

The Practice of Media Coverage of Agro-topics in Azerbaijan

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Abstract:

This article examines the practice of media coverage of agricultural topics in Azerbaijan, drawing on articles, surveys conducted among farmers, and analytical materials. It explores the sources from which farmers in Azerbaijan obtain agricultural information, the accessibility and reliability of this information, and the effectiveness of media outlets in addressing the needs of rural communities.

Keywords: Azerbaijan; Agricultural Sector; Media; Information Sources; Analyze.

Introduction

Azerbaijan, recognized for its agricultural potential, strategic location, and farming traditions, provides substantial government support for the agricultural sector. This support includes exemptions from most taxes except for land tax, direct and indirect financial assistance, special concessions, low-interest loans, and waivers of customs duties on imported inputs, promotion of exports, and facilitation of farmers' access to essential information.

The adoption and expansion of information technologies in the agricultural sector, coupled with the diversification of information sources, have significantly enhanced the scope and depth of media coverage in this area.

The Ministry of Agriculture of Azerbaijan, responsible for developing and implementing state policy in the sector and overseeing its

normative-legal and economic regulation, carries out targeted measures to strengthen and expand media coverage. Its media policy aims to ensure transparency regarding agricultural reforms, state programs, and subsidy and support mechanisms, while also informing the public about innovative technologies, including the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices. The increased emphasis on sustainable development, environmental conservation, and efficient resource use has resulted in a greater proportion of media coverage being devoted to climate-smart agriculture alongside other agricultural topics.

The 29th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held at a high level in Azerbaijan from November 11 to 22, 2024, is regarded as a milestone event with significant implications. One of the key outcomes of this esteemed conference was the establishment of a new global target to provide USD 1.3 trillion in climate finance to developing countries by 2035, the full operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund, and the complete agreement on Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, thereby initiating the functioning of international carbon markets (COP29, 2024). These globally significant decisions underscore international support for Azerbaijan's initiatives toward a green and sustainable future. Within the framework of the event, discussions on numerous pressing topics reflected prospective directions for improving state support mechanisms in the agricultural sector. From this perspective, it is particularly important that Azerbaijan's system of support measures places extensive emphasis on enhancing the efficiency of water and land use under global climate change conditions.

Farmers' ability to access information on various aspects of agriculture, including climate-smart practices, largely depends on the extent to which the media covers these topics. State policy, with its high prioritization of developing the non-oil sector, diversifying the economy, ensuring national food security, and promoting the development of rural communities, has contributed to broader media coverage. The degree of media attention given to agricultural topics

and farmers' access to such information is significantly influenced by the methods, approaches, and tools employed by the media.

Research Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to examine the extent of media coverage of agricultural issues in Azerbaijan, identify the main sources from which farmers obtain agricultural information, and evaluate the accessibility and reliability of this information. Furthermore, the study aims to determine priority directions for enhancing the effectiveness of media outlets in addressing the informational needs of rural communities and supporting sustainable agricultural development.

During the research process, an online survey was conducted among 49 farmers (37 men and 12 women) representing different regions of Azerbaijan. The survey questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice, checkbox, rating, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. Comprising 15 questions, the survey involved farmers from 12 regions. It was distributed via State Agrarian Development Centers and Regional Training Centers under the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as through leading farmers, unions, and associations. The questionnaire collected information on participants' names, age, education, and engagement in agriculture, primary sources of information, topics and usefulness of received information, application of acquired knowledge at the family, community, or environmental level, sharing of agricultural information with others, and participants' comments and recommendations.

In the study, random, stratified, and purposive sampling methods were employed. Prior to distribution, the survey questionnaire was pilot-tested among a small group of farmers, and their feedback and recommendations were systematically incorporated to optimize the questionnaire.

Studies on survey methodology among farmers indicate that farmers are willing to spend relatively little time completing mail surveys. Without compensation, the majority of crop farmers will not spend more than about ten minutes. Over one-third are unwilling to spend more than five minutes. This strongly suggests that lengthy surveys

(sent without compensation, as is the typical practice in agricultural economics) will result in low response rates and may be plagued by related response biases (Pennings, Irwin, & Good, 1999).

