

Media Coverage of Agriculture in Armenia Institutional Barriers, Resource Constraints, and Information Gaps

Gayane Mirzoyan

Brusov State University

Journalism Lecturer,

Head of Journalists for the Urban Development

Abstract

The agricultural information ecosystem in Armenia faces significant structural challenges that limit the availability and accessibility of reliable information for rural communities. This study examines the institutional, professional, and informational barriers that shape agricultural journalism and influence the flow of agricultural knowledge to farmers. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines qualitative interviews with agricultural journalists, investigative reporters, media founders, and farming entrepreneurs with a survey of farmers from multiple regions of Armenia assessing their access to and use of agricultural information.

The qualitative analysis identifies five interconnected barriers affecting agricultural media coverage: the erosion of institutional support mechanisms, political agenda-setting that marginalizes rural issues, chronic resource scarcity within media organizations, restricted access to governmental agricultural data, and the limited availability of specialized agricultural journalism expertise. Complementary findings from the farmer survey reveal significant gaps between the information needs of rural producers and the content currently provided by media outlets. While farmers actively seek agricultural information and often share knowledge within their communities, they report uneven access to reliable and practical guidance.

The study demonstrates that the limitations of agricultural journalism in Armenia extend beyond economic constraints and reflect broader

institutional and policy-level failures in the agricultural information system. Addressing these challenges requires systemic intervention, including strengthening institutional support for agricultural reporting, improving access to public agricultural data, developing specialized journalistic capacity, and supporting sustainable media coverage of rural and agricultural issues.

Keywords: *agricultural journalism, rural information ecosystem, media institutions, agricultural information access, farmer knowledge networks, agricultural policy communication*

Introduction

Agriculture remains an important component of Armenia's rural economy and livelihood system, yet the circulation of reliable agricultural information within the country remains limited and uneven. Farmers require timely and practical knowledge on production techniques, market conditions, agricultural policies, and available support programs in order to make informed decisions. At the same time, media institutions play an important role in translating complex sectoral developments into accessible public information. However, in Armenia the agricultural information environment appears fragmented, with limited interaction between farmers, journalists, and public institutions responsible for agricultural policy and knowledge dissemination.

Over the past decade, the agricultural sector in Armenia has faced a number of structural challenges. These include regional crop concentration leading to market saturation, persistent irrigation infrastructure problems, the gradual aging of the rural population, and declining participation of younger generations in agricultural work. Another frequently discussed issue is the limited availability of extension services that traditionally connected farmers with technical expertise and practical advice. In this context, the availability of clear and accessible agricultural information becomes particularly important for rural communities.

Despite these needs, public communication about agriculture remains relatively limited. Media coverage of agricultural issues often appears

episodic and event-driven rather than systematic, while rural communities frequently report difficulties in accessing reliable and practical information about agricultural programs, innovations, and policy developments. This raises broader questions about the functioning of the agricultural information ecosystem and the role of media institutions within it.

To explore these issues, this research examines how agricultural information is produced, mediated, and accessed in Armenia. The study draws on qualitative interviews with key stakeholders representing different positions within the agricultural information ecosystem. Participants include agricultural journalists, investigative reporters, media founders working on rural and development issues, regional television journalists, and farming entrepreneurs involved in knowledge-sharing initiatives. These interviews provide insight into the institutional and professional dynamics that shape agricultural media coverage.

In addition to qualitative interviews, the study incorporates survey data collected from farmers in several regions of Armenia. The survey explores farmers' primary sources of agricultural information, their assessment of the usefulness of available information, and the extent to which acquired knowledge is applied in practice and shared within farming communities. Integrating perspectives from both media professionals and farmers allows the research to examine the agricultural information ecosystem from both the supply and demand sides.

The analysis identifies several structural factors that influence the quality and availability of agricultural information in Armenia. These include institutional changes within the agricultural governance system, limited financial and human resources within media organizations, restricted access to reliable agricultural data, and the absence of specialized training in agricultural journalism. Rather than operating independently, these factors interact with one another and collectively shape the ability of journalists to cover agricultural issues in a consistent and informative manner.

By examining these interconnected dynamics, the study aims to contribute to a better understanding of how agricultural information circulates within Armenia’s rural communication environment. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening institutional support for agricultural knowledge dissemination, improving access to agricultural data, and enhancing journalistic capacity to cover rural and agricultural issues in a systematic and accessible way.

Research Methodology

This study applies a mixed-methods research design combining qualitative interviews with media and agricultural sector stakeholders and quantitative survey data collected from farmers in different regions of Armenia. The purpose of this approach is to examine the agricultural information ecosystem from both the perspective of information producers—such as journalists and media organizations—and information users, particularly farmers who rely on agricultural knowledge for their daily practices.

Qualitative Component: Interviews

The qualitative component of the study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with five purposively selected participants who represent key positions within Armenia’s agricultural information environment. The selection of participants aimed to capture diverse institutional perspectives, including national media, investigative journalism, regional broadcasting, and agricultural entrepreneurship. This purposive sampling strategy enabled the research to explore how agricultural information is produced, interpreted, and communicated across different professional contexts.

