a farm depression began to erode the stability of the United States' agricultural infrastructure (Bonnen, Browne, & Schweikardt, 1996). To relieve their fiscal decline, farmers lobbied for direct government intervention, and legislators began to listen. To appease their constituents, farm-state Congressmen "saw their own interests best served by working with and listening to farmers and farm groups. This led...to the maintenance of the congressional farm bloc" (p. 133).

The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 is regarded by scholars as the first major price support for farmers (Little, Proulx, Marlowe, & Knaub, 1987). Prior to this piece of legislation, farm policy was largely limited to improving conditions in rural America; the Adjustment Act was the forerunner of the nation's modern farm programs (Little et al., 1987). In 1930, America boasted over six million farms, most of which were threatened with bankruptcy due to the growing disparity in price between farm commodities and other products. The Roosevelt administration settled on an immediate goal of drastically reducing farm production to boost lagging prices, but other, more permanent issues threatened the stability of farm income (Garver & Trelogan, 1936).

The "policy triangle" phenomenon developed in the 1940s. Farmer interests, congressional committee chairs, and agents of the United States Department of Agriculture formed the first of these "triangles of power," which gradually splintered off as commodity programs became increasingly fragmented. A downward shift of power and influence occurred as subcommittees rose in prominence and policies became more commodity-specific (Bonnen, Browne, & Schweikardt, 1996). The 1950s ushered agribusiness into the political arena. Production controls hampered the financial gains of business leaders, and they subsequently sought equal representation in the policy-making process (Bonnen, Browne, & Schweikardt, 1996). This trend continued through the 1960s, as well. Agribusiness interests began to cultivate individual congressional advocates whose districts or states contained plants or business headquarters rather than approaching entire committees or subcommittees. The 1965 farm bill initiated the movement from high price supports, and direct income payments to replaced price supports throughout the decade and into the 1970s.

Globalization changed the face of American agriculture—and agriculture policy—in the latter part of the 20th century (Bonnen, Browne, & Schweikardt, 1996). Lowered price supports made domestic products more competitive in the world market; between 1965 and 1980, American exports increased in value from \$6.2 to \$41.2 billion, boosted by the growing needs of third-world nations and the declining value of the U.S. dollar (Bonnen, Browne, & Schweikardt, 1996; Thompson, 2005). When the dollar appreciated in 1981, Congress was in the act of passing a new bill that prescribed loan rates, or minimum levels at which U.S. prices would be supported. These conflicting events led to the worst financial crisis rural America had experienced since the Great Depression, with agricultural exports dropping 40 percent in five years (Thompson, 2005). Deficiency payments were introduced in the 1985 farm bill to reduce the difference between loan rates and world-market prices.

The “domestic-international policy nexus” (Bonnen, Browne, & Schweikardt, 1996) affected decision-making in two ways. First, it brought the White House and cabinet-level departments further into the process. Secondly, exports were becoming more economically and politically vital to the country, bringing global interests into trade negotiations and giving international institutions like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the World Trade Organizations more power over America’s national policy (Bonnen, Browne, & Schweikardt, 1996).

Throughout the early 1990s, congressmen were pressured to alleviate the high cost of agricultural cost supports and reduce government intervention in farm production. Critics challenged that previous provisions were outdated, program rules were restrictive, and federal budget costs were high (Young & Westcott, 1996). Congress finally gave in

to popular demand in 1996 with the passage of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform (FAIR) Act, also dubbed the “Freedom to Farm” Act. The FAIR Act was intended to shift federal farm aid from price supports to a system of direct payments; it also introduced loan-deficiency payments as an alternative to loan rates (Lence & Hayes, 2002). Despite legislators’ attempts to cut back agricultural price supports, some still remained in the 1996 bill, which drew criticism from economists who championed the “New Farm Economy” (Lamb, 2002). They argued that subsidies were unnecessary, first because farm households were no longer lagging behind non-farm households in terms of income, and second, support programs intended to decrease overproduction and price volatility had miserably failed to do so (Lamb, 2002).

The debate over subsidies raged far into the development of the 2002 Farm Bill, which—despite the protests of non-farm-state legislators and an incorrect budget baseline projection—was rushed through Congress and signed into law by a president facing an imminent, difficult election year (Thompson, 2005). The 2002 bill backtracked on farm subsidies, increasing price supports and creating new commodity programs. It also resurrected old ones, such as the dairy program that was killed by the FAIR Act six years previous. The new farm bill strained already tense foreign trade relations, as the United States appeared “two-faced” in its efforts to lower international subsidies while expanding its own domestic support program (Thompson, 2005). The country’s latest piece of farm legislation, which was originally scheduled for 2007, faces many of the same issues encountered with the 2002 Farm Bill.

Media Influence on the Policy-Making Process

Scholars have long hypothesized a connection between the news media and legislative policy. The media have a considerable influence on political agenda setting, or discerning which issues seem to be most pressing and important at a given time (Weaver, 1996). As early as the 1960s, media researchers interested in the motivation of public opinion postulated that there is a tangible link between the issues emphasized by the media and what the voting public considered important. According to Cappella and Jamieson (1996), “As various agenda setting, framing, and priming studies have shown, media coverage can shape how the public thinks about politics” (p. 75). Cohen sums up this phenomenon: “[The press] may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*” (Cohen, 1963, p. 120).

