

Farm Writers' TALK BACK

**Report on a survey of members and guests
of FarmWriters' Association of NSW Inc.**



October 2002



FarmWriters' Talkback – Summary of Survey Results.

Introduction

Periodically, the Committee of the FarmWriters' Association of NSW Inc seeks the views of members and their guests on the Association, its aims, its name and its activities. This year the Committee conducted a general opinion survey and, with this report to the Annual General Meeting 2002, has succeeded in meeting the aim of providing the in-coming committee with fresh insight on which to base their planning for the coming year.

This report provides a summary of the survey results. For those interested in survey process, a very brief discussion – dedicated mostly to acknowledging the assistance of those who helped – precedes the discussion of the results. A full survey report, including the detailed results by question, is available to members on request. Contact the Association's Secretary.

The survey team gratefully acknowledges the assistance of all those who contributed - all errors are the sole responsibility of the team.

What we did...

A four page questionnaire, using Leikert scales to provide measures of opinion, was printed with the help of **Rabobank**, a Farm Writers' corporate member. This was distributed to, and collected from, members and guests at the Farm Writers' Forum, *The NSW Wine Industry: Past, Present and Future*, held in July. In a bid to ensure that all members had ample opportunity to participate, the questionnaire was made available electronically to all members on the Association's e-mail list and by mail to the remaining (few) members. Thanks are also due to Tony Hanly of **Just-Surveys.com** for compiling the electronic version and collating the results.

Incentives to respond were provided in the form of prizes for a lucky draw open only to survey respondents. The prize drawn at the Forum was a hamper of Hawkesbury Harvest produce, generously donated by Hawkesbury Harvest Association, and won by a representative of corporate member, Hammond & Thackeray. The refund of the entrance fee to a seminar was the incentive offered for an electronic response.

Who responded

A total of 53 responses were received – from 45 members (85%) and 8 guests (15%) – the majority (90%) at the Farm Writers' Forum. This represents 45% of the 116 members (including corporate member representatives) on the Association's database as at 19 August 2002.



Survey respondents said....

...many of them regularly attend, would recommend membership....

The majority of members who responded (71%) regularly attend FarmWriter's functions and most guests rarely attend. Somewhat surprisingly, two members never attend functions. Only one respondent would not recommend membership – because "its too early to tell".

... and believe the **Association succeeds in meeting its aims**

Ninety-one per cent (91%) of respondents think the Association is succeeding in its aim to provide regular opportunities to network with others interested in the agricultural sector and to hear about topical issues from leaders in the sector. Topical speakers are most important to our audience, with only one respondent (2%) who thought it wasn't important enough to answer the questions. All the others rated topical speakers as very (68%) or moderately (30%) important to them. In contrast, 6% said networking activities were not important at all.

... is relevant,... unique,

Many are members of a wide range of other agricultural organisations but only 15,5% perceive there to be any overlap between the activities of Farm Writers and these other organisations. Members are broadly satisfied with the Association. Eighty-four per cent believe the aims of the Association are still valuable and relevant.

.... and provides value for money.

More than three quarters (34) indicated their expectations of value for money are met overall. The monthly activities also rated well, with over 70% of members perceiving these as value for money. (Disappointingly up to 20% did not answer the value for money questions leaving us guessing as to whether they are indifferent to the cost associated with membership or satisfied.)

The areas to address include:.....the name,....

Name "FarmWriters" is representative:



The survey suggests that members are almost evenly divided as to the need for a name change. We asked: Do you think the name Farm Writers' Association of NSW Inc suitably represents the current membership and activities of the organisation? Six people didn't

answer, 20 said "no" and 19 said "yes". The most common suggestion was that



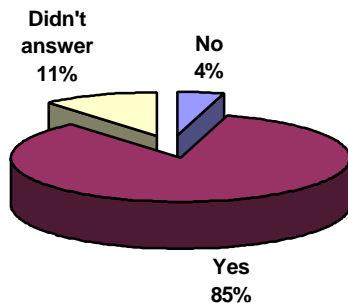
the name be broadened to reflect the fact that membership is now wider than print and broadcast journalists.

....improving the usefulness of the newsletter and the web site

Members do not rate the newsletter or the web site highly – 24% regarding them as average or no use. Too many respondents (13%) didn't know about the web site and less than half find it useful. Only five people (11%) thought the web site was always up-to-date. The out-going committee has now taken steps to improve both but more should be done.