The participants included a national television journalist with formal education in agriculture working on the Public Armenian Television channel; an investigative journalist with more than two decades of experience covering agricultural issues for the investigative media platform Hetq; the founder and director of Tavush Media, a regional media organization focusing on development and agricultural reporting; a regional television journalist working in the agriculturally significant Armavir region; and a farmer-entrepreneur in the

Gegharkunik region managing demonstration farms and extension-oriented initiatives. Together, these participants provided perspectives from both media professionals and agricultural practitioners involved in knowledge dissemination.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Armenian and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The interview guide included several thematic areas related to agricultural journalism and information circulation. These themes included the professional trajectories of agricultural journalists, current responsibilities and coverage practices, challenges in covering agricultural issues, institutional and resource constraints within media organizations, access to official information sources, and perceptions of audience engagement and future priorities in agricultural reporting.

The semi-structured format allowed respondents to elaborate on their experiences while maintaining comparability across interviews. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and provided consent to participate. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns related to the structural conditions that shape agricultural journalism in Armenia. Particular attention was given to identifying barriers that limit the production of consistent and informative agricultural coverage.

The coding process focused on several analytical dimensions, including barriers to agricultural reporting, recurring institutional challenges across media organizations, relationships between different constraints affecting journalistic work, and broader structural factors such as policy priorities, institutional arrangements, and resource limitations. Rather than treating interview responses solely as individual experiences, the analysis examined how the reported challenges reflect broader systemic conditions affecting agricultural communication.

Quantitative Component: Farmer Survey

To complement the qualitative insights from media professionals, the study incorporates survey data collected from farmers across multiple regions of Armenia. The survey aimed to examine farmers' access to agricultural information, the perceived usefulness of available information sources, and the extent to which agricultural knowledge is applied in practice and shared within farming communities.

A structured questionnaire was distributed to farmers engaged in agricultural activities. The survey collected demographic information such as age, gender, region, and municipality, as well as data on farmers' primary sources of agricultural information, topics on which they receive information, and their evaluation of the usefulness of such information. Additional questions explored whether farmers apply the acquired knowledge in their agricultural practices, the outcomes of such applications, and whether information is shared with other farmers within local networks.

The survey data provide an important perspective on the demand side of the agricultural information ecosystem and allow the study to compare farmers' information needs with the perspectives of media professionals involved in agricultural reporting.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative component of the study relies on a relatively small number of interviews, which limits the generalizability of findings and reflects the perspectives of selected stakeholders rather than the entire agricultural media community. Second, the research focuses specifically on Armenia's institutional and media environment, meaning that the findings may not be directly transferable to other national contexts with different agricultural governance structures.

Third, as in most qualitative research, the interpretation of interview data is influenced by the analytical framework used by the researcher. Alternative analytical approaches might lead to different interpretations of the same data. Finally, the research reflects conditions at a particular moment in time, and future institutional or

policy changes could alter the dynamics of agricultural information dissemination.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods design allows the study to combine in-depth qualitative insights with empirical data from farmers, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the agricultural information ecosystem in Armenia.

Research Findings

Finding 1: Institutional Breakdown as a Failure of Agricultural Information Infrastructure

The interviews consistently indicate that institutional restructuring within Armenia's agricultural governance system has had significant consequences for the circulation of agricultural information. In particular, respondents frequently referred to the abolition of the Ministry of Agriculture and the closure of the Regional Agricultural Support Centers (GAMK) as turning points that disrupted previously existing channels of communication between policymakers, journalists, and farmers.

Participants emphasized that these institutions served not only administrative functions but also operated as central nodes within the agricultural information ecosystem. The former Ministry of Agriculture functioned as a focal point for sectoral coordination and public communication. Journalists covering agricultural issues regularly interacted with ministry officials, sometimes through formal briefings or thematic meetings, which created opportunities to identify emerging policy issues and connect with sector specialists. Such interactions also provided journalists with institutional entry points for investigating agricultural problems and bringing them into public debate.

At the regional level, the Regional Agricultural Support Centers played a complementary role. These centers acted as intermediaries between farmers, state institutions, and knowledge providers such as research institutes and agricultural specialists. They facilitated access to advisory services, organized training activities, and supported local knowledge networks that helped farmers respond to production challenges. Their presence also provided regional journalists with

local sources of expertise and practical examples of agricultural innovation or difficulty.

Interview participants described the dismantling of these institutions as a form of infrastructure loss within the agricultural information system. As Grigoryan explained, the previous institutional structure provided journalists with identifiable contact points and clear lines of responsibility. With agricultural governance now distributed across multiple ministries and agencies, responsibility for agricultural communication has become fragmented. As a result, journalists must rely increasingly on informal personal networks when seeking information, and the process of gathering reliable data has become more time-consuming and uncertain.

The implications of this institutional fragmentation are particularly visible in investigative reporting. Balasanyan noted that investigative inquiries related to agricultural policies often require repeated requests to multiple government agencies in order to assemble even partial information. Without a central ministry responsible for the agricultural sector, accountability mechanisms become less transparent and institutional knowledge becomes dispersed across agencies that may not prioritize agricultural communication.

These institutional changes affect not only journalists but also farmers' access to information. Survey data collected from farmers across several Armenian regions reinforce the perception that institutional support for agricultural information has weakened. A substantial proportion of surveyed farmers reported difficulties in accessing clear and reliable information about agricultural programs, subsidies, and technical recommendations. Many respondents indicated that they rely primarily on informal sources of information, including neighboring farmers or personal networks, rather than official advisory structures.

