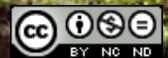


SEVENTY-FIVE WAYS TO FIX YOUR FARMER PROGRAM

INCLUDING A FEW THINGS TO AVOID!

By Doug Ward & Marvin Hanke



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INTRODUCTION

Radio, more than any other medium, speaks the language of farmers. Farmers count on radio to provide the information they need, when they need it. And farmers want radio to include them in discussions of how best to grow the crops that feed their families, and how to make some money at the market.

Too often, radio lets farmers down. Farmers tune out when the most important information isn't there or when lectures by professors, politicians and promoters drown out farmers' voices.

It doesn't have to be this way. Broadcasters in Africa can produce better programs for farmers. They can meet farmers' needs, involve farmers, and make the broadcasts more interesting. What is needed is to shine a light on good practice and share it widely across Africa.

In 2010, Farm Radio International gathered information about farmer radio programs from radio stations in Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi. We visited twenty stations and two production houses and listened to their farmer programs. We posed hundreds of questions to the people making the programs and to the people listening to them. Stemming from our findings, we are publishing a list of tips for broadcasters who want to improve their farmer programs starting right now!

Positive change rarely happens overnight – but it does start with one forward step. We have grouped these tips into three categories: *quick fixes*, *middle-sized improvements*, and *the big stuff*. We encourage you to consider implementing the “quick fixes.” If they work

out, move on to more complex improvements. Before long, you will have a transformed radio program – more effective and more fun - with more job satisfaction too!

We could not have done our research without the full, open and frank cooperation of the broadcasters, managers, reporters, extension workers and the farmers whom we interviewed. They all openly shared their material and their aspirations. We are grateful for their hospitality and enthusiasm. Our results are dedicated to all of them.

A note about the title: we will be happy when “*Seventy-five ways to fix your farmer program*” becomes “*Ninety-nine ways to fix your farmer program*”! But that depends on **you**. Contact us and tell us of your ideas to improve farmer programs, and things to avoid. We will name everyone who provides suggestions that we use in the next edition. Contact us by email at info@farmradio.org and put “**Seventy-five**” in the e-mail message subject line.

And good luck to all of you!

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September 2012*



NOTE: Continue the discussion on Ways to fix your farmer program on Barza– www.barzaradio.com – the Farm Radio International social networking site for African farm broadcasters. Access the discussion forum at: <http://bit.ly/barzadiscussion>

SEVENTY-FIVE WAYS TO FIX YOUR FARMER RADIO PROGRAM

1. First and foremost – we assume that your farmer program is broadcast in the language that farmers speak. If not, correct that as soon as you can. Don't force farmers to jump over language hurdles. They will just listen to another station.

A) QUICK FIXES:

These are things you can do right now, next week, and over the next months, with no new resources and probably without asking anyone for permission.

2. Write an intro that compels listeners to stick around

You need to win your listeners' loyalty with each program episode. Listeners will give you a few minutes off the top to convince them that they should keep listening. Because of that, your intro should be one of the best thought-out things you prepare. And don't just provide a shopping list of items. Appeal to the listener's curiosity and self-interest. *Give the listener an emotional reason to listen.* For example, don't just say "we will talk to an expert on x disease." Rather, say "Betty Mumo's goats are dying of x disease. We talk to a vet who will tell you how to keep that from happening to your herd."

3. Promote your next episode At the end of each episode, tell your listeners something coming up next week. Then record a promo and get it played regularly over the week throughout the program schedule. This requires that you plan ahead, but that is a good discipline to have!

4. Do station/program IDs Most farmers have a choice of radio stations to listen to. You want them to remember yours. Do an ID off the top, half way through, and at the end of each episode.

5. Be supportive of small-scale farming and farmers

While a farmer program should provide *balanced information* about all important subjects, the program should not sound *neutral* about small-scale farming, or farmers, or about rural life. Your program should convey an overall positive and hopeful attitude about small-scale farming. It should tackle policies that threaten small-scale farming. It should question experts who do not have the interests of small-scale farmers at heart. It should celebrate the successes of farmers who have improved the lives of their families.