Media’s influencing the voting population has major ramifications on the development of legislative policy. Because one of the chief concerns of congressmen and –women is reelection, catering to constituencies is key when developing their individual political agendas (Miller, 1997). Such behavior among legislators is both rational and self-serving, though many political scholars have long been wary of government representatives “selling their souls to interests in exchange for support and votes” (Miller, 1997, p. 1175). Voters and legislators coexist in a relationship in which both sides expect certain “social rewards” from the other. Voters weigh the costs and benefits of certain policies, and their opinions inform legislators how to vote in order to garner their support (Miller, 1997). “Vote trading” occurs when interest groups pressure the government to

adopt certain policies and reject others. The amount of pressure exerted by a group depends on its anticipated gain or loss from a policy, and swapping policies in order for both sides to gain congressional support is a relatively common occurrence (Abler, 1989).

An increasingly cynical view of the federal government imposed by the news media also draws attention to controversial policy, such as farm legislation. Newspaper analyses conducted since World War II show that the national press generally holds Congress in low esteem (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996). The media's coverage of Capitol Hill teeters from total ignorance to outright criticism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996). Strategic coverage of the political arena may remind the audience that the parties involved in a particular issue debate are self-interested, and policy positions may be interpreted as the legislators' means of courting votes and maintaining their political status (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996). Therefore, coverage of contentious farm policy can be expected to be critical and largely negative in tone as the media seeks to challenge the authority of congressional policy-makers.

Special-interest organizations have strong ties to policy development, and they have long utilized the mainstream media as a resource to disseminate information and influence the political arena (Gable, 1958). Legislative groups and activist organizations are the major shapers of public policy, and they expend a great deal of funding on propaganda and media relations aimed largely at criticizing the opposing party in the news media (Gable, 1958; Telg, 2000). In 1996, a debate arose between a well-funded conservation group and the Florida sugar industry over the theoretical ecological effects of sugar farming on the Florida Everglades and three amendments to the state constitution the environmentalists proposed to combat them; the cost of the ensuing

media campaigns totaled an estimated \$38 million (Telg, 2000). Two of the amendments passed, and “the sugar industry was portrayed by voters as irresponsible stewards of the environment” (Telg, 2000, p. 55).

Agenda Setting, Priming, and Framing as a Theoretical Foundation

This study’s theoretical base rests upon the principles of agenda setting, media framing, and media priming. McQuail (1994) asserts that “the mass media seem increasingly to ‘set the agenda’ and to define political problems on a continuous day-to-day basis” (p. 370), so their effect on audience beliefs and opinions could be substantial. A study conducted by McCombs and Shaw demonstrated a relationship between media reports and audience ranking of important issues during a key presidential election (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Baran & Davis, 2003). The agenda-setting media do not seek to influence audience opinion about particular issues, but rather to bring specific issues into the public awareness (Weaver, 1996). Closely tied to the concept of agenda setting is that of media priming. Priming occurs when news media outlets assign more “weight” to one subject than another, bringing certain topics to the forefront as “bits and pieces of political memory that are accessible” and therefore more likely to influence the judgment of the reader (Baran & Davis, 2003, p. 314).

Frames, which are concepts that define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993), may be identified by the presence or absence of keywords and phrases and are used by journalists to minimize the complexity of issues in order to make specific information available to audiences (Scheufele & Tewkesbury, 2007). These keywords and phrases help readers understand issues and

formulate judgments, and framing information can be accomplished by utilizing a variety of sentence types, such as judgments and inferences, and citing sources whose views may echo those of the writer (Andsager 2000). This may, however, also lead to a perceived media bias and a lack of media objectivity.

The extent to which the news media remains unbiased in its reporting has long been questioned, and unattributed facts and opinions do appear in news articles against the recommendation of many journalists and journalism instructors (Ryan, 1979).

Hayakawa developed a categorization system to classify news sentences into three types: reported sentences, which are verifiable facts; inferences, which are statements about the unknown based on the known; and judgments, which are expressions of the writer's "approval or disapproval of a specific object, occurrence, or person" (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990; Ryan, 1979, p. 497). This system was based on two theoretical assumptions of objectivity and source attribution (Lowry, 1985). First, readers are more likely to perceive reported sentences as objective than inferences, and inferences are perceived as more objective than judgments. Second, information attributed to a news source is less likely to be perceived as "biased" or "subjective" than unattributed information (Lowry, 1985). News articles featuring a majority of unattributed information, therefore, may be perceived as more biased by the audience, and articles featuring a large number of judgment sentences may face similar criticism (Ryan, 1979).

Agricultural Literacy as a Growing Issue

As the American farm population dwindles, so does the number of working journalists who specialize in agriculture-related areas, despite the growing need for

discipline-specific media professionals (Lundy et al., 2006). The number of newspapers employing full-time farm writers has declined 60 percent in the last 20 years, and many of the remaining agriculture journalists are employed by specialty publications, not large-market news outlets (Pawlick, 2001). With 90 percent of the country's population at least 30 years removed from the farm, the public has a limited understanding about government-supported agricultural policies, agencies, and academic institutions (Frick, Kahler, & Miller, 1991). This break between agriculture and society at large could potentially cause the public to view the activities of such agencies as "serving only the interests of a narrow (and dwindling) constituency" (Frick, Kahler, & Miller, p. 42).

Media literacy, the ability to process messages disseminated by the media, can be applied to the agriculture industry, as well (Baran & Davis, 2003). Agriculture-related news, when reported, lacks the depth and breadth of information once offered to a more knowledgeable public; farm news for farmers has been supplanted by farm news for the general public (Pawlick, 2001). A dearth of sources may also play a role in the diminishing substance of agricultural journalism as multinational agricultural summits, such as the 1992 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade talks, may be narrowed to the "assumptions and calculations of U.S. trade officials" (Pawlick, 2001, p. 89). As voters receive much of their political information from the news media and subsequently influence the voting tendencies of their legislative representatives (Miller, 1997), the lack of agricultural specialization and literacy among American news media professionals is a worrisome trend that is unlikely to change, given that only seven of the 510 journalism programs accredited by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication offer agricultural journalism curricula (Pawlick, 2001).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Farm subsidies have long been a topic of controversy, and at no time are they more spotlighted than during periods of debate on federal farm policy. The purpose of this study was to investigate a possible bias against farm subsidies in mass-market print media. The previous literature review guided the data collection in this study.