Agricultural surveys are usually the most difficult and complex; that single word covers a tremendous variety of activities and purposes in four ways: multi-subject, multi-method, natural conditions and cultural norms, and repeatability and periodicity. There are great differences in agricultural practices between less developed countries as well as between regions and even districts within them (FAO, 2015).

Efforts were made to cover all regions of Azerbaijan in the survey, and farmers from the districts of Aghjabadi, Aghdam, Agdash, Astara, Barda, Beylagan, Dashkasan, Goranboy, Goychay, Ismayilli, Lankaran, Oghuz, Gazakh, Guba, Shamakhi, Samukh, Shamkir, Shaki, Tartar, Kalbajar, Khachmaz, Yevlakh, and Zagatala, as well as from the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and the city of Ganja, participated in the survey. Regarding the regional distribution of participating farmers, the Lankaran and Shamkir districts exhibited comparatively higher representation. This outcome was primarily influenced by factors such as farmers' level of activeness, use of social media platforms, educational background, specialization, and other relevant determinants.

31 farmers with university degrees, 11 with college education, 3 with vocational education, and 4 with secondary education participated in the survey (Figure 1).

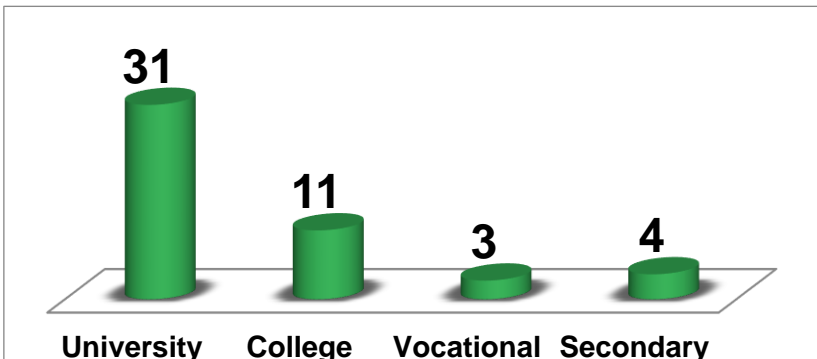


Figure 1. Education level of respondents

It can be concluded that the survey's exclusive reliance on multiple-choice, checkbox, rating, and Likert scale questions tends to constrain respondents, often leading farmers to provide standardized answers and, in some cases, resulting in deviations from actual situations. From this perspective, the inclusion of open-ended questions in the survey was identified as an essential methodological requirement.

The ages of the survey participants ranged from 22 to 70 years: 4 participants were aged 22–30, 6 were 31–35, 4 were 36–40, 9 were 41–45, 11 were 46–50, 7 were 51–55, 4 were 56–60, 2 were 61–65, and 2 were 66–70. An analysis by gender revealed that the ages of female participants ranged from 37 to 68 years.

Research Results

In Azerbaijan, the development of the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector—recognized as one of the priority areas of the non-oil economy within the framework of information society—has contributed to improved access to agricultural information and has led to significant transformations in the structure of information sources.

According to the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, during the period 2020–2024, the number of Internet users in the country increased from 1.16 million to 2.30 million, while the number of mobile phone subscribers rose from 10.3 million to 11.3 million. Consequently, the share of the information and communication sector in the national economy expanded from 1.8% to 2.1%. (AzStat, 2025)

Based on the results of the conducted survey, the structure of the main information sources utilized by farmers in the agricultural sector reveals that these sources vary depending on the nature of the information, the type of production, the farmers' age and education level, the technological processes involved, and the availability of relevant information in the respective sources.

Research findings indicate that in Azerbaijan, the main information sources accessible to farmers include the State Agrarian Development Centers, Regional Training Centers, television, information portals, social media, informal communication channels, training programs

and consultations, as well as educational and instructional materials (Table 1).