This finding highlights a broader transformation in the agricultural information ecosystem. Whereas earlier institutional arrangements created structured channels for knowledge exchange among policymakers, journalists, and farmers, the current system appears more fragmented and decentralized. In the absence of institutional

coordination, information flows increasingly depend on individual initiative rather than structured communication mechanisms.

Finding 2: Political Agenda-Setting and the Marginalization of Agricultural Issues

The interviews indicate that agricultural journalism in Armenia operates within a broader media environment shaped by political agenda-setting and editorial prioritization. In such an environment, topics that dominate political discourse or generate immediate public attention often receive significantly greater media visibility than sectoral issues such as agriculture. As a result, agricultural reporting frequently becomes episodic and secondary to political news coverage.

Several interview participants noted that the daily news agenda in Armenia is heavily influenced by statements and activities of political leaders. Balasanyan described this dynamic by noting that the political agenda often determines which issues dominate the news cycle, while structural problems in sectors such as irrigation management, land cultivation, agricultural marketing, soil salinization, and rural infrastructure receive comparatively limited attention. According to this perspective, journalists frequently respond to politically driven events rather than independently shaping the public agenda around long-term social and economic issues.

This dynamic affects the visibility of agricultural issues in the media landscape. When political developments dominate the national news cycle, other topics—including agriculture—tend to receive minimal coverage. Interviewees observed that during periods of political tension, border conflicts, or major political announcements, agricultural stories often disappear entirely from news coverage, even when rural communities continue to face persistent economic and environmental challenges.

A frequently cited example concerns the contrast between crime reporting and agricultural reporting in rural communities. Journalists described situations in which incidents such as violent crimes in rural villages receive extensive national coverage, while ongoing

agricultural problems affecting the same communities remain largely invisible in national media. For example, in the village of Merdzavan journalists documented a homicide investigation in detail and generated substantial media attention. However, long-standing agricultural issues in the same community—including damaged rural roads that prevent farmers from accessing fields, irrigation shortages, and large areas of uncultivated land—have received little sustained media attention.

These observations suggest that news selection in agricultural reporting is shaped not only by the objective importance of an issue but also by perceptions of newsworthiness and immediacy. Political developments tend to generate rapid audience engagement, particularly on digital platforms where social media interactions and algorithmic amplification favor highly visible political events. Agricultural topics, by contrast, are often perceived as less immediate and therefore less competitive within the daily news cycle.

The farmer survey conducted as part of this research provides an important complementary perspective. While journalists describe agriculture as a topic that struggles to compete with political news in editorial priorities, many farmers report a strong need for reliable information related to agricultural production, government programs, and market conditions. Survey responses indicate that farmers actively seek information from a variety of sources, including television, social media, neighboring farmers, and agricultural specialists. This suggests that the limited presence of agricultural reporting in the media agenda may not reflect a lack of audience demand but rather editorial assumptions about audience engagement.

Taken together, these findings point to a structural mismatch between the information needs of rural communities and the priorities of contemporary news production. Political agenda-setting shapes media visibility, while agricultural issues often require long-term, explanatory, and solution-oriented reporting that does not easily align with the fast-paced dynamics of daily political news cycles.

Finding 3: Resource Scarcity and Economic Constraints on Agricultural Journalism

Interview participants repeatedly emphasized that economic constraints represent one of the most persistent structural challenges for agricultural journalism in Armenia. Limited financial resources within media organizations influence editorial decisions, reporting priorities, and the overall capacity to cover complex sectors such as agriculture.

Several respondents described how financial pressures shape the allocation of journalistic resources. Media outlets operating in a competitive digital environment often prioritize content that generates high audience engagement and advertising revenue. According to Mirzoyan, agricultural stories typically attract lower levels of audience engagement compared with politically controversial or sensational topics. As a result, editorial teams frequently allocate limited reporting resources to subjects that are more likely to generate online views, social media interactions, and advertising income.

This dynamic reflects broader transformations in the economic structure of the Armenian media sector. Interview participants noted that the withdrawal or reduction of international donor funding—particularly from American media support programs—has significantly affected the financial sustainability of many media outlets. Previously, such funding made it possible for journalists to produce specialized content, including coverage of rural development and agricultural issues, even when these topics did not generate strong commercial returns. With the decline of this external support, many media organizations have been forced to reduce field reporting and concentrate resources on content that is economically viable in the digital media market.

These economic pressures are particularly visible in regional media outlets. Unlike large national media organizations based in Yerevan, regional outlets operate within much smaller advertising markets and often rely on local authority support or limited regional funding sources. This financial environment may influence editorial independence and restrict the ability of regional journalists to conduct

in-depth investigative reporting on agricultural issues. Stepanyan's experience at ALT TV illustrates these challenges. Limited staff numbers, restricted travel budgets, and limited logistical resources constrain the ability of journalists to regularly visit rural communities or conduct extended reporting projects in remote agricultural areas.

Reporting on agricultural issues frequently requires additional logistical investments compared to urban reporting. Journalists covering rural topics may need to travel to distant villages, spend extended time observing agricultural practices, and consult multiple experts in order to produce accurate and informative stories. In resource-constrained media environments, such investments can be difficult to justify when compared with more easily produced content that attracts larger audiences.