Research Design

This study was designed as a content analysis of newspaper articles discussing farm subsidies in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills. Because its goals were to identify and describe the type and number of sources addressed in these articles, to analyze the framing and media bias present in the material, and to categorize the articles by their placement, this study was labeled descriptive.

Limitations of the Study

The content analysis conducted for this study was performed on newspapers with large national circulations and readership and therefore excluded smaller regional publications that may have presented a different side of the issue. Because of the selection criteria, Midwestern states were largely removed from the analysis sample. However, the newspapers chosen are distributed throughout the country. As the articles were pooled using a search of the LexisNexis Academic database, only written descriptions of accompanying visual aids and graphic elements were available for study.

Another limitation to the study was the choice of keywords selected for the LexisNexis search. More or less specific search terms may have yielded a different sample, which in turn could have altered the findings of the study. The choice to examine only the body text of the articles—rather than including headline, subheadings, and image captions—may be viewed as an additional restriction on the study’s outcome. Coder reliability of less than 75% limits the credibility of the resultant data according to Holsti’s coefficient of reliability (North et al., 1963); coder reliability for this study was calculated at 64%.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected using a content analysis of a series of articles pooled from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *Los Angeles Times* from two discreet time periods. Articles from the first sample were published between January 1st, 2001, and December 31st, 2002, roughly the dates of discussion for the 2002 Farm Bill. The second sample came from a pool of articles dated between January 1st, 2006, and December 31st, 2007, and dealt with the formation of the 2007 (now 2008) Farm Bill.

These newspapers were chosen for the study because of their large national circulation and readership. The four papers selected are ranked among the highest in the United States. *USA Today* ranks first with a daily circulation of 2,284,219; the *New York Times* follows in third with 1,077,256. The *Washington Post* has a daily circulation of 699,130, and the *Los Angeles Times* circulates 773,884 newspapers daily (Associated Press, 2008).

The study was conducted using a content analysis of the pooled articles from the selected newspapers. Content analysis—the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics—has been cited as the fastest-growing research technique in mass communication in the last two decades (Riffe & Frietag, 1997). The articles were selected via a LexisNexis research database search using the key phrases “2002 Farm Bill,” “2007 Farm Bill,” and “farm subsidies” between the start and end dates listed above. Those ultimately chosen fell into one of the two time periods and contained the words or phrases listed in the search field. The search yielded a sample of 54 articles in total, 27 from 2001-2002 and 27 from 2006-2007. Corresponding photos and graphics were not included in the final analysis, and headlines and subheads were similarly excluded. Editorials found in the LexisNexis search were included in the data set in addition to news articles.

Measurement of Study Variables

Variables in the study included the number of stories concerning the farm subsidy program in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills published during the two time periods; the news publication in which they appeared; physical placement of those stories within the newspaper; number and types of sources cited; the media frames utilized; and ultimately a sentence-by-sentence breakdown based on Hayakawa-Lowry media-bias categories.

The number of farm subsidy-related stories was measured by counting the overall number of stories meeting the selection criteria that were published during the study time periods. Each story was classified according to its newspaper of publication, either *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, or *USA Today*. Story placement

was measured by categorizing each article based on its appearance in one of the following newspaper sections: Business/Financial, Editorial, Front Section, Metro, National, Technology, other, or no section listed.

Source numbers were measured by counting the number of news sources cited in each story. Source types were measured by classifying each attribution into one of 16 discrete source categories: agricultural organization, alternative fuel industry representative, conservation organization, commodity producer (large-scale), commodity producer (small-scale), economist, foreign trade expert, government agency representative, government report, President of United States, university professor, U.S. Representative (Democrat), U.S. Representative (Republican), U.S. Senator (Democrat), U.S. Senator (Republican), and other.

Media frames were determined by classifying each story according to primary and secondary topic areas. Wording, sources, and topics covered all played a role in the frame chosen. These topic areas, or media frames, include equalizing distribution of farm subsidies; constituent influence on farm subsidies; effect on foreign trade; reform of subsidy program; changes in farm demographics; subsidy impact on commodities; opinion of the Bush administration; opinion of House of Representatives; opinion of Senate; subsidies and conservation; subsidies and alternative fuels; and subsidies and social programs. Primary topics were those introduced in the articles that provided an overarching theme. Secondary topics were other issues raised and discussed to a lesser extent yet still given emphasis by the author.

The study utilized content analysis methods based on the Hayakawa-Lowry news bias categories. S.I. Hayakawa's original work created a system of three sentence-type

categories: reported sentences, which are verifiable; inferences, which are statements about the unknown based on the known; and judgments, which are expressions of the writer's approval or disapproval of occurrences, individuals, or objects (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). D.T. Lowry expanded upon Hayakawa's three-category system by adding six new categories. Lowry's categories considered the concept of attribution from either the journalist making statements or attributing the information to a source (1985). The following nine categories therefore make up the Hayakawa-Lowry system (p. 574):

1. Reported attributed sentences, or factual information attributed to a source;
2. Reported unattributed sentences, which present factual information without a source citation;
3. Labeled inferences, which are predictions, interpretations, or statements about the unknown based on the known that contain subjective "tip-off" words such as "appear," "could," "may," "perhaps," or "possible";
4. Unlabeled inferences, or statements about the unknown based on the known that do not contain "tip-off" words;
5. Favorable, attributed judgments, which are the writer's or speaker's statements of an event, individual, or situation that are attributed to a source and are favorable toward the subject;
6. Unfavorable, attributed judgments, or the writer's or speaker's statements of an event, individual, or situation that are attributed to a source and are unfavorable toward the subject;

7. Favorable, unattributed judgments, which are the writer's or speaker's statements of an event, individual, or situation that are not attributed to a source and are favorable toward the subject;
8. Unfavorable, unattributed judgments, or the writer's or speaker's statements of an event, individual, or situation that are not attributed to a source and are unfavorable toward the subject;
9. Other sentences, such as rhetorical questions, introductory sentences, or incomplete sentences.

