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Reporting Rural News: Perspectives on Public Radio Restructuring

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the restructuring of the rural programming on New Zealand's public radio station, National Radio. The overall aim is to provide a holistic account of the changes which includes establishing their impact on programme content, and documenting the reaction of the farming community, and other stakeholders (eg. rural reporters) to them.

Content analysis, defined by Berelson as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (quoted in Kaid and Wadsworth, 1989, p.198), explores what the restructuring has meant for the content of *Rural Report* and *Country Life* (previously *Country Saturday*). While content analysis is central to the research, it is combined with other methodologies, namely a survey questionnaire and qualitative interviews, in an effort to more fully investigate the changes.

The viewpoints of key groups are explored through a mail survey and qualitative interviews. Conference lists maintained by the Faculty of Agriculture at Massey University are used to survey members of the farming community as to their attitude toward rural programming and aspects of the restructuring. The interviews allow for input from one former and two current rural reporters, Rangitikei MP Denis Marshall, and Radio New Zealand's Programme Commissioner.

The results demonstrate that the restructuring has impacted upon programme content (especially in regard to the number of stories covered, place of origin, story length and depth, issue coverage, source speaking time and use of the interview technique), and show differences between mainstream and specialist rural coverage which suggest *Rural Report* and *Country Life* are vital if National Radio is to maintain a comprehensive rural news service. Survey respondents are overwhelmingly disappointed with the restructuring and its results, while indicating that National Radio is one of the three most important sources of news for them, and

the single most important broadcaster. In the interviews, reporters suggest the changes were motivated by management policy (particularly their desire to use the reporters' skills elsewhere, and a move toward de-specialising generally) and budgetary constraints. Radio New Zealand justifies the changes on the basis of income loss and the need to better cover the regions, and former *Rural Report* editor Peter Burke, and Rangitikei MP Denis Marshall, address wider issues, such as urbanisation.

The financial and structural problems being faced by public radio have been referred to throughout the research, and these resource issues make it futile to recommend that the rural news service be restored to its previous level. However, the thesis is important for its use of content analysis to establish characteristics of rural news on National Radio, both before and after the restructuring, and its collection of a range of perspectives on the change. Despite the fact that the agricultural sector remains vital to the economic success of New Zealand, and is entwined with the history and psyche of those who live here, rural news has not been the subject of empirical inquiry here. Therefore, it is also hoped that the research, in identifying key areas of interest, will act as a springboard for further research into agricultural news.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

In early 1996, when Radio New Zealand (RNZ) announced that it was planning to restructure its rural programming, the reaction was muted. Of course, at this early stage it was not known that the restructuring would result in the shortening of programmes or the reallocation of specialist rural reporters, and with no tradition of rural news scholarship in this country, there appeared to be little public recognition of the importance of the programmes.

Confirmation of the changes caused more controversy. They involved *Rural Report*, which airs twice a day, Monday to Friday, being pruned from approximately 15 minutes to five minutes, and the Saturday programme being halved in length, from two hours to one. Rangitikei Member of Parliament, Denis Marshall, called it a "high handed decision by urbanites who think they know what's best for rural people" (quoted in "RNZ accused of slashing rural content", 1996, p.2). The changes were also criticised by various rural organisations, and former and current rural journalists. In particular, the rural/urban divide was alluded to, with the restructuring offered as a further illustration of this trend. From time to time, in the months following the implementation of the changes in January 1997, the restructuring has been referred to in the agricultural media. The *Straight Furrow* has provided updates on the situation between reporters and RNZ, and conducted a reader survey which included a question about rural radio. Other rural commentators have linked the changes with problems in the technology transfer process, and the failure of public funds allocator, New Zealand on Air (NZOA), to continue funding the television series *AgriTech 2000*, or to support new rural broadcasting ventures.

This thesis, then, is a study of the restructuring of Radio New Zealand's rural programming, the effect of it on the news service provided by public radio, and the reaction of the rural community. The wider context, in terms of changes in public radio and the shifting role of agriculture and its portrayal in the media generally, is

necessarily entwined. The majority of the academic research that has been so important in informing this research, particularly that of Reisner (1989, 1991, 1992, 1994), Walter (1992, 1996), and Hays (1990, 1992), has been done in the United States, and is specifically concerned with the relationship between the agricultural media and advertisers. In an effort to apply this research to the New Zealand situation, the thesis combines it with views expressed in the rural media, and in this way, develops and adjusts overseas scholarship to our circumstances.

The topic is of importance because it recognises both the significance of rural news to the agricultural industry, in a time when the urban domination of news is well documented (eg. McGregor & Comrie, 1995), and contributes to the continuation of news media debate in New Zealand. The study notes the constraints under which public radio currently operate, and the effect of this on the rural news restructuring, thereby recognising that "Agricultural journalists work in organisational contexts that constrain the kind of stories published and, therefore, limit their opportunities to make farm coverage resemble what the critics desire" (Reisner & Walter, 1994, p.534).

Furthermore, the research is worthy for its acknowledgement of the significance of the agricultural sector, and some of its current concerns. For example, Massey University Professor Warren Parker, addressing the Farm Management Society conference in November 1997, called for the group to be more proactive in changing the way society views and accepts agriculture (Barton, 1997). This research recognises the role the news media may play in influencing public perceptions of agriculture, and consequently the need for some monitoring of how media organisations, such as RNZ, cover the topic. At the same conference, the general manager of Wrightson Enterprises, David Rutherford, stated his belief that the importance of the industry and those who work in it is being lost on urban New Zealand. "Although agriculture was important to the country, it went deeper than that, he said. 'I believe all New Zealanders need to feel the spirit of the people of the land and of the land itself'" (Quoted in *ibid*, p.11). The economic and social value of

agriculture, articulated by Rutherford, is another reason why this research is so important.

The project is also of interest for the way it combines theory with the views of those in, or familiar with, the rural news industry, and its inclusion of a range of perspectives. Five interviews were conducted, with people with an interest in the topic, ranging from reporters to a Member of Parliament. The input from the survey respondents, especially in the form of personal comments, provides insight into the role of rural news and prompts the realisation that National Radio's rural news is of direct use and importance to the farming community.

The goal of the thesis is to provide a holistic picture of the restructuring, one that realises the medium's importance to the rural community but which also recognises, as Reisner and Walter (1994) point out, that there are external factors which impact upon reporters' abilities to provide comprehensive coverage. As Comrie and McGregor (1992) write, "Those who believe journalism matters, also believe discussion about the effects of change is imperative" (p.9). Therefore, the broad questions guiding this research are:

- 1 What changes have been made to National Radio's rural news services?
- 2 What are the perceptions and attitudes of those who produce and use rural news toward the restructured service?

The hypotheses to be tested are:

- That the nature of rural news has changed
- That journalists perceive the changes to be the result of a managerial influence and commercial imperatives and
- That the rural community perceives the changes negatively.

In terms of research structure, these questions are addressed, and the hypotheses tested, in the following chapters. Chapter Two outlines key areas of

interest, in both rural news scholarship overseas, and in coverage of the RNZ restructuring. This section includes some discussion of public radio in New Zealand, and the previous events which have directly or indirectly contributed to the restructuring of the rural programmes. The other topics discussed are: the news requirements of farmers; the management policy of mainstreaming rural news, and the qualities of mainstream news generally; the sourcing of rural news; commercial imperatives in agricultural news and how they may influence content; the covering of agricultural news as a specialist round or a business news topic; and, finally, the rural/urban divide.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the three methodological approaches employed in the research, namely content analysis, a mail survey and interviews. Content analysis is used to determine what, if any, changes have occurred as a result of the programme restructuring. A mail survey aims to give voice to the rural community, and the interviews allow the journalistic viewpoint to be heard. The importance of a combination of methodologies is pointed out, and the individual approaches are defined and discussed in relation to their purpose, limitations and, where applicable, ethical considerations. Chapter Four is also concerned with the methodologies but focuses on the specific steps involved in their application to the research.

In Chapter Five, the results of the content analysis are tabulated and key changes between the 1996 and 1997 programmes are identified. The coding protocol used in the research is reproduced in Appendix A, and the definitions of rural news categories are in Appendix B. Chapter Six discusses the content findings in relation to other studies of broadcast news, current themes in agricultural news scholarship, and some of the agricultural sector's concerns.