The experience of Tavush Media illustrates both the constraints and potential alternatives within this landscape. Supported partly through international donor programs, the outlet has been able to maintain a degree of editorial independence and produce specialized reporting on agricultural and regional development issues. However, interview participants emphasized that such funding models remain uncertain and dependent on external support. If donor funding declines, media organizations that rely on such support may face immediate operational constraints.

Survey results from farmers further illuminate the consequences of these structural limitations. Farmers report relying on multiple informal and semi-formal information sources, including neighboring farmers, social networks, and personal contacts with agricultural specialists. While media outlets remain one source of agricultural information, they do not represent the primary channel through which many farmers obtain practical advice. This pattern suggests that limited journalistic coverage of agriculture contributes to a broader diversification of information channels within rural communities.

Taken together, these findings highlight how economic pressures within the media sector shape the visibility of agricultural issues in the public sphere. Financial constraints influence not only how frequently

agricultural topics are covered but also the depth and quality of reporting that journalists can realistically produce.

Finding 4: Barriers to Information Access and Limited Availability of Agricultural Data

In addition to economic constraints, interview participants consistently emphasized limited access to reliable agricultural data as a significant obstacle to effective agricultural journalism. Journalists noted that information that should normally be publicly accessible is often difficult to obtain, delayed, or provided only in incomplete form. These challenges complicate the production of evidence-based reporting and reduce the ability of journalists to investigate structural problems within the agricultural sector.

Investigative journalists described the process of obtaining official information as time-consuming and uncertain. Balasanyan explained that formal requests for information frequently require multiple follow-up submissions in order to receive even partial responses. According to his experience at the investigative platform Hetq, responses from government institutions often arrive in fragmented form, requiring journalists to assemble information from several different sources before a coherent picture of a policy or program can be constructed.

One example frequently cited by respondents concerns transparency in agricultural markets. For many years, the Ministry of Agriculture publicly released information regarding which wineries owed payments to grape producers for purchased harvests. This data allowed farmers to better understand market dynamics and helped journalists report on accountability issues within the agricultural value chain. However, after journalists began using the information in investigative reporting, access to the data was restricted and reclassified as a “trade secret.” As a result, journalists were no longer able to obtain this information through official channels.

Participants also highlighted broader limitations within existing government transparency mechanisms. Armenia’s public procurement platform, which is intended to provide open access to government contracts, often contains incomplete data or missing

documentation. When journalists inquire about these gaps, responsibility is frequently shifted between institutions. For example, the Ministry of Finance, which administers the procurement system, typically states that it publishes only the information submitted by procuring authorities. As a result, no single institution assumes responsibility for ensuring the completeness and accessibility of publicly available procurement information.

Another challenge identified in the interviews concerns the lack of systematic agricultural data collection and analysis. Grigoryan observed that the former Ministry of Agriculture regularly produced analytical reports, statistical summaries, and sector forecasts that helped journalists understand broader trends within the agricultural economy. In the current institutional structure, where responsibilities for agricultural governance are distributed across multiple agencies, similar analytical outputs are less consistently produced. This absence of structured data infrastructure makes it more difficult for journalists to contextualize individual events within wider agricultural trends.

In response to these limitations, journalists increasingly rely on alternative information-gathering strategies. These include direct communication with farmers, informal conversations with agricultural specialists, and the analysis of scattered data available through public records or previous media reports. While such approaches allow journalists to continue reporting on agricultural issues, they often result in stories that are more anecdotal and event-driven rather than systematically supported by comprehensive datasets.

The lack of reliable and accessible agricultural data also limits the potential for investigative journalism. Reporting on agricultural subsidy programs, for example, requires access to detailed information on program budgets, recipient lists, and program outcomes. Similarly, analysis of land use patterns requires cadastral records and cultivation data, while evaluation of agricultural productivity depends on access to yield statistics, input costs, and market prices. Without access to such information, journalists face significant obstacles in conducting rigorous investigations that could inform public debate and support farmer decision-making.

Findings from the farmer survey further illustrate the consequences of these information barriers. Many farmers reported difficulties in accessing reliable and timely information regarding agricultural programs, technical recommendations, and market conditions. As a result, farmers often rely on informal communication networks, including neighboring farmers and local agricultural practitioners, to obtain practical knowledge. While these networks can facilitate knowledge exchange within rural communities, they cannot fully substitute for transparent institutional information systems.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the challenges facing agricultural journalism are closely linked to broader issues of data transparency and institutional communication. When public institutions do not consistently produce and disseminate accessible agricultural data, journalists are limited in their ability to provide evidence-based reporting, and farmers face additional barriers in accessing the information necessary for informed agricultural decision-making.

Finding 5: Knowledge Gaps and the Limited Development of Agricultural Journalism

Interview participants consistently highlighted the absence of systematic professional development in agricultural journalism as an important structural barrier affecting the quality and depth of agricultural media coverage in Armenia. Agricultural reporting requires specialized knowledge that extends beyond general journalistic skills, yet opportunities for journalists to develop such expertise remain limited.

Agriculture is a complex sector that involves technical knowledge in areas such as plant protection, soil management, irrigation systems, agricultural economics, market dynamics, and food safety. Effective coverage of agricultural issues often requires the ability to interpret scientific information, evaluate policy claims, and translate technical knowledge into accessible language for broader audiences. However, interview participants noted that most journalists covering agriculture do not receive formal training in these domains.