In his work, Lowry makes two assumptions about sentence objectivity and source attribution. He states that readers are more likely to recognize reported sentences as more objective than inference statements, which are in turn seen as more objective than judgments (Lowry, 1985). He also assumes that reporters are perceived as less biased when attributing information to sources and when writing labeled inference sentences than unlabeled inferences. His studies tested the construct of the Hayakawa-Lowry news bias categories and verified that Hayakawa's distinctions between reported and inferred information and judgments can be distinguished by readers and do affect their perceptions of news objectivity (Lowry, 1985).

Analysis of Data

The author was the primary coder for all articles used in the study. Coding for this study was conducted over a four-week period. The project advisor helped to establish reliability by checking percent agreement for each coded variable from a 10% random sample of five articles. Holsti's coefficient of reliability (North, Holsti, Zaninovich, &

Zinnes, 1963) was used to calculate intercoder reliability. The reliability check yielded agreements averaging an intercoder reliability of 62%.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected using Microsoft Excel statistical software. Data were calculated related to the objectives:

1. To determine to what extent farm subsidy programs in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills were discussed;
2. To establish how farm subsidy-related articles were framed by the news media and how these frames change over time;
3. To determine the objectivity of stories concerning the farm bills and, specifically, farm subsidies;
4. To identify the sources utilized by news writers covering the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills by occupation, expertise, and number;
5. To describe the published articles in terms of physical placement within the newspapers.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings of the research study are presented, which investigated the coverage of federal farm subsidies in major metropolitan newspapers between 2001-2002 and 2006-2007. Utilizing a content analysis of 54 news articles, the study identified major frames and classified sentences based on the Hayakawa-Lowry news bias categories. It is broken into five sections, each describing the results of the objectives stated in Chapter III. Those objectives are to determine to what extent farm subsidy programs in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills were discussed; to establish how farm subsidy-related articles were framed by the news media and how these frames change over time; to determine the objectivity of stories concerning the farm bills and, specifically, farm subsidies; to identify the sources utilized by news writers covering the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills by occupation, expertise and number; and to describe the published articles in terms of physical placement within the newspapers.

Objective 1: Determining Media Coverage of Farm Subsidy Articles

The search for articles covering farm subsidies in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *Los Angeles Times* yielded 54 articles, 27 from each discrete time period. Of those articles, 27 (50.0%) appeared in the *Washington Post*, 19 (35.2%) appeared in the *New York Times*, 5 (9.3%) appeared in *USA Today*, and 3 (5.5%) appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. Distribution of articles by year of publication are shown in Table 1 below. As shown, the majority of the articles

appeared in 2002 (n=23; 42.6%) and 2007 (n=22; 40.1%). Only 7.4% of the articles appeared in 2001 (n=4), and 9.3% were published in 2006 (n=5).

Table 1. Distribution of Articles by Year

Year	N	Frequency
2001	4	7.5%
2002	23	42.6%
2006	5	9.2%
2007	22	40.7%
Total	54	100%

Objective 2: Establishing News Media Frames

All 54 articles were placed into primary and secondary frames. Primary frames denote the main concept discussed in the article; secondary frames represent other main topics that were referenced in the article. As illustrated in Table 2, the most prevalent primary frame found in the sample was reform of subsidy programs with 11 articles (20.4%). Second-highest among primary frames was Senate opinion with 10 articles (18.5%), and equalizing subsidy distribution ranked third with 8 articles (14.8%). In the secondary frame category (Table 3), farm subsidy reform represented 25.9% of secondary concepts (n=14). Equal distribution of subsidies was a secondary frame in 18.5% of articles (n=10), and both subsidy impact on commodities and effect on foreign trade were secondary concepts in 11.1% of the sample (n=6).

Table 2. Distribution of Articles by Primary Topic by Year

Primary Topic Area	2001-2002	2006-2007	Total
Reform of Subsidy Programs	11	0	11
Opinion of Senate	10	0	10
Equalizing Distribution	0	8	8
Impact on Foreign Trade	3	3	6

Opinion of Administration	0	5	5
Impact on Commodities	0	5	5
Constituent Influence	0	4	4
Opinion of House of Reps.	3	0	3
Change in Farm Demographics	0	2	2
Subsidies & Conservation	0	0	0
Subsidies and Alt. Fuels	0	0	0
Subsidies & Social Programs	0	0	0
Total	27	27	54

It is also important to note the breakdowns of primary and secondary frames between the two discrete time periods represented in the sample. Primary frame breakdowns in the 27 articles chosen from 2001-2002 were: Farm Bill reform (n=11; 40.7%); Senate opinion (n=10; 37.0%); House opinion (n=3; 11.1%); and foreign trade (n=3; 11.1%). Secondary breakdowns were: farm bill reform (n=14; 51.9%); subsidy effect on foreign trade (n=6; 22.2%); Senate opinion (n=3; 11.1%); House opinion (n=3; 11.1%); and changes in farm demographics (n=1; 3.7%).