The outcome of the mail survey is shown in Chapter Seven, where the quantitative results from the sheep and beef, and dairy conferences, are shown in table format and described. The document employed in the research is reproduced in Appendix C. Chapter Eight takes these findings and discusses them in relation to

other rural radio surveys, and also includes some of the personal remarks made by participants, which are not able to be quantified but which are valuable for the insight they provide into how rural listeners feel about rural radio. These comments are applicable to the research themes set out in Chapter Two.

Finally, Chapter Nine is concerned with the interviews, which are written up and examined for the way in which they support other research findings, and for the additional insights they provide, which would not be accessible through any other methodology. A range of people were included, namely reporters Hugh Chappell and Jill Galloway, Rangitikei Member of Parliament Denis Marshall, former *Rural Report* editor Peter Burke and RNZ's Programme Commissioner, Michael Peck.

In terms of research parameters, the thesis was specifically concerned with the 1996/1997 round of rural news restructuring. Although the reporters mention the changes they have seen during their years with *Rurals*, which is of historical interest and demonstrates the shifting place of agricultural news, the subject is confined to the recent restructuring. However, changes in other media are noted where they appear to be indicative of a wider trend. In addition, while recognising that *Rural Report* and *Country Life* are listened to by people not directly involved in agriculture, and that the programmes play a part in linking rural and urban communities, it is the rural audience which is of primary interest for this study. Any examination of rural news listeners, who are not involved in farming, is outside the boundary of this research.

My personal interest in the topic stemmed from an agricultural news research topic undertaken earlier in my degree. Accordingly, I was familiar with some of the overseas research into agricultural news when, in December 1996, RNZ confirmed their rural programme cutbacks. Studying change can be particularly insightful, and along with the topical nature of events, it seemed a perfect opportunity to test and develop overseas findings for their relevance to the New Zealand situation. My own family background in agriculture meant that I had both the background

knowledge and personal interest to understand and enjoy the topic, combined with the academic motivation required to complete the project.

To briefly summarise the research findings, the following chapters demonstrate that RNZ's rural restructuring has adversely affected *Rural Report* content, particularly in regard to the number of stories, the length of items, the place of Wellington as a place of origin, the degree of issue coverage and story depth, source speaking times and the use of the interview format. The survey exercise shows that the rural audience perceive this restructuring in a negative way, and simultaneously illustrates the importance of the programmes (and thus this research) by finding that National Radio is the most important broadcast source of news for farmers. The interviews provide further insight into the events leading to the changes and RNZ's reasons for them. The interviewees have slightly different views as to why the changes occurred, and why now, but broadly these reasons fall into an acknowledgement of funding restraints, the impact of earlier restructuring decisions, and the changing place of agriculture in society. However, Radio New Zealand still devotes a relatively large amount of its reportorial resources to rural news.

The following chapters provide a more in-depth account of the restructuring, its effect on content, its reception in the rural community, and the reaction of selected people to it. The next chapter though, takes a wider approach, discussing themes in agriculture news and public radio. These themes are interwoven throughout the thesis results and discussion, and provide a framework for analysis.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The development of New Zealand agriculture and the changes that have occurred in its somewhat turbulent history, particularly over the past 15 years, have been well documented (see Wallace & Lattimore, 1987; Sandrey & Reynolds, 1990; Coddington, 1993). The industry has been, and continues to be, of economic, political, and social importance to the nation, to the point that McLauchlan (1981) writes that "The history of New Zealand farming is in a real sense the history of New Zealand" (p.11). In economic terms, the primary sector is key to New Zealand's success: dairy produce, meats, forestry, wool, fisheries, fruit and nuts earn over half of our export earnings, with the meat industry the biggest single source of income, accounting for approximately one in every six dollars earned overseas (New Zealand Yearbook, 1996). In addition, New Zealand is a world leader in agricultural research.

The sector's economic power and prestige has traditionally translated into political clout, with the agricultural community being closely aligned with various political parties, most recently the National Party. However, the abrupt deregulation of the sector in the early 1980s, with the result that New Zealand's agricultural industry is now the least subsidised in the developed world, together with a variety of other government policies which have impacted negatively on rural communities (such as the closing down of many small hospitals and schools which serviced rural areas), has weakened farmers' alignment with any one political party. Lobby groups such as the Federated Farmers continue to play a key role in representing industry interests at a national level.

The farmer is also something of a national cultural symbol, appearing in various popular forms: in satirical persona as Fred Dagg (otherwise known as John Clarke), in the enduring cartoon characters of *Footrot Flats*, and in one of New

Zealand's most popular and highly rating programmes, *Country Calendar*. The image of the hard working pioneer "breaking in" the land, which "From about the 1890s nostalgia and a search for national identity raised...into a legend" (Phillips, 1996, pp.38-9), continues to appear in representations of those "on the land", who are seen to embody traits of self sufficiency and resourcefulness. However, nowadays increasing numbers of New Zealanders live in urban areas and their links with farming are tenuous. Overseas research suggests that in such situations, commonheld notions of rural life tend to become more romantic and nostalgic (Goldman & Dickens, 1983), removed from the reality of modern farming.

Sociologists and policymakers hint at the importance of the mass media for those who are geographically isolated (eg. Bean, 1980; Sparrow et al, 1979), yet the subject of agricultural news is seldom publicly discussed and mainly absent from scholarship. Within New Zealand this is perhaps not surprising for, as Comrie and McGregor (1992) point out, the news media is "dangerously under-debated" (p.9) in this country.

It is in the United States where agricultural communication has been most studied, although principally in regard to the print media. To the point of labelling radio the "forgotten medium", Pease and Dennis (1995) believe it has been neglected as an area of investigation: "Like the air, radio is just there, part of the media and social landscape but rarely acknowledged or much remarked" (p.xi). While there has been a resurgence of interest in talkback radio, particularly in regard to the 'new' news (see, for example, McGregor, 1996b), and public service radio has been the subject of academic debate, in the United States, as here, if radio is mentioned *in the context of the agricultural community*, it is mainly in terms of companionship: "Radio was the remedy for isolation, which was the curse of the farmer" (Keillor, quoted in Pease & Dennis, 1995, p.xvii. See also Delli Carpini, 1995; Powell III, 1995). However, it is a premise of this research that radio has a significance for the farming community *beyond* providing company and that specifically, rural news on

public radio is worthy of further investigation. English researchers Barnett and Morrison (1989) found that:

The concept of radio as friend, company and background noise may give an erroneous impression that the nature of programme content is largely unimportant...it was not just the medium but the programmes and presenters which formed an integral part of listeners' everyday lives...[and] at times daily patterns were constructed in order to coincide with favourite programmes (pp.3-4).

In New Zealand, radio and agriculture merge in National Radio's rural news programming, which comprises daily morning and noon news sessions during the week, and an extended magazine type show on Saturday mornings. These shows have been a feature of National Radio since the 1950s, with Hall (1980) recording that in 1950 the New Zealand Broadcasting Service appointed a Rural Broadcasts Officer to Head Office. The restructuring announcement in late 1996, which cut back devoted rural content and moved toward mainstreaming, sparked the closest thing this country has seen to a debate about agricultural news and its role in the rural and wider communities. Accordingly, it is a topical, unique and previously untapped area of investigation which forms the particular context of this study of agricultural news. With little specific scholarship available, this literature review will necessarily borrow heavily from American research, while recognising that the changes must also be seen as particular to this country and its concept of public radio.

2.2 Public Radio in New Zealand

Throughout the developed world public service broadcasting appears in a variety of guises. In New Zealand the public service component of broadcasting is funded by a licence fee, known as the Broadcasting Fee, which is collected and distributed by New Zealand On Air (NZOA). For state- owned television, only a small number of programmes are paid for by licence fees and the bulk of costs are met through advertising. However, Radio New Zealand, the public radio network which supplies

a national news service and produces the National and Concert programmes, is almost entirely funded by the fee. In the 1996-97 year, 25% of the revenue collected by NZOA went toward National Radio, Concert FM and Access Radio ("NZ on Air calls for increase in fee", 1997).

A publicly-funded broadcasting organisation, Radio New Zealand is governed by the Public Radio Charter, which stipulates that the network provide "innovative, comprehensive and independent broadcasting services of a high standard", produce programming which contributes to intellectual, scientific and cultural development, and encourage and promote, dramatic, musical and other performing arts ("Taxpayers plug public radio's debt", 1997). However, Radio New Zealand's Chief Executive Sharon Crosbie has indicated that adhering to the charter is costly: "We wish to reflect society, produce something that is seen as really worthwhile by at least 20 per cent of the population. But all of that doesn't come cheap...We've restructured and we're downsizing. It's been ugly and painful and bloody, but it's been done for reasons of real logic - you can't go to the supermarket with \$19 and get \$27 of groceries" (quoted in *ibid*, p.9).