Table 1. Received information by sources and topics

Information	Number of answers	State Agrarian Development Center	Regional Training Center	TV	Newspaper/ magazine	Radio	Online informational platforms	Social media	Banners/Brochures	Books	Non-formal communication	Trainings/consult.	Don't know/ Refuse to respond
Fruit growing	17	X	X	X			X	X		X	X	X	
Subsidies	16	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Protection of environment	13	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Agro insurance	12	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Climate change	12	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Cattle breeding	10	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Soil tillage	10	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Vegetable growing	10	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

Cereal growing	10	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Beekeeping	8	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Storage, package, branding	7	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Export markets	7	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Sheep breeding	6	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Poultry	5	X	X	X			X	X			X	X	
Cotton growing	5			X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Finance	3	X	X	X			X	X			X	X	
Rice growing	1	X	X										
Wild crops	1						X						

The State Agrarian Development Centers (SADCs) serve as the primary institutions responsible for implementing the state's information and advisory policies in the agricultural sector at the local level. SADCs play a crucial role in delivering up-to-date information to farmers on new agricultural technologies, modern production methods, fertilization, plant protection, soil cultivation, livestock management, and irrigation systems. They also provide information on changes in agricultural policy, mechanisms of subsidization and crediting, as well as state support programs aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainability (MoA, 2018).

One of the key institutions playing a crucial role in facilitating farmers' access to information is the Agricultural Training Center of the Agrarian

Services. This institution carries out activities such as connecting agricultural training providers with farmers, promoting the dissemination of new technologies, international experience, innovations, and scientific-technical advancements among farmers, developing a database of trainers, and organizing training and information-advisory services. The Center fulfills its objectives both directly and through eight regional training centers (Agrarian Services Agency, 2025).

In recent years, the number of television and radio programs focusing on the development of the agricultural sector has been increasing. A notable example is the program “Fermerin Real Dostu — Real Friend of Farmer” broadcast on Real TV. The Press and Public Relations Department of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Azerbaijan is primarily responsible for public relations, press services, communication strategy, event organization, digital communication, as well as media monitoring and analysis. Since 2022, AgroTV has been operating in the country.

The Agrarian Innovation Center of the Ministry of Agriculture organizes a variety of activities aimed at promoting innovative agriculture, ensuring access to new technologies, fostering technological advancements and methods based on innovative solutions, and providing both methodological and practical support for the implementation of innovative technologies in the agricultural sector. Among these activities, the Center regularly hosts agribusiness festivals in the regions (Agrarian Innovation Center, 2025).

The Small and Medium Business Development Agency (SMBDA) under the Ministry of Economy is one of the main sources of agricultural information. The Agency conducts capacity-building trainings to improve practical skills across the value chain, including the preparation of business plans, cultivation, storage, packaging, and marketing of products according to agro technical standards (SMBDA, 2025).

Information portals, social media, and informal communication channels are additional key sources of agricultural information.

The Electronic Agricultural Information System (EAIS) (www.eagro.az) is a unique system that provides integration with internal and external systems and enables the creation of a comprehensive database covering a wide range of agricultural fields.

Scientific research institutes and other centers under the Ministry of Agriculture also play an important role in providing farmers with information.

In 2015, the Ministry of Agriculture, together with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), created an information portal on agricultural prices. This portal was later updated by the Ministry and developed into the Electronic Price Information Portal for Agriculture (www.aqrarbazar.az), which is now one of the main sources of market price information.

The analysis of the structure of information obtained by respondents from various sources over the past 12 months shows that the top five topics include fruit growing, subsidies, environmental protection, agricultural insurance, and climate change. The prominence of fruit-growing information is explained by the fact that the majority of respondents are engaged in fruit production alongside other sectors, the growing importance of applying innovative technologies in this field, and the increasing necessity of implementing measures against diseases and pests, among other factors (Figure 2).