6. Help farmers speak with confidence and clarity Most farmers have little experience with media. In an interview, make them feel comfortable and help them get their information and opinions across clearly. This will encourage more women and men farmers to agree to be interviewed.

7. Refer to women guests with the same dignity as men

Why is it that a broadcaster says, "I am talking with Dr. Stanley Lubo of the agricultural college"? But when he goes out to the field he just says, "Hello mother". Why doesn't he say, "I am talking to farmer Maria Smith in Luganda village"? And why does he say, "I am talking to a very pretty lady at Zomba market," when he would never think of saying, "I am talking to a very handsome man at Zomba market"?

8. Mix it up, break it up Listen to a recent episode. Does it appeal to the ear? Or does it go on and on with the same plain tone? Mix it up! Follow a slow piece with a faster one. Inject laughter appropriately. Use sound effects. Feature a variety of voices. If you must run a long interview, break it up with comments and questions.

9. Stop the popping You want to keep the mic close to your interviewee's mouth. But if it is too close, and right in front, every "p" will sound like an explosion – and distract the listeners. Keep the mic out of line with the breath coming out of the person's mouth.

10. Provide signposts Partway through your program say, "We are talking to Susan Smith about the orange-fleshed sweet potatoes she grows in Traora. The market report is next." Listeners, especially those who tune in late, want to know where they are.

11. Share ideas in the station You can't know everything that is going on, but somebody in the station might! Attend the weekly editorial meeting. Offer ideas and tips to your news department and to the women's program producer and the health program producer. And get ideas from them. If you all share, you all benefit – and farmers benefit most.

12. Share transportation Transportation to the villages is a major problem. Be creative. If a reporter has transportation to a village, ask her to do a couple of interviews for you while she is there. If an NGO is about to do a tour of villages, find a broadcaster who can hitch a ride to collect interviews – and to phone in from farmers' fields.

13. Get regular feedback from your listeners Nurture the bond with your farmer/listeners. Encourage them to tell you what they think of the program. Give them lots of ways to provide feedback: letters, phone-ins, SMS, etc. You can't *please* everyone, but you can *consider* every comment, and you can mention good ideas on air. That boosts a sense of ownership.

14. Talk it up One brain is good, two brains are better, three brains better still. Your program will benefit if you discuss content and how it is presented with other people at your station. Hold a weekly production meeting and include the host/producer, a reporter, perhaps a more experienced broadcaster whom you respect, and the extension worker if available.



15. Create memory aids Sometimes you must convey detailed information. If your guest is going to talk about a five-step process for drying maize, create a memory aid that will help farmers remember (e.g. *Husk it, mix with Ash, Bag it, Inspect it, Tie the bags – HABIT*). Another great format for memory aids is the musical jingle – a brief song that features the information and uses music and rhyme to make it memorable. Hold a competition. Ask farmers to submit poems or songs that lay out the crucial information.

16. Use the right word Modern farming is full of modern words. But do those words translate clearly into your farmers' language? If not, farmers won't fully understand the modern word and the meaning of your radio item might be lost.



17. Offer prizes for correct answers When you are covering a complex farming issue, offer a prize to the first farmer who calls in and can repeat the key information. This provides suspense and excitement, and besides, it helps everyone to remember – even when a caller gets it wrong! (It doesn't need to be a big prize. It might be as simple as inviting the winner to greet five of her/his farmer friends on air. People love to compete and show off!)

18. Cue the sounds of farming Farmers are attracted by sounds that resonate with their farming experience – farm animals braying, farm equipment running, birds singing, etc. Find ways to use these little audio gems in your program. And whenever you visit villages, record farming sounds for later use.

19. Produce panels Most farmers – both women and men – are not used to speaking into a mic. But put three of them together, and they will become encouraged by each other's words, and more of the story will come out, and everyone wins.

20. Use script and research services Some organizations (such as FRI – Farm Radio International, and CTA – the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation) provide scripts and recorded items on agricultural issues. If the topic is right and your time is scarce, you can run their material *as is*. Better, of course, use that outside material as inspiration and research as you create your own coverage of issues.