The financial difficulties which plague public radio have been used as a rationale for many of the recent programming changes, of which cuts to rural news are just one example. These financial problems are likely to increase as a result of earlier restructuring, which led to the selling off of the network's commercial arm. In late 1988 Radio New Zealand was made a State Owned Enterprise and in 1995 the commercial division of Radio New Zealand was separated and, in 1996, sold off, leaving Crown-owned New Zealand Public Radio, which has since reverted to its earlier name of Radio New Zealand (RNZ). The commercial arm, now known as The Radio Network (TRN), is owned by an overseas consortium and the contract it has with Radio New Zealand for the provision of a news service is not expected to be renewed when it expires in 1997-1998. This is likely to result in further redundancies (*ibid*). Over the same period, the amount of money RNZ received from New Zealand On Air decreased: the current \$19.4 million budget represents a

drop of \$3.3 million from \$22.7 million in 1994, and is significantly less than the \$29.1 million of 1990 (McLoughlin, 1994). However, it was reported in August 1997 that the Government will give \$3 million to Radio New Zealand in an effort to cover some of the operating shortfall, although State Owned Enterprises Minister Jenny Shipley has denied this means an "open chequebook" ("Taxpayers plug public radio debt", 1997).

In its Annual Report, released in October 1997, New Zealand on Air called for an increase in the broadcasting fee, in part because of "pressure on funding for New Zealand programmes on National Radio and Concert FM" ("NZ on Air calls for increase in fee", 1997). New Zealand On Air, which provides the bulk of RNZ's income through allocation of the Broadcasting Fee, stipulates that National Radio must, through ratings, demonstrate an audience to ensure that the level of public funding continues. And public funding, according to RNZ Chief Executive Sharon Crosbie, means accountability: "Public money is the most dangerous sort there is. It's not yours, it's someone else's and they want a very detailed account these days" (quoted in Chamberlain, 1997, p.79). However, the application of commercial principles to public radio is by no means entirely welcome. Dick Weir, whose children's show *Ears* was removed from air in 1996, states that "Bums on seats...is an inappropriate way to view public-resourced media" (quoted in *ibid*, pp.79-80). This view is shared by others in the industry, with the head of Radio Pacific, Derek Lowe, saying "I think public radio has gone too commercial. They're chasing the ratings when they should be producing better quality programmes...the sort of programmes that commercial stations can't do because they wouldn't be commercially viable" (quoted in "Taxpayers plug public radio's debt", 1997, p.9).

The 1996/97 rural news changes happened against a backdrop of little recognition of, or debate about, agricultural news. The announcement that rural news programming was to be reviewed came in early 1996, followed later by a call from RNZ for submissions from the community. Prior to Christmas of the same year, Rangitikei MP Denis Marshall announced his belief that the morning and afternoon

Rural Report sessions were to be cut back to 5 minutes each (from 10 and 20 minutes respectively) and shortly after this was confirmed. It was also established that the weekend magazine programme was to be halved in length, to one hour.

As previously mentioned, the restructuring of rural news was not an isolated occurrence. In 1996 the children's programme *Ears* was taken off air and plans for a reduction in radio drama, readings, and art and religious programming were announced (and have since been implemented). According to Chamberlain (1997) these recent changes are not motivated solely by funding difficulties, but are also about market positioning and changing the focus of Radio New Zealand to one of news and current affairs.

Comrie (1996), while recognising the difficulties of defining exactly what public service broadcasting is, sees its central feature as being "...the ideal of independence from commercial and political pressures which enable the provision of an accessible service to a wide variety of tastes, interests and segments of society in the support of democracy" (p.32). However, the "communications revolution", coupled with an increasing commitment to deregulation generally, appears to have eroded societal support for publicly funded broadcasting. Of particular relevance to this study is the criticism of it as being ignorant of its audience: "Public service broadcasters have done little to identify the public for which they work, feedback systems are limited and such evidence of public opinion which does emerge (for instance through letters and phone calls) is often ignored" (ibid, p.33). To give an example, RNZ called for the rural community to make submissions about the rural news service and yet several months later pruned it back. The outcry that followed the move suggests that the appeals of the submissions were not recognised and the rural news review, coming as it did after announcements that RNZ was committed to bringing spending in line with NZOA funding, indicates that the cuts were something of a *fait accompli*.

According to Barnett and Morrison (1989), listeners are faithful to the radio programmes they enjoy. They speak of

conclusive evidence of the attention and loyalty commanded by the programmes which people listen to. What cannot be appreciated from figures alone is the feeling of personal impoverishment that would follow from any changes which fail to take account of people's fundamental attachment to the medium (p.5).

Evidence of such loyalty can be found in the reactions of rural news listeners, documented in both the mainstream and specialist agricultural press (eg. Thompson, 1997a, 1997c; Burke, 1996; Wyn-Harris, 1997; Mandeno, 1997). However, rural programmes were not alone in being restructured and disappointment has also been expressed over the removal or makeover of a variety of other National Radio shows (see Chamberlain, 1997; "Anglicans protest at radio cuts", 1997). Placed into context, changes to rural programming may be seen as "just another" example in a series of public radio cost-cutting initiatives, although the rural community appears to see it in more personal terms, feeling alienated by what it feels is an uncaring, increasingly urban organisation. Indeed, according to Chamberlain (1997), public radio has been a surprisingly emotional issue over recent years, with successive governments oscillating between a desire for part or complete privatisation and a fear of public reaction to such a move.

2.3 The News Needs of Farmers

In an increasingly competitive marketplace farmers need current and relevant information to aid in decision making. Gay (1986) states that farmers at an Iowa State University seminar identified speed and accuracy, particularly in regard to market and policy information, as vital to their news requirements, although she goes on to say that one of the biggest problems facing the modern farmer is information overload.

In respect to the need for news to be quickly available, radio is without peer. Two bulletins of *Rural Report* are aired at set times each day which is useful for the farmer who, for example, can tune in at lunchtime to check the latest from the

morning's wool sale, or to hear the result of the Southfert vote. With radio being a portable medium, this type of news can be accessed while a farmer goes about his or her other farm activities.

In the New Zealand context, information overload may well be a particular problem, with farmers having access to two nationwide agricultural newspapers (one available on subscription, the other distributed free) as well as being delivered a number of advertiser funded, smaller circulation publications by merit of living on a rural delivery. The majority of daily newspapers also have regular farming pages. Although it is suggested in Crisell (1986) that radio should be seen primarily as a complement to other sources, rather than a complete news source in itself, the rural news service may have special appeal for farmers as a way of countering the amount of written material they feel they need to read, by alerting them to key news of the day which they can then follow up in agricultural publications if they so wish.

Crisell (1986) discusses the necessarily summarised and selective nature of radio news in semiotic terms, explaining that reading for oneself is quicker than listening to someone else read and that "A ten-minute radio bulletin is equivalent to a mere one-and-a-half columns of news copy - and a newspaper may carry thirty or forty columns of such copy" (p.69). Therefore, even National Radio's previous, longer bulletins were necessarily abbreviated, a situation that has been exacerbated since the restructuring.

In New Zealand the usefulness of National Radio rural news has had at least one formal recognition, with Mandeno (1997) stating that at the October 1996 Wool Board AGM a resolution was passed recognising the importance of National Radio rural news programmes as "...an important technology transfer link" (p.8), and urging the Government to provide sufficient funding and support.

Hays and Reisner (1990) make an interesting point about the relative size of the agricultural community and the information it needs, which has relevance for the cutbacks to National Radio. Rather than accepting that farmers, as a

demographically shrinking group, should receive fewer media resources they outline an argument for why communication with them becomes more important:

with only 17% of farmers accounting for 76% of the agricultural commodities marketed in the U.S., information that influences even small numbers of farmers can have a significant effect on one of the nation's most important industries (p.936).

If a November 1993 survey is any indication, National Radio's placement of the rural news, at 6.20am and 12.36pm, coinciding with rising/breakfast and lunch, suggest radio's understanding of many farmer's traditional daily patterns. The poll showed that a higher percentage of farmers listen to the radio prior to 7am than do Aucklanders, with 36% of the farmers questioned listening between 5am and 6am and 64% between 6 and 7am, compared with 20% and 53% of Aucklanders respectively ("Rerun for writers", 1994, p.23).