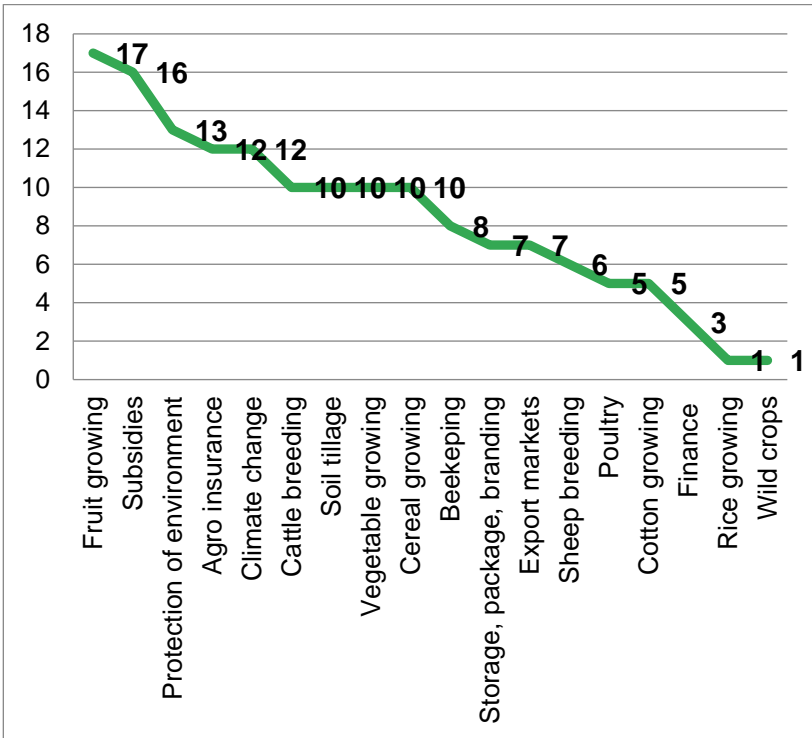


Figure 2. Recieved information from sources in the past 12 months

As previously noted, agricultural producers are exempt from all types of taxes except the land tax and are provided with direct and indirect subsidies. The declaration of subsidies for arable land, crops, seeds, calves, and other purposes through the Electronic Agricultural System is not only one of the main requirements but also the regular updating of subsidy rates increases the importance of this information for farmers (Agrarian Credit and Development Agency, 2020).

The payment of 50% of agricultural insurance premiums by the state, along with the significant increase in the number of farmers benefiting from this concession, has also raised the demand for information regarding agricultural insurance regulations. The primary sources of information on agricultural insurance include the websites and social media pages of the Agricultural Insurance Fund, television and radio

programs, as well as training sessions and awareness-raising events organized by the Fund (Agricultural Insurance Fund, 2019).

Azerbaijan, as one of the countries affected by the negative impacts of global climate change, has seen an increased demand for information on this topic, alongside other measures such as the effective use of water resources. In 2023, water consumption in the country amounted to 9,772 million cubic meters, of which 7,239 million cubic meters, or 74.1 percent, were allocated to irrigation and agricultural supply. An overview of the average annual precipitation indicates that it was 540.3 mm in 2002, 499.8 mm in 2010, 472.6 mm in 2015, 445.5 mm in 2020, and 481.2 mm in 2023. Regarding the average annual air temperature, the corresponding values for these years were 12.3°C, 14.4°C, 13.6°C, 13.8°C, and 14.7°C, respectively. Thus, on one hand, the decline in atmospheric precipitation, and on the other, the increase in average annual temperature, necessitate the promotion of efficient use of water resources (Hatamov, 2025).

Key information obtained also pertains to technological processes related to livestock production, land cultivation, and crop production, as well as the storage, packaging, branding, export, finance, and other related aspects of agricultural activities.

Trainings organized by public and private entities are also among the main sources of information. Leading consulting companies, individual consultants, laboratories, and specialists from input supply and processing companies are included among these information sources.

Regarding the usefulness of the information obtained, 55% of respondents reported it as very useful, 12% as mostly useful, 25% as useful, and 8% as slightly useful. None of the respondents indicated that the information was completely useless (Figure 3).

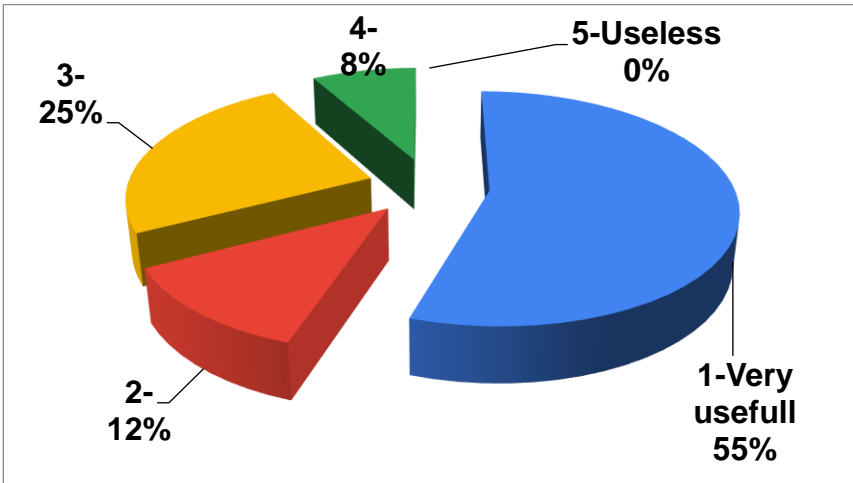


Figure 3. Usefulness level of received information

Question: Overall, on a 5-point scale, how useful was the information you received, where 1 means "very useful" and 5 means "not useful at all"?