Table 3. Distribution of Articles by Secondary Topic by Year

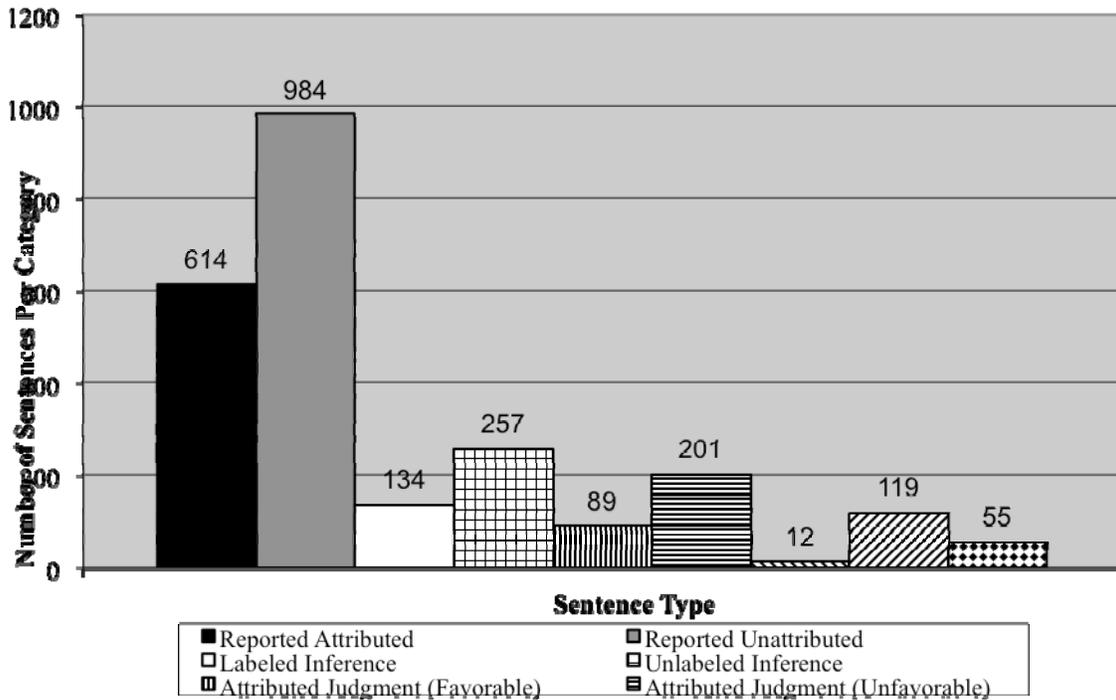
Secondary Topic Area	2001-2002	2006-2007	Total
Reform of Subsidy Programs	14	0	14
Opinion of Senate	3	0	3
Equalizing Distribution	0	10	10
Impact on Foreign Trade	6	0	6
Opinion of Administration	0	1	1
Impact on Commodities	0	6	6
Constituent Influence	0	6	6
Opinion of House	3	0	3
Change in Demographics	1	2	3
Subsidies & Conservation	0	1	1
Subsidies and Alt. Fuels	0	1	1
Subsidies & Soc. Programs	0	0	0
Total	27	27	54

In the 2006-2007 sample, the primary breakdowns were: Equal distribution of subsidies (n=8; 29.6%); impact on commodities (n=6; 22.2%); the opinion of the Bush administration (n=5; 18.5%); constituent influence on subsidies (n=4; 14.8%); foreign trade (n=3; 11.1%); and changes in farm demographics (n=2; 7.4%). Secondary breakdowns included equal distribution (n=10; 37.0%); effect on commodities (n=6; 22.2%); constituent influence (n=6; 22.2%); change in farm demographics (n=2; 7.4%); subsidies and conservation (n=1; 3.7%); opinion of the Bush administration (n=1; 3.7%); and subsidies and alternative fuels (n=1; 3.7%).

Objective 3: Determining Objectivity Based on Hayakawa-Lowry Categories

The 54 articles contained a total of 2,465 sentences. As shown in Figure 1, 984 sentences (41.0%) were unattributed reported sentences, and attributed reported sentences accounted for 25% (n=614) of the total sentences. An example of a reported attributed sentence found in one article is: “Fifty-four large crop operations would collect more than \$100,000 each under the proposal, according to an analysis by the advocacy organization Environmental Working Group, with one Louisiana farm receiving an extra \$201,000” (Eilperin, 2006). “With these ‘deficiency payments,’ farmers are assured of a certain income and can obtain the loans they need to stay in business” (Pear, 2002) represents a reported, unattributed sentence.

Figure 1. Hayakawa-Lowry Distribution of Coded Articles



In the sample articles, 134 sentences (5%) were categorized as labeled inferences, while 257 sentences (10%) could be classified as unlabeled inferences. Labeled inferences were sentences that included words such as “could,” “may,” or “possibly” to denote an opinion or perception. An example of a labeled inference would be “But now that they are in leadership positions, attacking farm subsidies could alienate voters in rural districts, particularly in the South and in the Corn Belt” (Martin, 2007). Four percent (n=89) of the sentences were categorized as favorable attributed judgments; 8% (n=201) were classified as unfavorable attributed judgments. Twelve sentences (0.48%) were labeled favorable unattributed judgments, and 119 sentences (5%) fell into the unfavorable unattributed judgment category. “Other” sentences comprised 2% of the sample (n=55).

Based on Hayakawa’s three original categories, 1,598 sentences (66%) were reported, 391 sentences (15%) were inference, and 421 sentences (17%) were coded as judgments. Two percent (n=55) of sentences were coded as other sentences.