2.4 Mainstreaming Agricultural News

We now know that the constituency for rural news is as much urban as it is rural so decisions have been made that more reasonably reflect this wider interest...we have also adopted a policy of mainstreaming rural stories to better reflect their importance to all of New Zealand (Crosbie, 1997a, p.14).

Radio New Zealand's move toward "mainstreaming" can be considered in terms of current issues in the study of agricultural news. First it should be pointed out that the type of agricultural coverage available in the mainstream media, especially on television, is minimal and often the subject of scorn. To illustrate, Geoff Prickett (1996), writing in the *New Zealand Farmer*, is critical of *One Network News* coverage of a bout of bad weather:

With such stories they have two problems. First, an ever-present desire to sensationalise and, second, an Auckland-based culture that leaves them clutching at straws when anything happens outside city limits" (p.9).

Another example comes from Thompson (1997a), quoting former *Rural Report* presenter Don Carson as saying that "For a sheep to get on TV it has to have five

legs and get rescued" (p.2). A similar situation has been documented in the United States, where the mainstream mass media tend to restrict coverage to problems in agriculture, such as extremes in the weather, financial troubles and environmental degradation (Walter, 1992). The impact of such coverage on public attitudes to agriculture is difficult to determine. Theories of agenda-setting, which argue that the media has greater influence in telling people what to think about in areas beyond their direct experience, and which recognise the role the social context of reception plays, have developed from early simplistic notions of an overriding power. Nelkin (1987), discussing the way newspapers cover the specialist area of science and technology, and how this affects public perceptions, subscribes to such a theory, writing that:

In esoteric areas of science and technology where readers have little direct information on (sic) pre-existing knowledge to guide on independent evaluation...the press, as the major source of information, in effect defines the reality of the situation for them (p.77).

In relation to farming, Walter (1992) discusses public understanding of agriculture in terms of an increasingly urbanised population and "media dependency theory", "which holds that media effects on people's beliefs and opinions are most pronounced in matters beyond direct observation or experience" (pp.29-30). He concludes that what the American public does know about agriculture comes from the popular mass media: newspapers, news magazines, radio and television. If Shaw's (1993) findings are any indicator, it may be that a similar situation exists here. According to her survey, some farming women believe that the media's portrayal of the role women play on the farm is inaccurate and potentially misleading:

Many women commented that people are often surprised at their actual participation in farm work...This male oriented presentation of farming by a greater part of the media does not give the correct situation, and some women believe this leads the general public to think that farmers are men only" (pp.82-3).

Of course, it is simplistic to say that this misleading impression is the fault of the media. Instead, the inclusion of agricultural news provides an opportunity for farming to be brought into the public arena for listeners' and readers' consideration. Dominant sources, on whom reporters rely for information, may define the terms of the debate (Leitch, 1992). Such sources, in the agricultural arena, tend to be male (see Section 2.5).

National Radio management believes that the audience for rural news is as much urban as it is rural, although no complete data exists to support this. However, if they are correct, then the role of such rural programming goes beyond providing useful and up-to-date information for those directly involved in the rural community, to acting as a bridge between rural and urban communities. Although writing in regard to newspapers, Reisner and Walter's (1994) statement, that the "...mainstream print media...serve agriculture more indirectly by covering agricultural events and issues for the non farming public, which depends on that coverage for much of its understanding of agricultural topics" (p.525), has some relevance. National Radio's rural programming is the radio equivalent of the farming page - a specialist section in a mainstream medium that has widespread appeal. Presumably the specialist agricultural newspapers, by definition, are aimed at and consumed almost exclusively in the rural community. However complete their coverage may or may not be, it does little to increase public understanding of farming, although the exchange of messages between rural and urban groups is recognised as an important component of the move toward sustainable agriculture:

communication about sustainable agriculture should aim to improve the accuracy of farmers' and the public's perceptions of one another's goals and constraints (Walter, 1992, p.29).

Aside from the part agriculture plays in national food supply and export earnings, misunderstanding of agricultural practices by an increasingly urban society may have

repercussions for public policy. The *Rural News* publication's watchdog, *The Hound*, gives an example:

A big - the biggest - brickbat for TVNZ for its October 10 report on the withdrawal of Hi-ester 2, 4-D next year. While reporting on the pastoral weedkiller TVNZ showed orchard tractors spraying kiwifruit and apples, implying - wrongly - that 2,4-D is used in orchards. The clear message: 2, 4-D, so bad it has to be withdrawn, is used on the food we eat. The Hound's been told there was an apology later in the news bulletin. He missed it. So will a lot of others. What won't have been missed will be another nail hammered into the coffin of agrichemical use, no matter how safe or sensible ("Drongo Award", 1996, p.6).

While those involved in farming are likely to have the background knowledge to critique such portrayals, many urban dwellers may not and consequently public support for farmers and farming practices may dwindle. In fact, a principal finding of Reisner and Walter (1994) was that

Print media coverage of agriculture...appears to enhance rather than reduce the potential for polarisation between production agriculture and the public (p.536).

However, this conclusion has not been tested in a New Zealand context. Indeed, the Manawatu newspaper, the *Evening Standard*, has a daily farming page, and a weekly extended farming section, which keeps agricultural content consistently accessible to the general public. Such a policy may reduce the potential for polarisation, at least in this region.

2.5 Sourcing

Specialist knowledge in agriculture is recognised as important for in-depth, useful and credible coverage. Meyer (1987) found that 95% of the editors he sampled believed a farming background assists in agricultural reporting. Reisner (1991) discusses his finding that "...agricultural journalists' agricultural background and associations are viewed as a help, rather than a hindrance, in covering agricultural issues" (p.44). She points out that the reporter and the source being too close is

usually seen as a problem in journalism and questions why it is more acceptable in rural reporting. Being sufficiently knowledgeable and yet not being too close to the sector is possibly a classic dilemma of the specialist journalist. In regard to specialist science writers Nelkin (1987) claims that "...journalists trained extensively in science may adopt the values of scientists and lose their ability to be critical" (p.103).

The implications this can have for content become apparent in Corbett's (1992) study of newspaper coverage of wildlife. She found that the specialist outdoor page of American daily newspapers tends to avoid reporting conflict, and applies Gans' theory of a dance between the specialist reporter and their sources:

The special 'outdoor' page...was a place of very low conflict, suggesting that the reporters who write specialised pages are 'led' a great deal by their sources (p.936).

Corbett also identified a relationship between rural communities and low conflict stories: newspapers circulating in rural areas (seen as more homogenous) were much less likely than their urban counterparts to publish stories which contained conflict. She analysed how rural and urban newspapers followed the issue of Native American treaty rights in regard to spearfishing and found that

The urban newspapers...printed frequent updates on the spearfishing issue. The rural papers virtually ignored the issue of Indian fishing rights, even though it was highly pertinent in one of the...circulation areas, which is close to an Indian reservation. One could conclude that such an issue was both too conflictive and potentially threatening for a homogenous rural community to report (ibid, p.934).

Whether or not there is a difference between rural news items and mainstream bulletin agricultural stories in terms of the inclusion of conflict will be explored in the content analysis. Corbett's findings would suggest that the stories in a specialist rural news show such as *Rural Report* may contain less conflict, possibly reinforcing the notion that the rural community is homogenous within itself and does not have different goals to other social groups.

In terms of the gender of agricultural sources, my own unpublished research found that in newspaper agricultural coverage the percentage of women sourced was consistently low: less than 8% of sources in the farming stories of three daily newspapers were women. The specialist newspaper sampled, the *New Zealand Farmer*, had 9.3% (Fountaine, 1996). The marginally better performance of the latter publication supports, albeit slightly, Shaw's (1993) suggestion that in regard to the portrayal of women, farming magazines/newspapers perform better than the general media. She proposes this is due to the agricultural media having more regular contact with farmers than their mainstream counterparts. However, the figures remain discouraging. A possible reason for the situation is the news imperative of sourcing, an important part of news production and its objective premise:

It seems to be an unwritten law in the journalism profession that a reporter cannot, in a news story, infer a motive from the actions or words of a public figure; only another public figure can do that (Morrison & Tremewan, 1992, p.129).

Publicly, agriculture remains a male dominated vocation and Shaw (1993) writes that

Major industry decisions are usually commented upon by Federated Farmers or the particular industry board, and as women are under represented on these boards, the image of the knowledgeable farmer is male (p.81).

There are few women in high profile positions in the industry and therefore it may be, as Tuchman (1978b) speculates, that:

Newspapers' very emphasis upon established institutions and those with institutionalised power may account in part for their denigration of women (p.28).