21. Sound as “live” as possible Nothing sounds duller than a radio program that could be from anywhere, any time. Most farmer programs are packaged in advance of broadcast, but the better ones sound almost live. Their hosts inject a sense of immediacy and urgency. They make references to events happening right now.

22. Write it down Talk radio programs are largely unscripted because they include long portions of unwritten interviews. But your program will be much better if you write out some parts in advance.

In particular:

- the episode *promo*, which brings listeners to their radios,
- the episode *intro* that gives them a reason to stay listening, and
- the *questions and follow-up questions* you need for important interviews.

23. Repeat, repeat, repeat In order for some information to stick, it needs to be repeated. The challenge is to provide those repeats without sounding boring. There are lots of ways. At the end of an interview, the host can provide a summary. Use a jingle or other memory aid. Provide the information on an SMS service. Encourage listeners to contact their extension worker. And if at all possible, rebroadcast each episode.

24. Crank up the emotion Radio is great for facts and opinion, but without emotional content, it can come across as dry as dust, and turn off listeners. Your challenge will be to introduce emotion (suspense, joy, sadness, etc.) without going off the deep end! Here is an intro with emotional appeal. “Would you allow your child to die of malnutrition when there is life-saving food close by? Stay tuned! We are going to talk about a miracle food that is already in your house!”

25. Feature experts who respect farmers Farmers like to hear from experts who can help them improve their farming. But some experts are more interested in selling grand schemes and products than in helping small-scale farmers work in sustainable ways. Of course there is a place for a discussion of grand schemes on your program, but *your regular agricultural experts should be people who deserve the respect of the farmers*. And remember: many small-scale farmers are agricultural experts too! Use them.

26. Paint word pictures When you go to a village to talk about a maize disease, first of all, you should be the eyes of the listener. Describe the “big picture” as you enter the village – kids playing, elders sitting outside, and anything that distinguishes this particular village – a building, a river, a shop, a temple. Then “zoom in” and paint a word picture of the specific field and the farmer and the infected maize. This brings your listeners along beside you, and stimulates their interest.

27. Ask farmer questions Before you interview an expert or an official, contact a few farmers and find out what questions they want to ask. Better still, if you know that next week you will be interviewing the district road manager, ask farmers to write or phone or text the questions they want answered. Asking farmer questions is one of the best ways to boost your credibility. Another time, have a panel of farmers interview the official.

28. Listen attentively Some interviewers prepare a list of questions and consider their work done when the interviewee has said something – anything – in response to each question. A good interviewer listens attentively as the interviewee replies. Did you get a complete reply, or did the interviewee slide around the issue? Did the interviewee say something far away from the topic, but something you should take up with him or her later?

29. Story, Story, Story Everyone loves a story, and radio is at its best when it tells them. A story usually involves an *interesting person who confronts a problem and overcomes it*. Learn how to use stories to grab and hold your listeners. Stories can be “factual,” as in a reporter’s piece, or they can be “representative,” as in a mini-drama. Both work well.

30. Feature farmers solving their problems Farmers face many problems and they usually must solve them with little outside help. Your program can give farmers courage to solve their problems. Give examples. Interview farmers who have tackled problems and have beaten them. (That is story-telling!) Assemble a panel of farmers and facilitate their discussion as they clarify a problem, discuss possible solutions and decide on a course of action.

31. Do your homework If you are going to do an interview with an official about the fertilizer subsidy program, do your research so that you know enough to ask meaty questions, and to keep your official focused on the topic that farmers need to hear about.



32. Motivate and celebrate At the beginning of planting season, exhort farmers to do their best planting ever. At harvest time, congratulate farmers for their hard work that has produced a good crop.

33. Play message music There are songs that tell stories about the struggles and successes of farmers. Find them and use them – and encourage songwriters to write new ones. A musical message will last longer than a spoken message. And you can use it more than once. Just don't play it to death!

34. Avoid pompous technical terms Academics might know something important, but they often can't make their point without using fancy words. Before the interview, chat with the academic and see if you can agree on simple language. And if some technical words still pop up, ask the expert to explain them.