Respondents who indicated that the information was "very useful" emphasized that they primarily obtained it from the State Agrarian Development Centers and Regional Training Centers. This information covered topics such as subsidies and concessions, agricultural insurance, fruit growing, vegetable production, land use, livestock farming, sheep breeding, poultry farming, beekeeping, cereal cultivation, cotton production, and other related areas.

Farmers who responded that the information was "mostly useful" also reported that they primarily obtained it from the State Agrarian Development Centers and Regional Training Centers. In this case, topics such as subsidies and concessions, agricultural insurance, beekeeping, livestock farming, poultry production, land use, and climate change were predominant.

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Those who stated that the information was “less useful” emphasized that they mainly obtained it from social networks, online information portals, trainings, and advisory services. It was thus concluded that information obtained from institutions subordinate to the Ministry of Agriculture was considered more useful and covered topics such as subsidies and concessions, agricultural insurance, fruit growing, vegetable production, land use, livestock farming, sheep breeding, poultry farming, beekeeping, cereal cultivation, cotton production, and other related areas.

Regarding the application of the acquired knowledge in their family agricultural practices, 85.7% of respondents (42 farmers) answered “yes,” 4.1% (2 farmers) “no,” and 10.2% (5 farmers) responded “I don’t know / refuse to answer.” Among the farmers who answered “no,” 50% stated that they obtained the information from online platforms and social networks, while the remaining respondents indicated that they received it from the State Agrarian Development Centers and Regional Training Centers. The topics covered in this regard include cotton production, grain cultivation, cattle breeding, sheep farming, beekeeping, and others.

The extent to which the implementation of new practices derived from the obtained information contributes to or adversely affects farming is one of the issues of significant importance for farmers.

In response to the question, “Overall, has the implementation of the new practice brought benefits or harm to your family/community/environment?” 86% of the respondents (42 farmers) indicated that the new practice was beneficial, 4% (2 farmers) answered “had no effect,” 2% (1 farmer) stated that “the new practice caused harm,” and 8% (4 farmers) did not know or refused to answer (Figure 3).

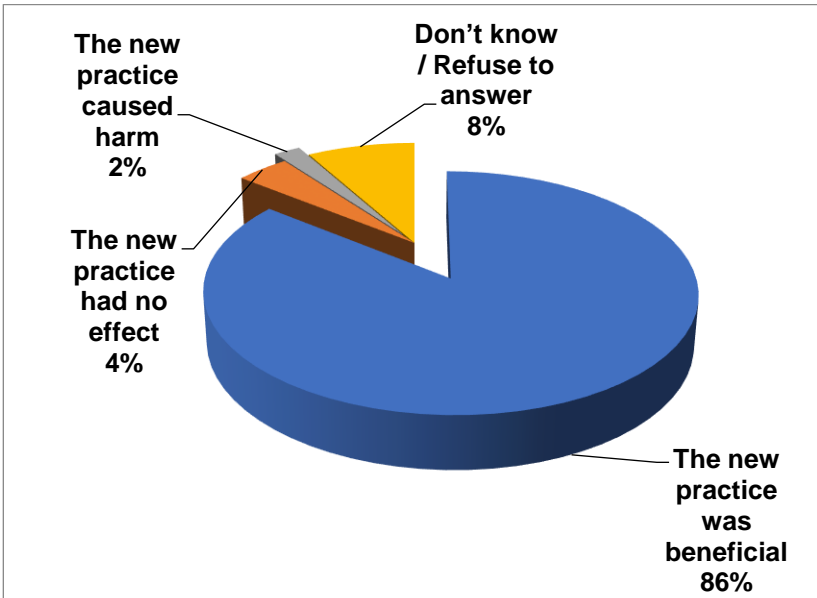


Figure 3. Perceived benefits or adverse effects of the new practice on the family, community, and environment.