Among the interview participants, Mirzoyan represents an exception. In addition to her work as a television journalist, she holds an academic background in agricultural studies, which enables her to interpret technical information and engage directly with agricultural specialists. Participants emphasized that such dual expertise remains rare in Armenian media. Most journalists encounter agricultural topics without prior sectoral knowledge and must navigate unfamiliar terminology, policy frameworks, and technical issues while preparing their reports.

Interviewees also noted the absence of structured professional development opportunities that could help journalists acquire agricultural knowledge. While occasional short-term initiatives exist—such as media tours organized by sector organizations like the Wine Foundation—these activities tend to be sporadic and limited in scope. According to Mirzoyan, such events provide valuable exposure but do not constitute a systematic approach to building journalistic expertise in agriculture.

More comprehensive capacity-building programs for agricultural journalism appear largely absent. Participants reported that Armenia currently lacks specialized fellowships, training programs, or collaborative initiatives that connect journalists with agricultural researchers, extension specialists, or policy experts. Without such institutional support, journalists covering agricultural issues often rely heavily on official sources or press releases, which can limit their ability to critically evaluate policy claims or independently analyze sector developments.

The absence of domain expertise also affects the ability of journalists to identify broader structural patterns within agricultural problems. When reporters lack familiarity with agricultural science or agricultural economics, they may find it difficult to assess the credibility of official statements, recognize inconsistencies in policy narratives, or situate individual farmer experiences within wider sectoral trends. As a result, agricultural stories may remain descriptive rather than analytical.

Participants further emphasized that the shortage of expertise extends beyond journalism and reflects wider challenges within the agricultural

sector itself. Mirzoyan pointed to broader human capital shortages, noting that the average age of veterinarians in Armenia has risen significantly and that agricultural faculties at universities attract relatively few students. This situation reduces the pool of experts available to journalists seeking professional commentary on agricultural issues.

The decline of agricultural extension services has also contributed to this knowledge gap. Extension specialists traditionally served as intermediaries between scientific research and farming practice, helping both farmers and journalists interpret technical developments in the sector. With fewer extension professionals available, journalists often lack accessible expert sources who can help translate complex agricultural topics into publicly understandable information.

Editorial structures within media organizations may further reinforce these limitations. News editors without agricultural background knowledge may underestimate the broader social and economic importance of agricultural reporting or perceive such stories as overly technical for general audiences. In some cases, agricultural topics are treated as niche or specialized content rather than as issues with significant implications for national economic development, food security, and rural livelihoods.

The farmer survey conducted for this study provides additional insight into this knowledge gap. Survey responses indicate that farmers actively seek practical agricultural information, particularly regarding production methods, pest management, weather conditions, and government support programs. However, respondents frequently reported that the available information is fragmented, difficult to interpret, or insufficiently adapted to farmers' everyday decision-making needs.

These findings suggest that strengthening agricultural journalism requires not only improvements in institutional support and information access but also targeted investments in professional capacity building. Developing training programs, fellowships, and collaborative initiatives that connect journalists with agricultural experts could significantly

improve the depth and analytical quality of agricultural media coverage.

Finding 6: Farmer Information Deficit and the Limitations of Practical Agricultural Journalism

Interview participants emphasized that despite individual efforts by journalists to increase agricultural coverage, rural communities in Armenia continue to face significant informational gaps regarding agricultural practices, available programs, and sector developments. Several respondents noted that the type of information typically provided through media coverage does not always correspond to the practical needs of farmers who rely on timely and actionable knowledge for everyday agricultural decision-making.

From the perspective of farmers themselves, access to practical information remains a central concern. Khachatryan, a farmer-entrepreneur involved in demonstration farming and agricultural knowledge sharing, emphasized that farmers require concrete, operational information rather than general news about the agricultural sector. According to his observations, farmers are primarily interested in timely updates regarding subsidy programs, weather conditions, pest outbreaks, market prices, and effective production techniques that can directly influence their agricultural practices.

However, agricultural journalism often focuses on policy announcements, official statements, or isolated success stories rather than providing continuous practical guidance. While such coverage contributes to public awareness about agricultural policy developments, it does not necessarily meet the day-to-day informational needs of farmers managing production risks and market uncertainties.

Mirzoyan's reporting experience provides an important example of this gap. One of her agricultural video reports attracted approximately half a million views within a single day, demonstrating that agricultural topics can generate significant public interest when presented in a compelling and practical format. At the same time, she noted that widespread informational deficits among farmers persist. Even when

journalists provide detailed explanations of agricultural support programs—for example, describing government subsidies covering 50 percent of certain production costs or loan interest reductions—many farmers remain unaware of these opportunities or believe that such programs are inaccessible to them.

Findings from the farmer survey conducted for this study further illustrate this informational gap. Survey respondents reported varying levels of awareness regarding available agricultural programs and technical guidance. Many farmers indicated that while they occasionally encounter agricultural information through media sources, they often depend on informal networks to obtain practical knowledge relevant to their farming activities. Neighboring farmers, personal contacts, and local agricultural practitioners were frequently cited as important sources of information.

This pattern suggests that the agricultural information ecosystem in Armenia relies heavily on informal knowledge exchange within rural communities. While such networks can be effective in transmitting practical experience, they may also lead to uneven dissemination of information, particularly when farmers rely on second-hand interpretations of policies or technologies rather than direct access to reliable sources.