35. Let farmers introduce themselves Set up a field interview by suggesting to the farmers, off-mic, that you would like them to introduce themselves and say what they do and where they live. Record those intros a couple of times, if you need to, until they sound strong and interesting.

36. Anticipate the cropping calendar When it is time to plant, it is too late to influence the availability of seed. Be

ahead of the game and deal with issues *before* they impact on farmers.

37. Use metaphors Some things just can't be explained with *more* words, so use *fewer*! For example: say that "soil with compost in it is like cotton cloth. It holds the moisture. And soil without compost is like nylon cloth. The water drains through it." That is a metaphor.

38. Record everything in sight When you go to a village, don't just record your next episode's interview. Look at your planning calendar. What topics are coming up? What *vox pop* interviews can you do? And what farm sounds can you record? And can you get the women to sing that rice-harvesting song? Then come home and carefully label what you have recorded. You can edit it later.

39. Keep it level Don't go to air with the sig tune at +2 db and the interviews at -15db! Go back to the studio and get your levels uniform. You want your listeners to be proud of the sound of their program.

40. Be timely Farmers count on radio connecting them to the wider world and keeping them up-to-date. If anything new happens in farming during the week, make sure you mention it on the next program, even if all you can say is that you will cover it next week!

41. Fix that voice-in-a-can sound A few studios have hard walls, floor and ceiling. That might make them easy to clean, but voices bounce from one surface to the next and sound strange. Hang thick curtains on one wall and the problem will be fixed.

42. Avoid the “lead farmer” trap Aid agencies love “lead farmers” – farmers who are always ready and willing to take up new practices. And radio stations interview those “lead farmers,” assuming that their experience will stimulate other farmers to act. It doesn’t work always that way. Ordinary farmers often see “lead farmers” as *different* from themselves – with better land, more labour, more tools, more connections, etc. And because “lead farmers” are considered different, their messages do not always inspire ordinary farmers. Your challenge is to find farmers whose conditions are *similar* to those of most of your listeners, *and* who have overcome the challenges that most farmers face, *and* who have taken up better practices. You want the listener to think: “*If she can do it, I can do it!*”

43. Keep station management onsite Make sure your manager knows how important the farmer program is, and what you are doing to make it as effective and as successful

as possible. Consult your manager about the changes you want to make. Keep management “onside” as you improve your program. At some stage you will need that support, for additional resources, airtime, training, or whatever.

44. Work with other media Radio can do a *lot*, but it can’t do *everything!* If a farming issue can only be communicated through pictures, find a way to get pictures to the farmers. These can be used as reference material for farmers all the time, unlike a radio program which only gets aired once or twice. Perhaps the Extension Department can provide pictures for the school to hand out to students to take home. Perhaps pictures can be put up in the market, and your program can steer people to them. Perhaps your station has a library that farmers can visit to see pictures of a farming practice you talked about on air.

45. Archive every episode Before you start working on the *next* episode, take a few minutes and gather all the important stuff from *this* episode and file it systematically. A year from now, when you are doing a piece about mosquito nets, you can go into your archives and find that great interview you did a year ago with a woman who lost a son to malaria. You can grab a clip from that and use it to set up your new piece.



B) MIDDLE-SIZED IMPROVEMENTS:

These changes might require some new resources and some involvement by station management. Consider implementing them over the next few months

46. Get out to the farmers in their villages Too many farmer programs are studio-bound and they suffer from that. Cell phones can bridge the farmer-broadcaster gap, but that is not enough. Transportation is costly, but you must get to the farmers' fields and homes. Farmers will respect you more if they know you have watched the wind scatter the dry soils, waited hours for the ferry, got stuck in the mud on the road to the market, and heard the cries of the sick goat. You might not be able to travel every week, but perhaps some other broadcaster can – a news reporter, for example. And the extension worker for sure. When we evaluated the twenty-two programs in the ARRPA study, we found that the programs that visited the fields were of much higher quality than those that didn't. Find the resources to get out there. And in the meantime, go to the markets close to you and interview farmers there.