Objective 4: Identifying Sources

The number of sources appearing in the sample ranged from 1 to 18, with a mean of 6.2 sources, a median of 6 sources, and a mode of 5 sources. Only one article cited 18 sources; most of the articles cited less than 10 sources (see Table 4).

Table 4. Number of Source Citations in Farm Subsidy Articles

Number of sources	N	Frequency
1	5	9.3%
2	2	3.7%
3	3	5.6%
4	7	13.0%
5	9	16.7%
6	5	9.3%
7	6	11.1%
8	6	11.1%
9	4	7.4%
10	2	3.7%
11	1	1.9%
12	0	0.0%
13	1	1.9%
14	1	1.9%
15	1	1.9%
16	0	0.0%
17	0	0.0%
18	1	1.9%
19	0	0.0%
20	0	0.0%

As shown in Table 5, the “other” source category constituted the largest group of sources cited in the sample articles with 21.9% (n=73). “Other” sources were those that

did not fall into the listed categories. These sources included non-commodity-producing landowners, legal representatives, financial institutions, non-agricultural business groups, aid organizations (such as OxFam and anti-hunger coalitions), and foreign officials. Among categorized sources, congressional members (n=108; 32.4%) and federal government agencies (n=32; 9.6%) were most often cited, with Democrats (n=68; 20.4%) being represented more than Republicans (n=40; 12.0%) among legislators. Common sources within Congress included farm-state senators and representatives, House and Senate leaders, and Agriculture Committee chairpersons and members. The government agency cited most often was the United States Department of Agriculture.

Table 5. Distribution of Citations by Source Type

Type of Source	N	Frequency
Other	73	21.9%
Democratic Senator	38	11.4%
Government Agency	32	9.6%
Democratic Representative	30	9.0%
Agricultural Organization	23	6.9%
Conservation Group	22	6.6%
Republican Senator	21	6.3%
Republican Representative	19	5.7%
Large Producer	16	4.8%
President/Administration Official	13	3.9%
Government Report	11	3.3%
University Professor	10	3.0%
Economist	8	2.4%
Small Producer	8	2.4%
Trade Expert	8	2.4%
Alternative Fuel Representative	1	0.4%
Total	333	100.0%

Agricultural organizations, such as American Farm Bureau and federations of commodity growers, appeared 23 times (6.9%), while conservation groups, such as the Environmental Working Group, constituted 22 citations (6.6%). Large-scale commodity

producers, which are widely identified as those receiving the bulk of farm subsidy payments, appeared 16 times (4.8%) in the sample, while small-scale producers were cited only 8 times (2.4%). The Bush administration, including the president and White House spokespeople, was cited 13 times (3.9%); government reports were cited 11 times (3.3%). University professors represented 3.0% of sources (n=10).

Objective 5: Describing Articles by Physical Placement

Of the 54 articles chosen for the sample, 38 articles (70.4%) were placed in the front section of their respective newspapers. Stories found in sections not listed on the coding breakdown constituted 11.1% (n=6). Five articles in the sample were found on the editorial page (9.3%), 3 were placed in a national news section (5.5%), and 2 articles came from the business section (3.7%).

Summary

In this study, articles printed in major metropolitan newspapers with high national circulation were analyzed and categorized by number and year of publication; by primary and secondary frames; by the Hayakawa-Lowry news bias classification system; by number and type of sources cited; and by their physical placement within the publications.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, KEY FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The study's data was collected using a content analysis of articles pooled from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *Los Angeles Times* from two discreet time periods, between January 1st, 2001, and December 31st, 2002; and January 1st, 2006, and December 31st, 2007. The articles were selected via a LexisNexis research database search using the key phrases "2002 Farm Bill," "2007 Farm Bill," and "farm subsidies" between the start and end dates listed above. Those ultimately chosen fell into one of the two time periods and contained the words or phrases listed in the search field. The search yielded a sample of 54 articles in total, 27 from 2001-2002 and 27 from 2006-2007.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the quantity and nature of print media coverage of farm legislation by major newspapers. The study was narrowed to the controversial topic of farm subsidies as provisioned in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills. The articles selected for examination by this study were published between 2001-2002 and 2006-2007 and were found in American newspapers with high national circulation: *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *USA Today*.

Objectives

Several issues relating to farms subsidies in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills emerged from a review of literature. These issues were presented in the form of

objectives, which served as guidelines when gathering data and helped in directing the aim of the study. These objectives were:

1. To determine to what extent farm subsidy programs in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills were discussed;
2. To establish how farm subsidy-related articles were framed by the news media and how these frames change over time;
3. To determine the objectivity of stories concerning the farm bills and, specifically, farm subsidies;
4. To identify the sources utilized by news writers covering the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills by occupation, expertise, and number;
5. To describe the published articles in terms of physical placement within the newspapers.

Limitations of the Study

The content analysis conducted for this study was performed on newspapers with large national circulations and readership and therefore excluded smaller regional publications that may have presented a different side of the theorized media bias. As the articles were pooled using a search of the LexisNexis Academic database, which includes only written descriptions of accompanying visual aids, graphic elements were unavailable for study. Another limitation to the study was the choice of keywords selected for the LexisNexis search. The choice to examine only the body text of the articles—rather than including headline, subheadings, and image captions—may be viewed as an additional

restriction on the study's outcome. A coder reliability of less than 75% also limits the credibility of the resultant data.

Analysis of Data

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected using Microsoft Excel statistical software. Statistics were calculated on data related to the objectives of the study, and mean, frequencies, ranges, and percentages were reported.