...and investigating the feasibility of a communications award.

Support a communications award



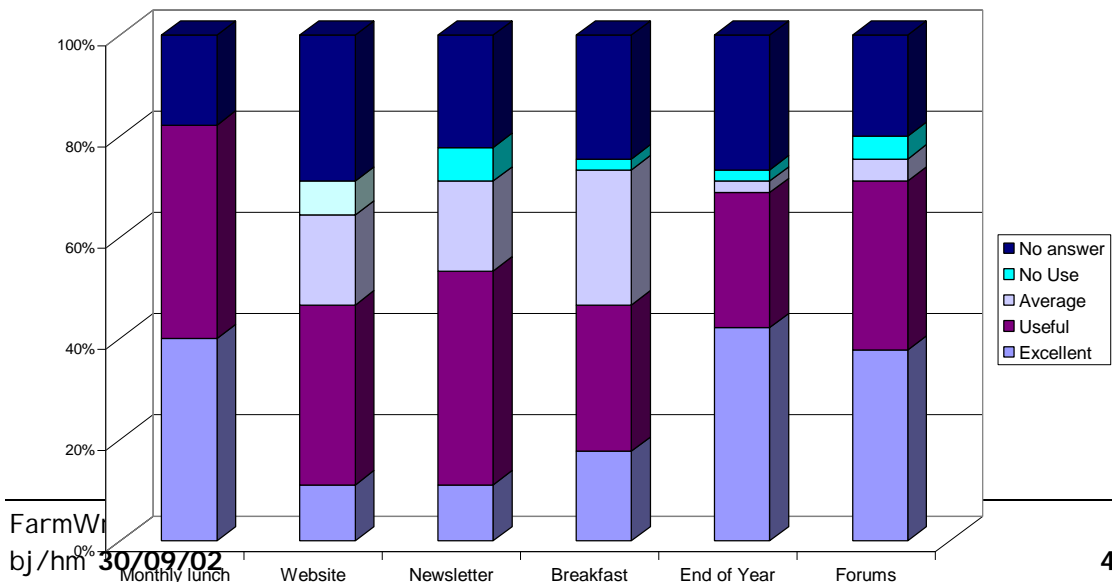
There was resounding support for Farm Writers' to sponsor an annual communications award to recognise high achievement in the field of agri-communication in the state.

Support for the current practice of providing financial assistance to attend the Annual Congress of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists was less resounding with less than 58% in favour.

The monthly luncheon seminars are the most highly rated activity.....

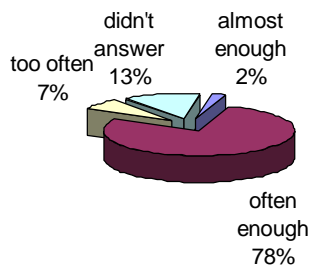
Members rated Farm Writers' activities. The luncheon seminars received the biggest rap with 82% of respondents evenly divided between those who thought them "excellent" and those who rated them "useful".

Members rate Farm Writers' activities





Luncheon seminars held:



A majority (82%) thought the speakers at the luncheon seminars are usually topical and interesting with 15% rating them highly interesting.

Nearly 80% thought these sit-down lunch seminars are held often enough, while 7% thought they are held too often.

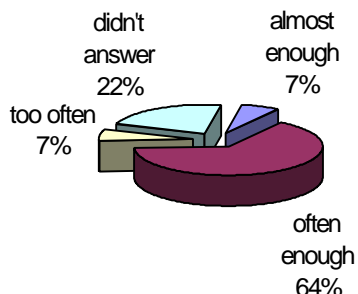
...very closely followed by the Patron's end of year function and the "Past, Present and Future" Forums...

The Patron's end of year function is rated "excellent" by over 40% of the respondents and "useful" by over 25%. A third of members rated the "Past, Present and Future" forums "useful" and 38% rated them "excellent".

Again a majority (78%) thought the speakers at the forum are usually topical and interesting with 30% rating them highly.

.....and the function mix meets most expectations

Forums held:



Sixty-four per cent thought the forums are held often enough, again 7% thought they are held too often but an equal number thought they were not held often enough.

The mix of functions held during a typical calendar year appears to meet most members' expectation.

Members' suggestions of subjects and speakers for future forums and luncheons ranged from emerging industries and technology adoption to salinity, water issues and eCommerce. These have



been given to the Committee and no doubt will be taken into account when planning activities in the coming year.