47. Broadcast when farmers can listen Are you sure your farmer program is aired at the right time of day for farmers? For women farmers? Go to the villages and the markets and ask that question. Ask women farmers as well as men farmers. If it is the wrong time, then you are probably losing a huge chunk of potential listeners. Work with your station management to get a more suitable time slot. Also try to get a good time for a repeat broadcast of each episode.

48. Start with a sig tune There is nothing like a signature tune to tell your listeners that their favourite farmer program is about to start. But you need the *right* tune, because it must do its magic – week in and week out – perhaps for years. It might feature local women singing a farming song. It might be lively instrumental music. While this might look like a “quick fix,” it takes time and effort to find the right piece of music and then test it with some farmers to see if they really like it. And remember two things about a sig tune:

- *play it long enough* to give farmers time to get to a radio, but
- *announce what is coming up over the sig tune*, so you don't lose listeners who are already listening.

49. Plan, plan, plan A farmer program should *sound* spontaneous and relaxed. But behind that comfortable, informal sound, there should be a *serious plan*. Will this *episode* serve the overall purpose of your *farmer program*? Will it move forward the discussion and resolution of a deep-rooted issue? Does it feature farmers discussing important farming matters? Does our market report reliably cover the markets that farmers use? These are the questions the host-producer needs to ask herself each week, and then she must do the work required to deliver the content – *and* make it all sound effortless on air!

50. Provide market information Set up a system to gather selling prices for at least the most common agricultural products sold at the most popular markets. Sometimes market agents will provide the information for free. Other stations pay people to provide exact information at a specific time. You need a reliable system so that you can broadcast the market information at the same time each week.

51. Solve the transportation problem Getting transportation out to farms is a major problem at almost all radio stations. Be creative. If an NGO is about to do a tour of villages, have a broadcaster hitch a ride, collect interviews and phone in from farmers' fields. Give your extension worker a small recorder and a cell phone so she can record interviews and also call in to the program while in the field.

52. Share with other stations Are there other stations that serve farmers and use the same language? Share your best material through email files. Cooperate to provide coverage of issues that affect the wider region.

53. Produce phone-in shows Nothing gets farmers talking as much as hearing other farmers talking! And a phone-in program provides an easy way to expose a range of opinion on an important topic. The best phone-ins include a *guest*, who is close to the issue (an expert or an activist, for example) and a *question*, which callers are invited to answer. You can promote a phone-in as follows: “Today we have Mary Chamba of the Litowe honey co-operative with us, and our question is: what is stopping you from keeping bees?” Make sure you have the studio equipment to do



phone-ins. If at all possible, have one person take the calls and check that the caller is legitimate, while the second person (the host) interviews the caller who is on air. Check to see if your country requires that phone-ins have a “delay” system so that you can erase offensive material before it goes to air. Your regular farmer program might not be long enough to carry a phone-in. In that case, have the phone-in at a different time, and direct your listeners to it.

54. Get training Farm broadcasters need training in radio production and presentation to continually improve the quality of their programs. Training is also needed to help broadcasters use newer ICTs to enhance their service to farmers. Check the Farm Radio International website www.farmradio.org, Farm Radio Weekly www.weekly.farmradio.org, and Barza www.barzaradio.com to learn of training opportunities.

55. Ensure continuity of staffing Listeners develop strong loyalties for program hosts. They don’t like it when a station changes the host every few months. This is a challenge for community stations in particular, where there is a constant

flow of volunteers and little or no compensation for host-producers. Managers can improve continuity by providing training opportunities, finding additional resources for program improvements, and by providing feedback (both praise and constructive criticism) to the production team.

56. Hold officials to account Citizens elect officials to act in their interest. But do they? One of the best ways to find out is to use radio to ask officials questions. Officials, on the other hand, might not want to be held to account. They might like to appear on your program only so they can enhance their reputation with voters. One way to engage officials is to gather questions from farmers, and tell the official that these are the questions that their constituents are asking. In the interview, remember that you are there as the voice of the farmers. Your job is to get answers for the farmers, not to make the politician look good! (Make sure that you have the support of your manager before you start this important work.)