Key Findings

Farm subsidies have long been a topic of controversy, and at no time are they more spotlighted than during periods of debate on federal farm policy. The purpose of this study was to investigate a possible bias against farm subsidies in mass-market print media and how that potential bias could potentially affect the development of farm legislation, such as the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills.

Objective 1: Determining Media Coverage of Farm Subsidy Articles

The search for articles covering farm subsidies in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills yielded 54 articles, 27 from each discrete time period. Of those articles, 27 (50.0%) appeared in the *Washington Post*, 19 (35.2%) appeared in the *New York Times*, 5 (9.3%) appeared in *USA Today*, and 3 (5.5%) appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. The majority of the articles appeared in 2002 (n=23; 42.6%) and 2007 (n=22; 40.1%). Only 7.4% of the articles appeared in 2001 (n=4), and 9.3% were published in 2006 (n=5).

This study determined that the majority of articles published concerning the subject of farm subsidy programs were printed in close chronological proximity to the passage of the corresponding farm legislation with more than 80% of the articles examined being printed in the same year as the bills' ratification. This suggests that newswriters, concerned by congressional proposals dealing with the farm subsidy provisions, sought to inform constituent voters at crucial times during the legislative process rather than making coverage of the farm bills a long-term goal.

Objective 2: Establishing News Media Frames

All 54 articles were placed into primary and secondary frames. The most prevalent primary frame found in the sample was reform of subsidy programs with 11 articles (20.4%). Second-highest among primary frames was Senate opinion with 10 articles (18.5%), and equalizing subsidy distribution ranked third with 8 articles (14.8%). In the secondary frame category, farm subsidy reform represented 25.9% of secondary concepts (n=14). Equal distribution of subsidies was a secondary frame in 18.5% of articles (n=10), and both subsidy impact on commodities and effect on foreign trade were secondary concepts in 11.1% of the sample (n=6).

Primary frame breakdowns in the 27 articles chosen from 2001-2002 were: Farm Bill reform (n=11; 40.7%); Senate opinion (n=10; 37.0%); House opinion (n=3; 11.1%); and foreign trade (n=3; 11.1%). Secondary breakdowns were: farm bill reform (n=14; 51.9%); subsidy effect on foreign trade (n=6; 22.2%); Senate opinion (n=3; 11.1%); House opinion (n=3; 11.1%); and changes in farm demographics (n=1; 3.7%).

In the 2006-2007 sample, the primary breakdowns were: Equal distribution of subsidies (n=8; 29.6%); impact on commodities (n=6; 22.2%); the opinion of the Bush administration (n=5; 18.5%); constituent influence on subsidies (n=4; 14.8%); foreign trade (n=3; 11.1%); and changes in farm demographics (n=2; 7.4%). Secondary breakdowns included equal distribution (n=10; 37.0%); effect on commodities (n=6; 22.2%); constituent influence (n=6; 22.2%); change in farm demographics (n=2; 7.4%); subsidies and conservation (n=1; 3.7%); opinion of the Bush administration (n=1; 3.7%); and subsidies and alternative fuels (n=1; 3.7%).

One of the most important elements of the study was the breakdowns of frames in the sample. Farm subsidy reform was a major issue prior to the passage of the 2002 Farm Bill, appearing as a primary frame in 11 of the 27 articles (40.7%) from the 2001-2002 sample and as a secondary frame in 14 articles (51.9%). This frame may have been a response to Congress's increase in farm subsidy payments in the 2002 legislation following major cuts in the program allotted in the 1996 FAIR Act. The media pushed for less spending; Congress pushed for financial support for struggling farmers; and the White House sided with Capitol Hill.

For the legislation originally slated for 2008, however, the main primary frame shifted to equalizing the distribution of moneys currently designated for farm price supports and direct payments with 8 of the 27 stories (29.6%) featuring the topic as a primary frame and 10 (37.0%) as a secondary concept. In the 2006-2007 sample, a wider range of primary frames was evident, with subsidy impact on individual commodities appearing as primary and secondary frame in 6 stories apiece (22.2%). Constituent influence, too, framed 10 articles in total, appearing in 27% of articles. This implies that,

rather than completely rewriting the existing legislation, focus turned to spreading the funds more thinly across a wider range of commodities and conservation and nutrition programs, as well as observing how constituencies influenced their congressional representatives in farm policy development and voting.

Objective 3: Determining Objectivity Based on Hayakawa-Lowry Categories

The 54 articles contained a total of 2,465 sentences. In the sample, 984 sentences (41.0%) were unattributed reported sentences, and attributed reported sentences accounted for 25% (n=614) of the total sentences. In the sample articles, 134 sentences (5%) were categorized as labeled inferences, while 257 sentences (10%) could be classified as unlabeled inferences. Four percent (n=89) of the sentences were categorized as favorable attributed judgments; 8% (n=201) were classified as unfavorable attributed judgments. Twelve sentences (0%) were labeled favorable unattributed judgments, and 119 sentences (5%) fell into the unfavorable unattributed judgment category. “Other” sentences comprised 2% of the sample (n=55). Based on Hayakawa’s three original categories, 1,598 sentences (66%) were reported, 391 sentences (15%) were inference, and 421 sentences (17%) were coded as judgments. Two percent (n=55) of sentences were coded as other sentences.