The absence of functioning agricultural extension services further amplifies these challenges. Historically, extension systems provided a structured mechanism for delivering scientific knowledge and technical advice to farmers. Regional Agricultural Support Centers previously played an important role in connecting farmers with agricultural expertise and translating research findings into practical recommendations. With the decline of these institutions, the responsibility for communicating agricultural knowledge has shifted partially toward media outlets, although journalism alone cannot fully substitute for extension services.

The limitations of journalism as a substitute for agricultural advisory systems are evident in the nature of media production itself. Journalists operate according to editorial cycles and news values, producing periodic reports focused on developments that are

considered newsworthy. Farmers, in contrast, require continuous access to information aligned with seasonal agricultural cycles, including planting periods, pest control interventions, irrigation management, and harvest planning.

Consequently, the informational needs of farmers extend beyond the scope of conventional news coverage. Addressing these needs would require a more integrated agricultural information system combining journalism, extension services, research institutions, and government communication mechanisms. Without such coordination, media coverage can contribute to awareness but cannot fully replace institutional systems designed to provide ongoing technical guidance.

Khachatryan's work with approximately 250 farming families provides an example of how targeted information exchange can produce tangible results. Through direct engagement, training activities, and market linkages, his initiative demonstrates the potential benefits of structured knowledge-sharing systems. However, such initiatives remain localized and dependent on individual leadership rather than representing a nationwide system of agricultural information dissemination.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the gap between farmers' information needs and the content typically provided through media coverage remains significant. While agricultural journalism can play an important role in raising awareness and highlighting sectoral challenges, addressing farmers' practical informational needs requires broader institutional mechanisms capable of delivering continuous, context-specific agricultural knowledge.

Finding 7: The Audience Engagement Paradox

One of the most intriguing findings emerging from the interviews concerns the relationship between audience engagement and media investment in agricultural journalism. While agricultural reporting is often perceived within media organizations as a topic with limited audience appeal, several interview participants described examples suggesting that audience interest in agricultural content may be significantly higher than editorial assumptions indicate.

Mirzoyan's reporting experience provides a particularly illustrative example. One of her agricultural stories attracted approximately half a million views within a single day—an unusually high level of engagement for agricultural media content in Armenia. This example demonstrates that when agricultural issues are presented through compelling narratives or practical insights, they can generate substantial public attention. Such cases challenge the widespread perception among media editors that agricultural topics inherently attract limited audiences.

Interview participants suggested that the success of such stories is often linked to several factors, including the presence of a clear narrative structure, the practical relevance of the information presented, and effective digital distribution strategies. Agricultural stories that highlight individual innovation, new production methods, or successful local initiatives may resonate strongly with audiences, particularly when they provide concrete examples of problem-solving within rural communities.

However, respondents also noted that such high engagement levels are not consistently replicated across all forms of agricultural reporting. Many agricultural topics involve technical discussions related to policy frameworks, production systems, or regulatory changes that may be less immediately engaging for general audiences. As a result, media organizations often view agricultural journalism as a risky investment in terms of audience metrics.

The farmer survey conducted for this study provides additional context for interpreting this dynamic. Survey results indicate that farmers actively seek agricultural information and frequently share knowledge within their communities. This suggests that a core audience for agricultural information already exists, particularly within rural regions. However, the content needs of this audience—such as practical guidance, technical explanations, and sector-specific analysis—may differ from the types of narratives typically prioritized in mainstream news production.

Several interview participants emphasized that editorial decisions are frequently shaped by short-term engagement metrics rather than by

long-term audience development strategies. Digital media environments encourage content that generates immediate reactions through social media interactions, comments, and shares. Agricultural stories that require deeper contextual explanation may struggle to compete within such attention-driven news ecosystems.

Grigoryan noted that when agricultural reporting is produced in a detailed and community-oriented manner, it can generate significant local engagement. According to his experience with Tavush Media, audiences in rural regions respond strongly to coverage that reflects their everyday experiences and addresses practical challenges faced by farmers. Nevertheless, financially constrained media outlets often hesitate to invest in developing such specialized content because of uncertainty regarding its broader audience reach.

This dynamic creates a paradox within agricultural journalism. Media organizations often assume that agricultural topics attract limited audiences and therefore allocate minimal resources to agricultural coverage. At the same time, audiences may have limited exposure to agricultural journalism precisely because such coverage remains scarce. In other words, limited investment in agricultural reporting may contribute to the perception of limited audience interest.

Overcoming this paradox may require strategic experimentation with agricultural storytelling formats, including explanatory journalism, multimedia narratives, and community-focused reporting. Demonstration projects that successfully combine engaging storytelling with practical agricultural information could help media organizations better understand the potential audience demand for agricultural content.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest that agricultural journalism in Armenia operates within a complex set of institutional, structural, and resource-related constraints that collectively limit the visibility and effectiveness of agricultural information within the public sphere. Rather than reflecting individual shortcomings of journalists, these

limitations appear to be rooted in broader systemic dynamics that shape how agricultural issues are communicated and understood.

One of the most significant developments affecting the agricultural information ecosystem has been the institutional restructuring of the sector's governance framework. The dissolution of the Ministry of Agriculture and the closure of regional agricultural support structures weakened institutional mechanisms that previously facilitated communication between policymakers, journalists, and farmers. As a result, agricultural information flows have become more fragmented and less coordinated.