C) THE BIG STUFF:

These changes will take time, but they are well worth it! They will require planning and the involvement of station management – and probably some special one-time resources or even additional ongoing resources. Aim to implement the ones that are important to you over the next three to twelve months.

57. Find out what your farmers need When was the last time your station did a thorough study of the farming situation of your farmer population? It is probably time to do it again! Set up meetings in villages, get transportation and meet with groups of farmers. If women farmers are not able to speak out in the presence of men, then hold a separate meeting with the women. Ask the farmers:

- what *media* they use, and what they like about them (information and entertainment)

- what *information* they need to farm well, including:
 - survival information – e.g., weather forecasts, planting dates, market prices, etc.
 - current information – what is going on
 - deep-rooted issues information – what are the most important, deep-rooted issues that the farmers face
- when is the best time of day and day of week for a farmer program

Use that information to help you plan improvements to your farmer program.

58. Create a purpose statement When a station decides to do a farmer program, too often it simply assigns a producer-host and it's up to him or her to decide what to do. That is not fair to the producer – or to the listeners! Work out a clear and useful purpose statement with your manager. Here is a good sample:

“Farmers First” helps equip Tembe region farmers to grow the most appropriate food for their families and the market, and to build a vibrant rural community. “Farmers First” is an entertaining, weekly program that provides farmers with the information they

need, from reliable sources, and when they need it. It also provides farmers with an opportunity to discuss matters of importance to them.

59. Partner with extension services Radio mainly serves farmers from a central location. Extension agents regularly travel to the villages. Both can improve their service to farmers if they work together. (This will probably require a formal contract or MOU that outlines who does what.)

60. Keep your program independent Some farmer programs are fully sponsored by a single sponsor, such as a marketing board. But what if farmers need to question that marketing board? It is better if the farmer program is completely sponsored by the radio station. Of course it can run spot advertisements, but these advertisers should have no influence over the program.

61. Respect religion and culture, but don't get bent out of shape One station did a program series encouraging farmers to interplant legumes with maize, to help renew the soil. One farmer phoned in to say that corn was sacred and could not be tampered with. The station phoned out to a religious leader who said that corn was not sacred, but that the soil was, and the soil needed to be respected!

62. Get access to a computer A farmer program will benefit hugely if you can get your hands on a computer with internet access. You can do program research. You can edit audio files. You can write what needs to be written. And you can archive your programs.

63. Get farmers discussing important issues on air There will be no effective economic and social development in your area *unless farmers are part of that development discussion*. Your program can provide a comfortable "space" where those discussions can *start*, and where they can *deepen*, and where they can *include more and more farmers of both sexes*.

64. Tackle the important deep-rooted issues You can produce a good-sounding farmer program without ever tackling the deep-rooted issues farmers face. But what a waste of a farmer program! Set aside some prep time every week to dig into the deep-rooted issues that your farmers have identified, and find ways to bring those issues to air.

65. Be there in time of extreme farmer need Radio stations can provide essential services in time of flood and infestation and other emergencies. But you need to have the equipment, including a back-up power supply for your

transmitter, and you need to have a plan that outlines who does what and when, in the event of an emergency.

66. Consider mobilization programming Thoughtful farmers and their supporters know that rural life could benefit immediately if a large number of farmers took up an improved farming practice (whether new or traditional). Your station and your program could make this happen. Realize however that mobilization campaigns take a lot of time and resources. (Check the FRI website to find out about "Participatory Radio Campaigns.")

67. Develop a capacity for mini-drama Nothing is as ear-catching as a bit of drama – and it doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg, just time and talent.

- Find someone who can sound like an "old-timer," and have him talk grumpily (but with humour) about adjusting to new farming methods
- Do a fictional, mother-daughter telephone call in which they chat about what is happening in the next field
- Find people who can play traditional African storytelling roles and have them improvise on a current issue.

These mini-dramas will make your listeners sit up and take notice, and once you have softened them up, then you can run that serious interview about interplanting beans with corn, and they will listen!