Data about the gender and position of sources used in radio rural news will also be gathered in the content analysis, although it appears that agricultural reporting conforms to general journalism rules. According to Reisner and Hays (1989), the "vast majority" of agricultural communicators in the United States complete professional journalism courses from general departments or journalism schools,

suggesting that agricultural reporters are "trained in the same standards as general journalists" (p.41) . In addition, whether specialist rural reporters use similar types of sources to their mainstream counterparts will be tested, as will be the range of sources used prior to and following the restructuring. According to McGregor (1991) "...staffing constraints clearly limit the diversity of voices heard in the media" (p.7), as fewer reporters have less time to contact sources that are not readily available or to develop additional story ideas. It is conceivable that the reduction in the number of specialist rural reporters working for RNZ, from ten full time staff to two, may lead to an increased reliance on information provided by the variety of farming lobby groups, some of which employ specialist media relations personnel whose job it is to supply information to the news media.

The sources employed in a story are important in the objective journalism model for it is they who usually define the terms of the story and thus influence public debate. Hays (1992) discusses two studies which examine the sources used in newspaper coverage of agricultural related issues, and concludes that while news coverage of the events studied was balanced and fair, "...the source selection was an important factor in the choice of information to be reported" (p.63). Newspaper stories about the controversial issue of bovine somatotrophin were heavily reliant on animal health industry sources, who were quoted almost three times more than industry critics (in 62% of items, compared to 22%). "Press agency" was identified as the reason for the former's dominance (ibid).

2.6 Commercial Imperatives

Recent research in the United States (eg. Hays & Reisner, 1990; Logsdon, 1992; Reisner & Hays, 1989) has centred around the ethics of agricultural journalism within a commercial environment, in particular the relationship between the specialist farm press and advertisers, and what this means for news production:

Critics of agricultural magazines argue that reporters for such magazines identify too closely with agriculture and take a pro-industry point of view, saying that farm magazine reporters write stories that are actually advertisement for companies or agri-business in general...This situation is likely enhanced by the magazines' dependence on agribusiness advertisers and the reporter's own agricultural backgrounds (Reisner & Walter, 1994, p.527).

The role that advertisers play in commercial agricultural journalism in the United States has been studied in some depth. It is recognised that specialist agricultural media depend on a limited range of advertisers, a dependency that increases during periods of economic recession. Reisner (1991) found that agricultural journalists in the United States "...feel more pressure from advertisers than do general journalists" (p.45) and believe advertiser pressure to be the most significant ethical issue facing their profession. Not just perceived as an issue within the nation, some specialist farming writers Reisner and Hays (1989) surveyed "considered agricultural communicators' willingness to compromise their ethics a global threat to the entire profession" (p.44). Possible flow-on effects for content have also been identified. Walter (1996), studying the "successful farmer" stories in three prominent United States agricultural magazines found that this type of story tends to define the successful farmer in commercial terms. He states that:

The magazines' affinity for technology may in some instances reflect editors' and writers' sincere desire to serve their readers with information about agricultural innovations. It may indicate as well their lack of familiarity with alternative paths to improving the quality of farm work and rural life, or their lack of faith in those paths' efficacy. On the other hand, it may instead reflect their deliberate consideration of how advertisers have wanted successful farming to be portrayed and understood (p.597).

It may be naive to believe New Zealand agricultural reporting is not similarly challenged. Although Jim Tully, head of Canterbury University's Journalism School, believes the agricultural print media contains high quality journalism, helped in part by the competitiveness between *Rural News* and the *New Zealand Farmer*, ("Rural News scoops award pool", 1996, p.1), no data exists to substantiate that similar ethical dilemmas do not occur here.

The suggestion that there may on occasion be a negative relationship between advertising and quality agricultural reporting has some relevance for the rural news programmes provided by non-commercial radio. If it is advanced that specialist agricultural publications here may face some of the same ethical dilemmas as their American counterparts, and given that the daily press and television news is not seen by the farming community as containing much regular or valuable agricultural content (see "Rural cast off", 1997; "Agriculture valued", 1996; Prickett, 1996), then the significance of National Radio's rural news grows, for "farmers depend on *accurate and unbiased* information" (Hays & Reisner, 1990, p.942).

According to Logsdon (1992), the most effective solution to the possible problem lies in publishing without agri-business advertising. Although it is unrealistic to suggest all agricultural media should or could be funded entirely by the consumer, it does strengthen the case for at least one non-commercial alternative, such as National Radio's rural programmes. Specialist rural reporters on a public radio station may be in a unique position to provide quality agricultural coverage beyond the reach of agribusiness, although they do work under other forms of commercial pressure in regard to ratings and levels of funding (See Section 2.2)

2.7 Specialist Agricultural Reporting

As a specialist topic, Hillgren (1989) believes that agriculture is best covered as a regular beat:

Good reporting often requires deeper knowledge than that which can be gained with occasional stories, and good stories go unreported when no one is assigned to keep a close eye on the beat (p.19).

National Radio rural reporters are classified as agricultural "beat" journalists as they produce special-interest content within a news organisation that provides a wide

variety of news, information and entertainment. Farm beat reporters, according to Reisner and Walter (1994),

are part of a larger organisation of newspaper reporters and editors who are largely divorced from agriculture, generally have a more urban orientation, and are not dependent on agribusiness for advertising revenues (pp. 527-8).

The importance of having agriculture as a regular beat, as National Radio does (and as most general newspapers also do, to varying degrees), lies in it defining the topic as news. The importance of having a set time or place for specialist news is discussed by Paul Rock (1973):

Policies affecting the layout of a newspaper predetermine what can be reported about the world. They map out the rough system of priorities which will be allocated to the description of unrealised events; decide the proportions that those reports will occupy in the total presentation; and limit the entire volume of events which can evoke a journalistic reaction (p.75).

Accordingly, the fact that *Rural Report* is a predetermined daily feature of National Radio ensures that relevant news will be found for it, the bureaucratic nature of news gathering organisations, and what Rock terms the "journalistic division of labour" (ibid), ensures this. However, the shortened timeslot for dedicated rural news and the policy of mainstreaming effectively means agricultural news must compete with other news. *Rural Report*, now being produced by two Wellington based reporters, is required to source stories from RNZ's general news team and "In doing so they are expected to compete for reporters' time with each other and the news desk itself" (Thompson, 1997b, p.4). The limited agricultural knowledge of general reporters, who might be required to cover some rural stories, may result in shallow coverage. If findings in the United States are any indicator, only a certain type of news will make it into mainstream bulletins. Reisner and Walter (1994) outline criticisms of general news coverage of agriculture in the United States as being "superficial, lacking in comprehensive understanding...of agricultural issues, and inclined toward flashy events and 'cute and folksy' feature stories" (p.525).

Employing various kinds of agricultural journalists as judges, Reisner and Walter (1994) found that the agriculture beat writers were perceived to be somewhere between specialist magazine writers and general journalists: writing fewer superficial and crisis oriented stories than general journalists, yet displaying less industry bias than specialist publication reporters. However, room for improvement was identified: "...farm beat reporters could improve their coverage by avoiding cute and flashy stories and writing more investigative and issue stories" (p.534).

A 1988 study, again in the United States, indicated that agricultural newspaper reporters and farm editors are more likely to take a pro-industry stance than are general news reporters. This aspect of specialist reporting will be addressed in the content analysis through the labelling of agricultural stories as either "good news" or "bad news". It is interesting that while agricultural reporters are sometimes accused of being pro-industry, often at the expense of consumer and environmental views on agriculture, the "doom and gloom" of much rural reporting is also the subject of criticism (Gay, 1986).

2.8 Farming As Business News

An official justification for a shortened midday *Rural Report* is that further agribusiness news is present in the hour's business section. National Radio's move toward incorporating agriculture into the business beat is not without precedent as American daily newspapers, according to Hillgren (1989), have been doing this for some time:

Many newspapers have shifted agricultural coverage to their business pages and targeted coverage at consumers of agricultural products or investors in agribusiness (p.19).

She gives examples of the *Gary Post-Tribune*, Indiana, employing a business journalist to report on agriculture (a journalist who went on to win the highest agricultural reporting award presented by the Newspaper Farm Editors of America)

and *The Los Angeles Times*, the biggest newspaper in the United States' largest agricultural state, which has also covered agriculture through the business beat.