The research also highlights the influence of political agenda-setting within the Armenian media environment. Daily news production is strongly shaped by political events and statements by political actors, which tend to dominate media attention and reduce the visibility of sectoral issues such as agriculture. In this context, agricultural reporting often becomes episodic and reactive rather than systematic and investigative.

Economic pressures within the media sector further reinforce these dynamics. Limited financial resources and increasing competition for digital audience engagement encourage media outlets to prioritize topics that generate higher levels of audience interaction and advertising revenue. As agricultural reporting is frequently perceived as attracting lower engagement, it often receives fewer editorial resources despite its social and economic importance.

Another significant barrier concerns access to reliable agricultural data. Journalists interviewed for this study described persistent difficulties in obtaining official information related to agricultural policies, market conditions, and government programs. Limited transparency and fragmented data systems reduce the capacity of journalists to conduct evidence-based reporting and limit farmers' ability to access reliable information necessary for agricultural decision-making.

The study also identifies a significant gap in professional development opportunities for agricultural journalism. Effective reporting on

agricultural issues requires familiarity with technical subjects such as agronomy, agricultural economics, environmental management, and food systems. However, structured training programs that would enable journalists to acquire such expertise remain limited.

Survey data collected from farmers reinforce several of these findings. Farmers report significant demand for practical agricultural information, including technical guidance, weather information, pest management strategies, and details about agricultural support programs. However, many respondents rely primarily on informal networks—such as neighboring farmers or local practitioners—to obtain such information, suggesting that existing media and institutional communication channels do not fully meet farmers' informational needs.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the challenges facing agricultural journalism in Armenia extend beyond newsroom-level decisions and reflect broader systemic conditions within the agricultural information ecosystem. Improving the circulation of agricultural knowledge therefore requires coordinated efforts that involve media institutions, government agencies, agricultural research organizations, and rural communities.

Recommendations

Addressing the barriers identified in this research requires a comprehensive approach aimed at strengthening the agricultural information ecosystem. Several policy and institutional measures could contribute to improving both agricultural journalism and farmers' access to reliable information.

1. Strengthening Institutional Coordination

One important step involves strengthening institutional mechanisms responsible for coordinating agricultural policy communication and information dissemination. This may include establishing a dedicated institutional structure responsible for agricultural policy coordination, statistical reporting, and communication with both media and farming communities.

At the regional level, mechanisms that support agricultural extension services and facilitate collaboration between farmers, experts, and journalists could significantly improve the circulation of practical agricultural knowledge. Such structures could serve as platforms for information exchange, policy dialogue, and the dissemination of technical expertise relevant to rural communities.

2. Developing Agricultural Data Infrastructure

Improving access to agricultural data is essential for supporting both evidence-based journalism and informed agricultural decision-making. Government institutions could strengthen agricultural data infrastructure by developing systematic mechanisms for collecting and publishing agricultural statistics, including data on crop yields, production inputs, market prices, and land use patterns.

Public information systems should also ensure transparent reporting on agricultural programs, subsidy allocation, procurement contracts, and program outcomes. Making such data publicly accessible would enable journalists to conduct more rigorous investigations and allow farmers to better understand market conditions and policy developments affecting their livelihoods.

3. Supporting Capacity Building in Agricultural Journalism

Strengthening professional capacity in agricultural journalism represents another important priority. Because agricultural reporting requires specialized knowledge, targeted training programs could help journalists develop expertise in areas such as agricultural science, environmental sustainability, rural development, and agricultural economics.

Potential initiatives could include fellowships connecting journalists with agricultural researchers, training workshops focused on agricultural policy and science communication, and collaborative projects between media organizations and agricultural research institutions. Such programs could help journalists produce more analytical and informative coverage of agricultural issues.

4. Supporting Sustainable Agricultural Media Coverage

Given the social importance of agricultural information for rural development and food security, targeted support mechanisms may also be necessary to sustain agricultural reporting. Grants or specialized funding programs could support investigative reporting on agricultural issues, regional journalism initiatives, and multimedia projects focused on rural communities.

Such initiatives could help media organizations experiment with new formats of agricultural storytelling and expand coverage of topics that may not generate immediate commercial returns but remain important for public knowledge and policy debate.

Figures

Figure 1

Institutional transformation of the agricultural information system in Armenia

This figure illustrates the institutional transformation of Armenia's agricultural information system following the restructuring of agricultural governance. Prior to the dissolution of the Ministry of Agriculture, information flows were coordinated through a centralized structure linking the ministry, regional agricultural support centers, media organizations, and farming communities. These institutions facilitated communication between policymakers, journalists, agricultural experts, and farmers.

Following institutional restructuring, agricultural governance responsibilities became distributed across multiple government agencies without a single coordinating institution. As a result, communication channels between journalists, agricultural experts, and farmers became more fragmented. The figure illustrates the transition from a coordinated institutional communication system toward a more decentralized and fragmented information environment.

Figure 2

Demographic profile of surveyed farmers

This figure presents the demographic characteristics of the farmers participating in the survey (N = 52). The sample includes 29 male respondents (55.8%) and 23 female respondents (44.2%), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution among participants.