Farmers who reported that the new practice had no effect stated that they obtained information on topics such as cotton growing, land use, livestock, sheep breeding, beekeeping, and export markets through social media, online platforms, television, and informal communication channels.

The sharing of acquired information is one of the key factors significantly influencing the outcomes of farmers' activities. In particular, farmer-to-farmer experience exchange is often considered a more reliable source of information. For instance, the farmlands of high-performing farmers frequently serve as demonstration sites, providing valuable information, knowledge, and experience for other farmers (Wesierski, Hatamov, Ilyasov, & Korchiyev, 2023).

Of the surveyed farmers, 94% (46 farmers) reported that they shared the information they obtained with others, such as neighbors, friends, and relatives. Meanwhile, 4% (2 farmers) stated that they did not share the information, and 2% (1 farmer) did not respond to the question.

Naturally, the unwillingness to share obtained information is mainly characteristic of competitive environments and rival farmers.

The level of trust in information sources depends on the outcomes achieved through the application of the acquired knowledge. In response to the question, “Tell us more about how the acquired knowledge/practice was useful to you,” 26.5% of the respondents (13 farmers) stated that it led to an increase in productivity (Figure 4).

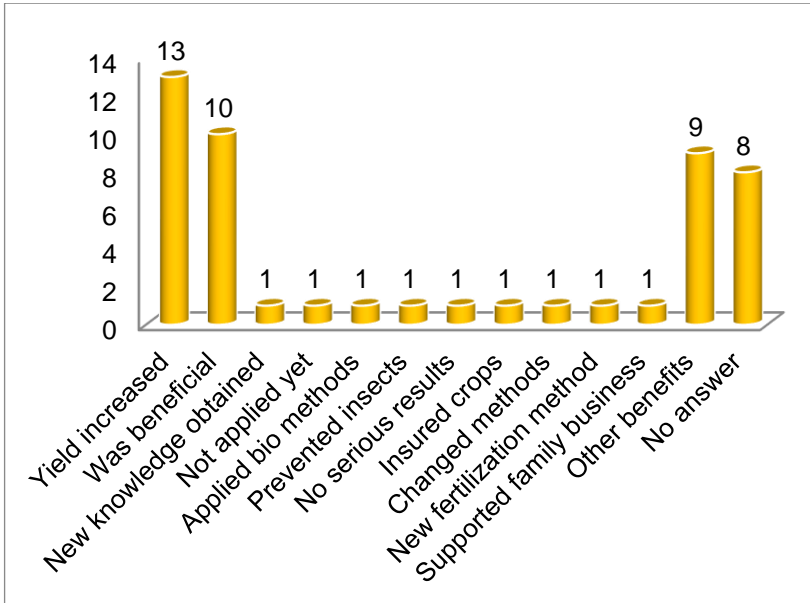


Figure 4. Benefits of acquired knowledge/practice

Of the respondents, 20.4% (10 farmers) stated that the acquired knowledge and skills were generally useful, 18.4% (9 farmers) mentioned other benefits, and 16.3% (8 farmers) did not respond to the question. Other respondents emphasized that the new knowledge contributed to acquiring new skills, applying biotechnological methods, preventing pests, obtaining insurance, implementing new fertilization methods, and supporting family businesses.

In the recommendations section of the survey, the respondent farmers considered it extremely necessary to organize regular practical

trainings, establish demonstration plots for comparison, and expand advisory services. According to them, these measures would help farmers become familiar with new technologies and innovative methods, facilitate experience sharing, and increase production efficiency.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In Azerbaijan, agriculture, as one of the main non-oil sectors, plays an important role in diversifying the economy and reducing dependence on the oil industry. From this perspective, government support for the sector is substantial, and media coverage of agricultural topics is extensive.

Research indicates that farmers' access to agricultural information is multifaceted and influenced by various factors, including their field of activity, age, gender, level of access to information and communication technologies, knowledge and skills in this area, the nature of the subject matter, and other socio-economic indicators.

Media coverage of agricultural topics in the country includes both public and private media outlets. Among public media, the Public Relations and Information Supply Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, along with other agencies such as the Agrarian Services Agency, Agrarian Innovation Center, and Agrarian Credit and Development Agency, are key players in informing farmers about agricultural issues, government programs, innovations and technologies, market trends, challenges, and good agricultural practices. In addition, television and radio programs play a significant role as primary sources of information for farmers. According to survey results, the information that farmers obtain from the relevant state institutions is primarily related to subsidies, concessions, insurance, and registration procedures.