68. Diversify your revenues Transportation, training, mobile phone airtime, computers and internet time, staff compensation, remote recording equipment – all of these take money. Where will it come from? Are you selling commercial spots to companies who want to advertise to farmers? Can you band together with other stations to find such advertisers? Do you charge for farmer messages, and do you have an efficient system to generate them? Can you provide services to an NGO or an INGO working in your area – and get paid for it? Do you have a way to reach out to local people who now live far away, and who might be prepared to contribute to the program? Can you make a deal with the cell phone provider? The internet provider? Can you convince development agencies that you have a large and loyal following and that they should partner with you on development-related programming?

FINALLY, A FEW THINGS TO AVOID!

Through the course of the ARPPA research (and other program monitoring) we have come upon some radio practices that we think have no place in a farmer program. Here they are. To be forewarned is to be fore-armed!

69. Never “talk down” to farmers We have heard programs where the host treated farmers like irresponsible children. We have heard extension workers blame farmers for not taking up some new practices they promote. We have heard hosts whose exaggerated praise for farmers sounds hollow and fake. Sometimes broadcasters feel that they have risen “above” farmers, and so they consciously or unconsciously “talk down” to them. The best farm broadcasters know that farmers work long and hard to improve the health of their families. These farm broadcasters understand that they have a huge responsibility to use radio to serve farmers, and to do so with respect.

70. Don’t play your music, play theirs Many farmers are older, while almost all host-producers are younger. Some

young broadcasters play music that appeals to them and their friends. That is unprofessional and self-indulgent! Find music that resonates with your target audience of small-scale farmers. This can be harder than it seems. You need to appeal to men and women. You need music that suits either the mood or the content of the program. (We once heard a farmer program surround an item with a piece by Beethoven. Who was the producer trying to attract?)

71. Don’t think that a lecture is a radio program Some radio stations broadcast lectures by professors. A lecture might work in a classroom with a captive audience! A lecture does not work on radio where you need to provide additional stimulus so that people stay interested.

72. Don’t let interviewees take over You interview an official for a *reason* that has to do with what the listener *needs*. Some interviewees will try to take over the interview and talk about what makes them sound good. Don’t let it happen. It is your program and you are there to serve the farmers who are listening. If officials don’t answer your questions the first time, ask again, another way. If they still don’t answer, ask them why they won’t answer.

73. Don’t compromise your host’s credibility The respect that farmers have for your host is one of the most valuable assets your farmer program has. Don’t weaken that trust by forcing her to advertise commercial products. It is fine to run ads in the farmer program, but use someone else’s voice.

74. Don’t push one side of a debate We have heard farmer programs that only air one side of a controversial issue. If that is all the coverage the station did, it is wrong. Coverage should be *balanced*, and that involves getting all important points of view to air. You don’t have to get all sides exposed in the same episode. Just make sure that you cover them over the life of the issue. And don’t forget the other important journalist values – accuracy and fairness.

75. Don’t pile it on Some broadcasters must think their program is like a wheelbarrow: the more they can shovel in, the better. Not true! The program is an audio relationship between the host and the listener. Listeners are not motivated by a load of information dumped on them. They are motivated when they are engaged and guided through material at a pace and volume they can comprehend. If you pile on the information too thick, many farmers will consider themselves incompetent, (through no fault of their own), and they will be gone.



APPENDICES

Appendix 1- Farm Radio International's VOICE standards for farmer programs

Farm Radio International, with the help of many farm broadcasters across sub-Saharan Africa, has identified important characteristics that should be reflected in radio programming that serves smallholder farmers. The characteristics are summed up in the acronym "VOICE." *The VOICE Standards are a work in progress and are regularly revised in light of new learnings.*

- V - The programs value smallholder farmers, both women and men. They respect farmers for their hard work producing food for their families and the markets, often in the face of major challenges. They reach out to farmers to understand their situation, and are dedicated to supporting them in their farming work and in their efforts to improve rural life.
- O - The programs provide farmers with the opportunity to speak and be heard on all matters. They are centred on encouraging smallholder farmers to name their concerns, discuss them, and organize to act on them.
- I - The programs provide farmers with the information they need, when they need it.
- C - The programs are broadcast consistently and conveniently, on a reliable, regular basis, at least weekly, at a time when farmers can listen.
- E - The programs are entertaining and attract large numbers of farmers. There is no excuse for boring farm radio programs!