The examination of the Hayakawa-Lowry sentence breakdowns among the sample articles was vital to the study. Of the 2,465 sentences coded, 41% (n=984) fell into the reported unattributed category, and 25% (n=614) were classified as reported and attributed. Judgment sentences were reported as negative more often than positive, with 201 sentences (8.0%) categorized as attributed unfavorable judgments and 119 (5.0%) as

unattributed negative judgments versus 89 attributed (4.0%) and 12 unattributed (0%) favorable judgments. The study's findings of 66% (n=1,598) reported sentences are very similar to other studies investigating media bias in agricultural reporting. A study examining the Texas print media's objectivity on cotton found 64.2% reported sentences; another studying Associated Press coverage of agricultural issues found 64.2% reported sentences, a percentage that had actually increased over time (Vinyard, Akers, Doerfert, Davis, & Oskam, 2005; Hagins, Lockaby, Akers, & Kieth, 2002). Though the majority of sentences were reported, the high incidence of unattributed, reported information may cause articles to skew toward a perceived bias. Many articles cited legislators opposed to farm subsidy programs, adding many of the negatively skewed judgments to the sample. Indeed, one-third of the sources utilized were members of Congress (n=108; 32.4%). Sources more likely to have positive opinions and judgments about farm supports, such as agricultural organizations and small-commodity producers, only accounted for 6.9% (n=23) and 2.4% (n=8) of sources, respectively. By focusing on the views of legislators who did not support farm subsidy payments, newswriters could give their articles a negative slant, which—studies have shown—can be perceived by the audience.

Objective 4: Identifying Sources

The number of sources appearing in the sample ranged from 1 to 18, with a mean of 6.2 sources, a median of 6 sources, and a mode of 5 sources. Only one article cited 18 sources; most of the articles cited less than 10 sources. The “other” source category constituted the largest group of sources cited in the sample articles with 21.9% (n=73). Among categorized sources, congressional members (n=108; 32.4%) and federal

government agencies (n=32; 9.6%) were most often cited, with Democrats (n=68; 20.4%) being more represented than Republicans (n=40; 12.0%) among legislators. Agricultural organizations appeared 23 times (6.9%), while conservation groups constituted 22 citations (6.6%). Large-scale commodity producers appeared 16 times (4.8%) in the sample, while small-scale producers were cited only 8 times (2.4%). The Bush administration was cited 13 times (3.9%); government reports were used 11 times (3.3%); and university professors represented 3.0% of sources (n=10). Economists and foreign trade experts and officials each constituted 2.4% of citations (n=8), respectively, and only one alternative fuel industry representative appeared in the sample (0.3%).

The majority of the categorized sources cited by journalists in the sample were legislators or political figures who may have a negative bias toward the farm subsidy program. Democrats, who are more likely to vote against agricultural support programs in favor of increased funding for conservation and social programs, appeared more often than Republicans. Sources more likely to support farm subsidies, such as commodity producers, agricultural organizations, and university faculty, were much less likely to appear as quoted sources in the articles examined. Hall and Rhoades's study of coverage of corn-based ethanol similarly reported a high percentage of government agencies and legislators (26.5% and 23.5%, respectively) and a small number of individuals directly impacted by the subject, such as gas station owners, agribusiness representatives, economists, and farmers (2008).

Objective 5: Describing Articles by Physical Placement

In the sample, 38 articles (70.4%) were placed in the front section of their respective newspapers. Stories found in sections not listed on the coding breakdown constituted 11.1% (n=6). Five articles in the sample were found on the editorial page (9.3%), 3 were placed in a national news section (5.5%), and 2 articles came from the business section (3.7%).

With a sizable portion of the sample appearing in the front section of the four newspapers, it is clear that farm policy with its major economic repercussions is a topic of interest to the public at large, making the metropolitan media's apparent, if slight, negative bias toward agricultural economic support a topic that needs to be addressed by agricultural policy makers and communicators.

Implications

Following the completion of this study, it is apparent that some action must be taken to ensure that both sides of the farm subsidy issue are addressed by the national news media. Several key implications based on the study's results may aid in addressing the media bias against certain agricultural policies.

One of the most important elements of the news media is the concept of timeliness. News stories have a figurative "expiration date," and issues are only interesting to the reading or viewing audience as long as they remain in the public eye or can be "repackaged" in a new way. The shift in frame between the two discrete time periods used in this study, exemplified by the major shift from subsidy reform to

equalizing distribution between 2002 and 2007, indicates that news writers sought new ways to present farm subsidies. In order for agricultural spokespeople to remain viable sources of information for the news media, it is imperative that they follow current news coverage and are prepared to address those changing issues accordingly. Strengthening the lines of communication between policy-making bodies, agricultural organizations, and the news media should therefore be a high priority.

Addressing the wide disparity in source attribution in farm subsidy-related news stories is another important goal for agricultural communication. Much of the perceived bias against farm subsidies found in this study's sample articles was attributed to non-farm-state congressional members whose primary goal was to reduce the farm bills' budgets and channel funds into programs that would more greatly benefit their own constituents. In order to combat the negative tone of such sources, agricultural representatives must be prepared to offer information to the news media and become more viable resources for news writers. Proactive organizations such as American Farm Bureau have set a very strong example for state and national organizations and commodity groups to follow.

Finally, it is apparent that farm policy in general, and farm subsidies in particular, is not a "back-page" topic. With over 70% (n=38) of the selected articles appearing in the front section of four major metropolitan newspapers, farm subsidies are definitely an issue of national interest and importance. It is therefore crucial to make certain that news stories on the topic of agricultural policy present an unbiased and well-rounded view of farm programs.

This study indicates that there is a need for further research into the possible media bias against agricultural support programs. In order to supplement the study's findings, congressional members could be interviewed to investigate how the media impacts their personal views on agriculture and how those views are translated into legislative decision-making. A survey of media professionals could be conducted on their understanding of farm policy and their information-gathering process when reporting on agricultural issues. Historical analyses of farm legislation coverage would further background the study and provide insight into the changes in agricultural reporting as the industry has transformed over time.

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