The expansion and intensification of television and radio broadcasts dedicated to agricultural topics at both national and regional levels are regarded as key priorities. It should be emphasized that substantial efforts are being undertaken in Azerbaijan to align economic broadcasting programs with contemporary requirements, with

concrete measures aimed at producing content that addresses the needs of economists and audiences interested in economic affairs. Although Agro TV contributes significantly to enhancing public awareness and knowledge in the field of agricultural economics, there remains a pressing need to strengthen and further develop its professional and human resource base (Huseynova, 2024).

One of the key directions for addressing existing challenges in this field is the development of agricultural journalism. In this context, one of the projects implemented in Azerbaijan was the “Agricultural Journalism Specialization” initiative, organized by the Agro Volunteers Organization, with financial support from the Youth Foundation and in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture. Within the framework of the project, participants were trained on topics such as “The Role of Social Media in Agriculture,” “Fundamentals of Journalism,” “Crop Production,” “Animal Husbandry,” “Efficient Use of Land,” “Data Analytics and E-Agriculture,” “State Support for Agriculture,” and “Agricultural Employment and Agricultural Loans.” The project aimed to increase youth interest in digital media, identify existing needs in the agricultural sector, contribute to the sustainable development of agricultural journalism, and support the production of more competent and professional articles related to the agricultural field (MoA, 2019).

Another initiative in this direction was the “AQRO Social Media Marketing – AQRO SMM” project, organized by the Agro Development Volunteers Organization, financially supported by the State Support Council for Non-Governmental Organizations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and implemented in partnership with Agrarian Procurement and Supply JSC. The project aimed to enhance the knowledge and skills of youth in the agricultural sector, with a particular focus on social media and marketing competencies (MoA, 2021).

Certainly, while initiatives of this nature contribute to addressing some of the challenges in agricultural journalism, the establishment of specialized programs within higher education institutions remains a critical issue. Specifically, there is a pressing need to train professionals capable of producing television and radio programs that

are accessible and comprehensible to the farming audience. It should be noted that in Azerbaijan, the training of specialists in all agricultural programs is fully funded by the state. From this perspective, state-supported education for agricultural journalists could further stimulate interest in the field. In countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and others, several higher education institutions offer graduate-level programs dedicated to agricultural journalism.

The specific characteristics of agriculture and the fact that technological processes require certain practical skills increase the demand for hands-on training among information sources. Survey results also indicate that the organization of practical training was particularly emphasized in farmers' recommendations. Although the COVID-19 pandemic led to the expansion of online training, it has not diminished the importance of in-person practical sessions and demonstrations, especially for technological processes such as crop fertilization, artificial insemination of livestock, and similar practices. Since the training programs organized by the Agrarian Training Center of the Agrarian Services Agency under the Ministry of Agriculture, the State Agrarian Development Centers, Azerbaijan State Agricultural University, and relevant research institutes and centers do not fully meet farmers' needs, promoting the involvement of private consultancy firms and individual agricultural advisors in the process remains a priority issue.

Strengthening agricultural advisory services through the development of mobile applications, implementation of extension campaigns to ensure mass communication, preparation of knowledge and communication products (brochures, videos, TV programs), establishment of commodity-based agricultural advisory platforms and demonstration plots, enhancing cooperation between agricultural advisory services and agricultural research for joint resource mobilization to improve service quality and technological relevance, the development of a research–university–farm chain, and other measures are among the key priorities for media coverage of agricultural topics in Azerbaijan.

Thus, farmers' access to agricultural information in Azerbaijan is diversified. Small-scale farmers and household farms dominate the agricultural system, and they mainly rely on online platforms, as well as the Regional Agrarian Development Centers and Regional Training Centers under the Ministry of Agriculture, as their primary sources of information. Farmers' preferred sources of information are influenced by their specialization, age, education level, and the nature of the problem. The main sources of information on subsidies, agricultural insurance, and concessions are institutions under the Ministry of Agriculture. The majority of farmers report that the information they obtain is useful and that they share it with their relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to official sources, online platforms and social networks are widely used, while newspapers, journals, brochures, and books have the smallest share in the structure of information sources and other related characteristics.

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