The age structure of respondents shows that the largest group of farmers falls within the **40–49 age category (30.8%)**, followed by farmers aged **50–59 (25.0%)** and those **under 30 years old (17.3%)**. Smaller proportions of respondents were aged **30–39 (13.5%)** and **60 years or older (11.5%)**.

Survey participants represented multiple agricultural regions of Armenia. The largest groups of respondents came from **Armavir and Vayots Dzor (each 17.3%)**, followed by **Syunik, Ararat, Tavush, and Gegharkunik (each approximately 9–10%)**. Additional respondents represented Aragatsotn, Shirak, and Lori regions. This distribution indicates that the survey captured perspectives from farmers across diverse agricultural contexts.

Figure 3

Main sources of agricultural information used by farmers

This figure illustrates the primary sources from which surveyed farmers obtain agricultural information. Survey responses indicate that **digital platforms play a major role in agricultural information exchange**. The most frequently mentioned sources included **Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok**, each cited by 18 respondents.

In addition to digital media, **informal communication networks remain a critical information channel** within rural communities. Approximately 10 respondents reported receiving agricultural information through informal discussions with **family members, neighbors, and friends**.

Other sources mentioned by respondents include **online information platforms, training activities, veterinary consultations, and printed materials such as books**. These results indicate that farmers rely on a combination of digital media, interpersonal networks, and professional advisory channels to obtain agricultural knowledge.

Figure 4

Farmers' evaluation of the usefulness of agricultural information

This figure presents farmers' assessments of the usefulness of agricultural information using a five-point Likert scale, where **1 represents "very useful" and 5 represents "not useful at all."**

Survey results indicate generally positive evaluations of agricultural information. A total of **15 respondents (28.8%) rated the information as very useful**, while **9 respondents (17.3%) rated it as useful**. An additional **13 respondents (25.0%) evaluated the usefulness as moderate**.

However, a notable portion of respondents expressed more critical assessments: **12 respondents (23.1%) rated the information as less useful**, and **3 respondents (5.8%) considered it not useful at all**. These results suggest that although agricultural information is available, its practical relevance and accessibility may vary across farmers.

Figure 5

Farmers' priority information needs

This figure summarizes the types of agricultural information that farmers reported receiving and seeking during the previous twelve months. The survey responses indicate that farmers most frequently seek information related to **agricultural production practices, crop management, market conditions, and available training opportunities**.

In addition, respondents indicated interest in information related to **agricultural subsidies, pest management strategies, weather conditions, and innovative farming techniques**. The distribution of

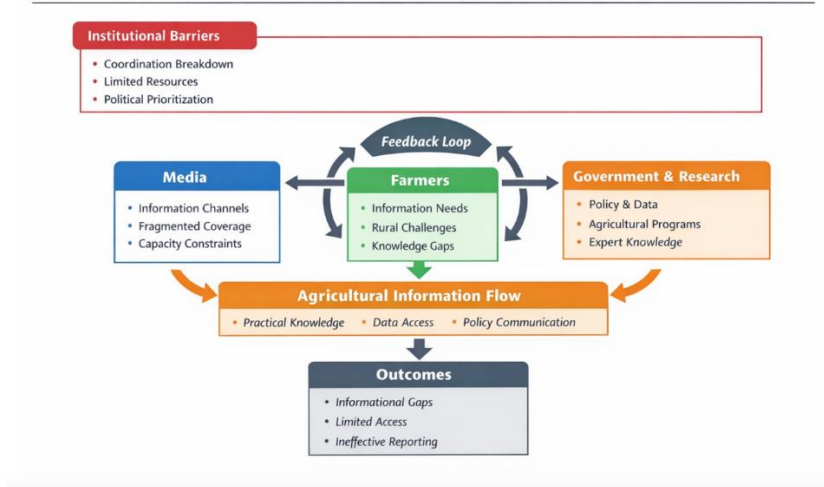
responses suggests that farmers prioritize **practical and operational knowledge** that can directly influence production decisions and improve agricultural outcomes.

These findings highlight the importance of accessible and practical agricultural communication systems capable of translating technical and policy information into usable knowledge for rural communities.

Figure 6. Integrated Model of the Agricultural Information Ecosystem

The figure illustrates the interaction between institutional structures, media organizations, and farmers within the agricultural information ecosystem in Armenia. Institutional barriers, media capacity limitations, and fragmented data systems influence the circulation of agricultural information and contribute to informational gaps affecting rural communities.

Figure 6: Integrated Model of the Agricultural Information Ecosystem



References

1. Balasanyan, G. (2021). Investigative journalism and transparency challenges in Armenia's agricultural sector. *Hetq Investigative Journalism Platform*. <https://hetq.am>
2. Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210–230. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x>
3. Carpentier, N., & De Cleen, B. (2008). The democratic role of journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 9(3), 385–398.
4. Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 128–138). Routledge.
5. Kuprashvili, N., & Chalaganidze, N. (2018). *Constructive agricultural journalism*. Universal.
6. McCombs, M. (2004). *Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion*. Polity Press.
7. Napoli, P. (2011). *Audience evolution: New technologies and the transformation of media audiences*. Columbia University Press.
8. Nisbet, M. C., & Scheufele, D. A. (2009). What's next for science communication? Promising directions and lingering distractions. *American Journal of Botany*, 96(10), 1767–1778.
9. Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.
10. World Bank. (2020). *Agriculture and rural development in Armenia: Challenges and opportunities*. World Bank Publications.