However, as Hillgren (1989) explains, these moves have not been without their critics. She suggests that business journalists may not have the knowledge or interest to cover agriculture in any depth. It is possible that this concentration on the commercial side of agriculture could contribute to the Reisner and Walter (1994) finding that "neither general newspapers nor farm magazines offer consistent or complete coverage of current agricultural practice or current social concerns" (p.534).

My own unpublished research into the farming coverage provided by daily newspapers circulating in the southern North Island found a business focus in the majority of stories (Fountaine, 1996). Items were classified drawing on Olowu's (1990) categories, and it was "pricing and marketing" stories, those which "provided information about price, financial/trading reports and opportunities farmers may encounter in their day to day operations" (pp.196-7), that dominated in all the newspapers sampled.

Finally, Hillgren (1989) writes that some in the industry are unhappy with the current trends in agricultural reporting. She quotes former farm editor Herb Karner:

One of the objectives of NFEA [National Farm Editors of America] was to take decision making concerning farm news away from the largely mindless and uncaring city desk (quoted in *ibid*, p.36).

This belief in an "uncaring city desk" has also been apparent in coverage of *Rural Report* changes here, and will now be discussed further.

2.9 Rural/Urban Dichotomy

Running through coverage of the changes to *Rural Report* has been a rural versus urban theme, exacerbated by the RNZ revelation that the research upon which their

restructuring was based was undertaken in the nation's main centres. Chief Executive Sharon Crosbie said that

it was impossible to obtain figures on the regional and rural audience of the National Programme without spending large sums of money" (Thompson, 1997a, p.2).

News media coverage of the changes was characterised by statements such as the *Straight Furrow* headline that a "City audience sealed fate of Rural Report". *The Dominion* quoted Rangitikei MP Denis Marshall as saying the cuts were a "high handed decision by urbanites who think they know what's best for rural people" (quoted in "RNZ accused of slashing rural content", 1996, p.2). "Yet another kick in the guts for the countrified from the citified" was the *Rural News*' contribution. Although such beliefs in a deliberate motivation cannot be substantiated, for they must be placed in the context of wider restructuring, what is the subject of empirical research, both here and overseas, is the urban domination of news. One of the largest studies into news in New Zealand, *Balance and Fairness in Broadcast News*, identified an "Auckland-Wellington news syndrome" (McGregor & Comrie, 1995, p.31). While recognising that this in part reflects the type of stories used in the sample, the centralisation of television news, with the two national television stations based in Auckland, was also identified as a possible reason. Comrie (1996) found that the number of agricultural stories aired by Television New Zealand news has dropped: in a 1985 sample there were eight agricultural stories and three environmental ones whereas in 1990 there was just one agricultural item and eight environmental ones. She writes that "As part, perhaps, of a shift away from rural concerns to urban concerns there was a swing away from agricultural to environmental stories during the study years..." (p.225). National Radio is also moving away from provincial programming. Ian Johnston, a former public radio reporter, says that "The whole feel of public radio is going to be more Wellington based...National Radio... is largely produced in Wellington, and is starting to sound like that" (quoted in Sargent, 1996, p.14) With fewer rural reporters employed

around the country it seems likely that there will be less in-depth regional stories on *Rural Report*. The restructuring appears to demonstrate the abandonment of the concept of "localism", defined by Barrett (1995) as

a basic notion that the best practicable service to the public is rendered by the broadcaster who maintains close ties with the community served and who provides programming that responds to issues affecting residents of that community (p.156).

2.10 Conclusion

The recent restructuring of National Radio's rural programming provides the specific context for this research, with the literature review placing the changes within wider academic debate about agricultural news. It has drawn heavily on overseas, particularly American, scholarship, and explores rural news in terms of themes - the needs of farmers, commercial influences, trends of mainstreaming and the covering of agricultural news through a business "beat", and sourcing - which while having been established primarily in regard to newspapers have a demonstrated relevance for radio coverage in New Zealand. However, it is acknowledged that the restructuring is particular to our country and its form of public radio, and therefore local documentation of the changes and reactions to them, often presented in terms of "rural versus urban" interests, makes a useful contribution to the review. The research aims to prompt recognition of agricultural news and the role it plays in the rural and wider community, a subject which has not previously been addressed in academic study in New Zealand.

The next chapter will outline the theoretical base of the methodologies employed in the study, provide a justification for why they are used, and discuss their compatibility.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGIES: THEORY AND JUSTIFICATION

3.1 Introduction

Rural news has not been the subject of any significant academic debate in New Zealand, despite the economic and cultural importance of the agricultural sector. However, the changes made to National Radio's rural news service in 1997 were preceded by public concern which went some way toward addressing matters such as the role and importance of rural news to both farmers and the wider community. As discussed in Chapter Two, the issue of rural news restructuring has at times been an emotional one, characterised by reference to urban versus rural interests, although the necessity of placing the changes within the context of wider change in New Zealand public radio has been acknowledged. Public documentation of the repackaging of the rural programmes, Radio New Zealand's justification on the grounds of funding and audience figures, and the reactions of listeners and journalists all informed the research design. It appears to be a perfect opportunity for gathering empirical data on a neglected topic. And, as an early study of agricultural news, the widest exploration of facets and implications of the change was desired, hence the three, complementary methodologies.

Both quantitative and qualitative data was gathered in the research project through the employment of three methodologies: content analysis, a mail questionnaire survey and interviews. This chapter will define these methodologies and discuss their purposes, limitations and the ethical issues associated with their application. The following chapter will deal with the specific procedures involved in their utilisation in the study.

The results and discussion of the content analysis, survey questionnaire and interviews are shown in Chapters Five to Nine.

3.2 Why this Combination?

The methodologies were selected for what they could contribute to the project both individually and in combination. As Tuchman (1991) points out, the choice of method should be guided by the questions the researcher is seeking to answer.

The combination of content analysis, a survey and personal interviews allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Frey, Botan, Friedman and Kreps (1992) differentiate between qualitative data, which is in word form, and quantitative data, which employs numerical indicators. Patton (1990) writes that combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, which he sees as "alternative but not mutually exclusive" (p.14), is becoming increasingly popular. The researcher should maintain a flexible approach depending on the requirements of the project. Priest (1996) advances that the researcher "...can avoid the trap of assuming that only one type of method is valid or useful by simply recognising that some things...are most easily expressed in numbers and some most easily expressed in words" and that "Much depends on the nature of the question being asked" (p.8).

Content analysis is widely used in the study of communication and its popularity has been linked with the growth of the mass media this century (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989). In more recent years it has been used in conjunction with other methodologies to enable researchers to gain a broader picture of the communication process. For example, Tuchman's (1978) well known *Making News* study employed content analysis and participant observation, and in studies of the New Zealand news media, McGregor (1995) and Comrie (1996) apply content analysis in conjunction with other methodologies. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) advance that "A study of media content alone is not sufficient...to understand either the forces that produce the content or the nature or extent of its effects - but content research is a start" (p.28).

The study is strengthened by its use of more than one methodological approach: the limitations of content analysis are able, to some extent, to be compensated for by the survey and the interviews; and findings become more

credible when the results of different approaches support one another. Tuchman (1977) concludes that the limitations of content analysis point not to the abandoning of the approach but to "the wisdom of using additional methods to validate statements based upon content analysis" (p.60).

3.3 Content Analysis

Content analysis is used to study the changes in *Rural Report* content as a result of the Radio New Zealand (RNZ) restructuring. While the fact that the news programmes have been reduced in length, and the number of reporters cut, is a matter of public record, what the changes have meant for content (in terms of the number and length of stories, use of sources etc.) is not, and this is what the analysis focused upon. In addition, the content analysis examines whether the cutbacks to *Rural Report* have been compensated for by an increased emphasis on agricultural news in mainstream bulletins, as claimed by RNZ. To determine if, and to what extent this has occurred, agricultural content in selected pre-change bulletins (1996) is compared with that in post-change bulletins (1997).

3.3.1 Purpose

As already discussed in Chapter Two, there is a shortage of empirical data on agricultural news in the New Zealand context and thus content analysis is required to aid in establishing the situation. The importance of content analysis as a prerequisite for further study is verbalised by Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1991), who write that "An understanding of news content is necessary before we can pose meaningful questions regarding the effects of content on consumers" (p.49).