VOICE STANDARDS CHECKLIST

V – We value smallholder farmers

- We have done an analysis of the situation of farmers in our area (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, constraints) and we use that to inform our programming.
- We broadcast in the language or dialect normally used by the farmers.
- The host and the program convey an attitude of respect for, and solidarity with, farmers.
- All issues are treated with clarity and in a way that is understandable by farmers.
- The programs have the resources they require (within the abilities of the station) to serve farmers effectively.
- The station ensures that farm broadcasters receive the training they need to serve farmers effectively.

O – We provide smallholder farmers with an opportunity to speak and be heard

- We seek out a wide range of farmers, both women and men, to discuss issues that are important to them on air.
- We help farmers express themselves with confidence and clarity on the radio.
- We communicate the concerns of farmers to people who have the capacity or authority to help resolve those concerns. We encourage those people to engage in discussion with farmers.

I – We provide the most useful information when it is needed

- We find out from farmers what their most important issues are, and we provide information and discussion on those issues.
- Our news service covers important farming and rural issues on a regular basis.
- We find out what farmers need to know and we broadcast that information when they need it.
- We ensure that the information we broadcast is accurate, fair and balanced.
- We seek out specialists on issues of importance to farmers, and help them communicate in ways that are clear and useful for farmers.
- We also make key information available through non-broadcast means (e.g. SMS) to maximize farmers' opportunity to get that information.

C – We broadcast to farmers consistently and conveniently

- We broadcast at times when women and men farmers can conveniently listen to farmer programs. If women and men farmers require programming at different times, we do so.
- We provide at least one repeat broadcast of each regular farm program at another time in the week to maximize the opportunity that farmers have to hear the programs.
- We broadcast farmer programs reliably every week.
- We have plans to provide an emergency program service in the event of extreme conditions.
- We promote farmer programs throughout the week to ensure all farmers know when to listen.

E – We make entertaining farmer programs

- The host of the program is attractive to farmers.
- The program uses a variety of radio formats such as interviews, phone-ins and quizzes that are attractive to farmers.
- The program uses dramatic elements such as suspense, storytelling and mini-dramas.
- The program uses humour appropriately and regularly.
- The program includes local music of interest to farmers.
- Our program and item intros capture the interest of farmers and prompt them to listen.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Marvin Hanke worked for the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation as program producer for 24 years (1975 – 1999) and was well known for the production of an award-winning radio drama called *Theatre of the Air*. In 1999, he co-founded Story Workshop, a Development Media NGO with emphasis on radio communication, with Pamela Brooke, where he worked as Media Director and then Executive Director. His production of a radio soap called *Zimachitika* won The Commonwealth Award on Action against HIV and AIDS. He was Executive Producer of two rural development radio programs (a serial drama on good farming practices and a magazine program on food security which ran for 6 years) He voluntarily retired in 2008 and is currently managing his own Private Audio Media Company, Audio Clinic Productions, and doing consultancies in radio production skills. He sits on The Farm Radio Malawi Board as Vice Chairperson and Chair of the Programs Committee. He can be reached at marvinhanke54@yahoo.com.



Doug Ward is Chair of Farm Radio International. As Vice-President of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Doug managed CBC's seventy-plus regional radio and TV production centres. Earlier, Doug was Director of the CBC Northern Service, providing radio programming in nine native languages to, for and by northern native Canadians. He was Executive Producer on the team that created *As It Happens* – CBC Radio's popular phone-out program – now in its forty-third year. At Farm Radio International, Doug designed the Participatory Radio Campaign (PRC) methodology, which helps mobilize smallholder farmers to take up improved farming practices they consider important for family food security. Doug is also a public adjudicator on the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, which handles all complaints about commercial broadcasting in Canada. He can be reached at dougward@magma.ca.