It has been publicly documented that the daily rural news segments on National Radio have been shortened. The changes in length are not subtle: regular listeners should have noticed that a midday session of approximately twenty minutes has been pruned to five minutes. However, anecdotal evidence based on casual

listening is not generally accepted as sufficient basis for academic research. Lichty and Bailey (1977) write, in relation to television news, that "we analyze the content of news because a valid and reliable study is sharply different from casual watching" (quoted in McGregor, 1995, p.312). The research project does seek audience feedback in regard to the changes but it is content analysis which provides the scientific basis for determining what form the changes have taken.

Quantitative methodologies have been the subject of some criticism. For example, Jensen (1991) writes that "scholars and institutions have come to question the explanatory power of conventional empirical approaches within the social sciences" (p.1). This research acknowledges the limitations of content analysis (see Section 3.3.3) and also heeds Tuchman's (1991) advice: that the method to be used should depend on the question to be answered. Content analysis is the means by which the research can compare what rural news is available to listeners now, with what was available prior to the changes. The need for the project to generate its own reliable data also becomes apparent when secondary information is inconsistent or untested. For example, Thompson (1997a) writes, incorrectly, that the morning bulletin of rural news on National Radio "...has been cancelled altogether" (p.2) and other media accounts have the pre-change lunchtime rural session varying from 20 to 30 minutes in duration. Radio New Zealand, in defence of the changes, has indicated that more emphasis is to be placed on agricultural news in mainstream bulletins. It is only by studying content that the researcher can test such claims.

Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) state that content analysis is particularly useful for setting up comparisons between periods in time. They write that content analysis "...can provide information on processes and messages occurring over time and is particularly useful in retroactive measurement" and that "By looking at the evolution of messages from similar sources or the same source, researchers can gather information about the changes and adjustments made in those messages over time" (p.214).

Finally, content analysis enables the study of relatively large amounts of material with relatively few resources. In addition, it is an unobtrusive technique which does not impact upon the production process.

3.3.2 Definition

A widely used communication research methodology, content analysis is defined by Berelson as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (quoted in Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989, p.198). As a quantitative research method, the primary concern is manifest content and the researcher does not make a personal decision as to what particular content is important, but works on the premise that repetition is the best and most objective indicator of significance. However, content analysts do have the option of expanding the approach to include making comparisons and identifying relationships. Holsti (1969) advances that such generality adds depth to content analysis (ibid).

The need for applications of content analysis to be objective and systematic is seldom disputed, with Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) writing that "It is well accepted that the lack of bias is an inherent characteristic of any specific research methodology" and that "there is little controversy over the need to be systematic, to apply consistent criteria in a rigorous and careful way" (p.198). However, while an unbiased approach is a research requirement, the notion of researcher objectivity is challenged by the fact that reading the news is an inherently subjective process, "that different people assign different meaning and significance to the same text" and "that even the simplest texts are open to multiple interpretation" (Ericson et al, 1991, p.52). But there are ways of minimising this. In regard to content analysis, Stempel states that "objectivity is achieved by having the categories of analysis defined so precisely that different persons can apply them to the same content and get the same results" (quoted in McGregor, 1995, p.314) and McGregor develops this point, distinguishing between informal and scientific readings of news, the latter involving

"employing content analysis methodology used by researchers trained to bring to their analysis a common frame of reference" (ibid, p.315).

In addition, an exclusive emphasis on manifest content has been rejected by some theorists (eg. Krippendorff, 1980), who argue that content analysts "...can draw valid *inferences* about the characteristics of producers and receivers of messages and of the context in which a message is produced" (Frey et al, 1992, p.195). However, in abandoning manifest content, issues of researcher subjectivity again need to be addressed, for as Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) point out, "The problem with allowing one's self to look very far beyond manifest content is that someone must decide what is latent within a message, what is implied, what motives were behind the communication, etc." (p.198). The primary benefit of staying with manifest content is credibility, for if the approach is perceived as being factual, consistent and non biased it can be useful as a basis for activism and policy debate, and will retain more credibility in the wider community (McGregor, 1993).

The question as to whether or not content analysis must always be a quantitative procedure has also been the subject of debate. While the argument for employing precise exact counts of frequency is a powerful one, as "quantification increases the degree of precision of one's conclusions and permits a more accurate description of covariance between elements" (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989, p.199), a dogmatic reliance on counting can potentially provide an incomplete picture of content as when, for instance, an item's significance is seen to outweigh the frequency of its occurrence. Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) go on to suggest that while there is no easy solution to this dilemma, the answer may lie in a skilful combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, in which particular care is taken to safeguard the objective and systematic research goals. This study uses a combination of both qualitative and quantitative components of content analysis so as to provide the most complete picture of rural news content possible.

3.3.3 Limitations

Content analysis can only be applied to that communication which has been printed or broadcast, is able to be classified and counted, and has been recorded. In its quantitative applications content analysis relies on counting and ignores that which does not fit easily into rigid, pre-determined categories, which may produce incomplete results and be frustrating for the researcher. The novel or unusual is often discarded, potentially causing the researcher to "...overlook important insights" (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989, p.213). However, this may be more a criticism of certain applications of content analysis, rather than an inherent limitation, for as Ericson et al (1991) point out, more sophisticated applications of content analysis, particularly those which combine quantitative and qualitative elements, do more than simply produce frequency counts but also theorise the significance of what is counted.

Ericson et al (1991) claim, as mentioned earlier, that "...the whole effort to standardise categories is thrown into doubt by the well-known fact that different people assign different meaning and significance to the same text" (p.52). This limitation may be overstated, for in formally studying news, as opposed to during casual watching, analysis is guided by explicit guidelines.

While recognising that the only thing content analysis can legitimately comment on is content, for on its own it cannot reveal the intentions of the message producers or the effects on message receivers, the method's compatibility with other techniques means a more complete picture is gained through combining it with other methodologies such as interviews, surveys or participant observation.

3.4 Survey

The survey was used to gain some insight into the importance of rural news on radio for those actively involved in agriculture. The reaction of this group to the changes was also important, given that the audience research RNZ based its restructuring

decision upon was undertaken in main centres, effectively ignoring the habits and opinions of rural people.

Surveys have been used by news media scholars to examine issues surrounding change. For example, Underwood and Stamm (1992) used a self administered questionnaire to study the impact of business pressures on newsroom management policies.

3.4.1 Purpose

As mentioned above and in Chapter Two, Radio New Zealand's audience research was undertaken in the "main centres", effectively providing little or no opportunity for input from rural dwellers. The conclusion they reached was that the audience for rural news is as much urban as it is rural, although it is questionable whether the sample is representative. Radio New Zealand justified its decision on the basis that

- 1 its research organisation was sceptical as to whether listening figures would be higher in areas outside these centres and
- 2 doing research outside of the main centres is costly.

From the point of view of the researcher, a study of the changes that have been made to the rural news service without including some input from a key audience component (farmers and others involved in the industry) as to their feelings about the restructuring and the significance of the service for them, would be incomplete. Documenting that change has occurred and in what form is one aspect of the project, explorable through content analysis; how listeners perceive the changes is another, accessible through the use of a survey.

Neuman (1994) states that surveys are appropriate for the investigation of "beliefs, opinions, characteristics and past or present behaviours" (p.222). Questionnaires are a means of establishing what people think, for "Only participants can tell you how satisfied they are" (Fink & Kosecoff, 1985, p.15). In addition,

Barker and Barker (1989) see them as useful for the exploring of "uncharted territory" (p.170).

3.4.2 Definition

Mail surveys involve the sending out and return of a questionnaire (usually distributed along with a letter and a return envelope) via the postal system. As an example of a self administered survey, "...respondents complete the instrument without intervention by the researcher" (Dane, 1990, p.133).

3.4.3 Limitations

The sampling frame is of particular importance to the survey researcher. A representative sample, in conjunction with a statistically acceptable response rate, is necessary for the results to make credible statements about the group as a whole. However, when gathering data from a specialist rather than a general population it can be difficult to devise a representative sampling frame. In addition, there are difficulties in that the motivation levels of the sample group may be insufficient to produce acceptable response rates. Mail surveys, in which there is no personal contact between the researcher and the respondents, often suffer from low response rates. Frey et al (1992) suggest that what may pose difficulties for the survey researcher is that increasing numbers of people are simply refusing to complete questionnaires.

Limitations may also arise due to some respondents interpreting questions in ways not intended by the surveyor, although good question design will minimise the risk of this. As the researcher is not present while the respondent fills in the questionnaire s/he has no control over the quality of the data provided. For example, more than one option may be circled, or no answer provided.

3.4.4 Ethical Considerations

Fowler (1988) suggests, as a basic guideline, that no individual should suffer adverse consequences as a result of participating in a survey. Instead the researcher should make an effort to maximise the benefits, often intrinsic, of taking part, and inform and protect respondents. Confidentiality and/or anonymity clauses, if included, must be honoured. Anonymity means there are no names attached to any of the data whereas a promise of confidentiality ensures that the information is not released in a way which allows certain individuals to be linked to certain responses, although the researcher may be aware of the connection (Neuman, 1994).

As part of the researcher's obligation to inform respondents it should be made clear to survey participants exactly what they are volunteering for. Of importance is the name of the organisation/s carrying out and sponsoring the research, and its purpose. Respondents are entitled to confidentiality, are not under any obligation to participate and do not have to answer any questions they do not want to.

In terms of protecting participants the researcher must be committed to keeping replies confidential. Therefore, links between answers and any identifiers must be minimised, raw data in the form of completed questionnaires should not be accessible to those who are not involved in the project, and the researcher needs to take responsibility for the destroying or safe storage of raw data following project completion.

3.5 Qualitative Interviews

A number of people who have an involvement or interest in RNZ's rural news production were interviewed. Of particular relevance for the research was their feelings about the changes and, in the case of the reporters, how the restructuring has affected their job. In total, five interviews were undertaken: two with current reporters, one with a former *Rural Report* editor, one with Rangitikei MP Denis

Marshall, and one with RNZ's Programme Commissioner, Michael Peck. Radio New Zealand Chief Executive Sharon Crosbie declined to be interviewed.

3.5.1 Purpose

The purpose of interviewing, as advanced by Patton (1990), "is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (p.278). As he points out, some things are not observable but are accessible only through the questioning of certain people. The underlying assumption behind the inclusion of interviews in a research project is "...that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (ibid).

People who work within a news organisation are important as sources of information, explanation and opinion which may otherwise be inaccessible. In interviewing a former *Rural Report* editor and two current rural reporters, the research is offsetting any criticism of media research which does not include the perspective of media practitioners or management. The insights gained through interviewing help to make sense of the restructuring, and strengthen the research conclusions.

3.5.2 Definition

The semi-structured, in-depth interview is a variation on survey questioning but with a significant difference: as a qualitative method participants are not required to fit their replies into pre-determined categories but can express themselves through their own words. In addition, the researcher retains the flexibility to more fully explore interesting things that come up during the interview process (Priest, 1996), rather than being committed to asking all respondents exactly the same questions.

Interviewing is different from other methodologies because of the involvement of the researcher in data generation. Seidman (1991) notes that the interviewer is part of the process:

in in-depth interviewing we recognise and affirm the role of the instrument, the human interviewer. Rather than decrying the fact that the instrument used to gather data affects this process, we say the human interviewer can be a marvellously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact and understanding (p.16).

3.5.3 Limitations

The calibre of information gained through the interview process is largely dependent upon the interviewer. Establishing rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee, particularly through eye contact and the provision of neutral feedback, is vital to maximising the amount of useful information obtained. The interviewer must also listen carefully and follow up where appropriate. Inexperience and failure to establish a relationship conducive to open communication may have a negative impact on the quality of the information. In addition, although interview questions must be neutral, the interview may potentially be hampered by the impact of the interviewer's expectations or personal characteristics.

Kidder and Judd (1986) point out that personal interviews are costly and thus research funds may limit the number undertaken.

3.5.4 Ethical Considerations

When conducting in-depth interviews the researcher must maintain a neutral stance. The primary aim of interviewing is to gather data and as Patton (1990) points out, the role of the interviewer is neither judge nor therapist. As with conducting surveys, any risks to either interviewer or interviewee must be minimised, and issues of confidentiality, informed consent, data access and ownership considered. Any promises made to by the interviewer to the interviewee/s, such as to supply a copy of the report upon completion, must be kept.

Feminist scholarship has encouraged researchers who undertake interviews to consider questions surrounding data ownership. For example, Oakley (1981), in Rountree and Laing (1996), advocates a collaborative approach between female researchers and research participants, in an effort to offset inequalities in the

interview process. Seidman (1991) speaks of a continuum of data ownership, ranging from co-ownership to the interviewee involvement ending with the actual interview. However, ultimately it is the researcher who must interpret the interview data.

3.6 Conclusion

The three methodological choices, content analysis, a survey and interviews, have been discussed here in theoretical terms. The way these approaches are applied, influenced by the demands of the research project, is the subject of the next chapter. The results are collated and discussed in Chapters Five to Nine.

CHAPTER FOUR METHODOLOGY PROCEDURES

4.1 Introduction

The use of three different methodologies involved three different sets of procedures. The theory of the approaches, their limitations, benefits and ethical considerations are discussed in Chapter Three. This chapter will detail the specific methodological procedures, which lead to the results and discussion sections in Chapters Five to Nine.

4.2 Research Questions

The broad questions guiding this research are

- 1 What changes have been made to National Radio's rural news service?
- 2 What are the perceptions and attitudes of those who produce and use rural news toward the restructured service?

In terms of project hypotheses it is advanced that

- 1 The nature of rural news has changed
- 2 Journalists perceive the changes to be the result of a managerial influence and commercial imperatives, and
- 3 The rural community perceives the changes as representing a loss of value.

4.3 Content Analysis

Content analysis is employed to analyse the specialist and mainstream agricultural coverage of National Radio. In particular, what the restructuring has meant for the story length and depth, follow-through, place of origin and use of sources was examined. The coding protocol, showing all the aspects of content examined, is reproduced in Appendix A.

4.3.1 Steps in Content Analysis

Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) outline seven stages in the content analysis process:

- 1 Formulation of hypotheses or research questions to be answered
- 2 Selection of sample
- 3 Definition of categories
- 4 Outline of coding process and training of the coders who will implement it
- 5 Implementation of the coding process
- 6 Measurement of reliability and validity
- 7 Analysis of results

4.3.2 Research Questions

The development of the hypotheses is an important initial step. Although it need not be set in stone at this early stage and should be open to revision, early hypotheses should be informed by valid theoretical perspectives and/or earlier study. A content analysis hypothesis would usually advance a relationship between communication variables and "...suggest a particular description of a message" (ibid, p.200).

The content analysis research questions are

- 1 What changes have been made to National Radio's rural news service and
- 2 With what impact on content?

These link to theoretical perspectives relating to the tensions between commercial imperatives and public service broadcasting, as well as to other studies of broadcast content which demonstrate programme format changes impact on elements, such as story length and source speaking times (eg. McGregor & Comrie, 1995).

4.3.3 Selection of Sample

In the majority of content analysis applications it is necessary to sample. What Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) term the "universe of content" (p.201) must be identified, from which a representative and sufficiently sized sample is drawn. The most common types of sampling are random, where the sample is chosen arbitrarily; systematic, when every nth occurrence is chosen; and stratified, where the sample is divided according to project requirements (such as regional variations) and then chosen randomly within each strata. Of utmost importance in sampling is the avoidance of built-in bias through, for example, the over-sampling of certain days. Convenience sampling, the use of that material most readily available to the researcher, can also be problematic. Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993), whose study suggests the constructed week sample may be superior to random or consecutive day sampling, taking into account that newspaper content varies by weekday, write that "In more convenient samples using sets of consecutive days, all weekdays may be present in a seven-day sample, but the procedure ignores between-week differences" (p.134).

In the research project two complete, non-sequential weeks were chosen rather than structured weeks, on the basis that prior listening had identified the follow-through of issues during a week as an important component of *Rural Report*. Riffe et al (1993) point out that there is little research on content analysis sampling methods and their work provides little guidance for the researcher wishing to explore

how events and issues are followed through. Ericson et al (1991) state that qualitative content analysis which relies on random or stratified sampling frames is not always useful for the study of coverage of issues over time. By choosing non-sequential weeks, the existence of between-week differences is addressed. It was seen as desirable to have two weeks that were some time apart, to allow for any seasonal variations in coverage. Due to the *Rural Report* bulletins being of a predetermined duration, the size of the sample chosen is not problematic in terms of the rural news programme's length.

In regard to sample size, it is accepted that while bigger is not necessarily better, "...selecting too few issues may produce unreliable data and invalid results" (Riffe et al, 1993, p.133). In the study, ten days' worth of weekly rural news stories were examined for each year, plus two days' worth of weekend magazine content. The years chosen were 1996, the year preceding the restructuring, used as a basis for comparison, and 1997, the initial year of the reformatted programming.

Within these sample dates, both the morning and afternoon bulletins of rural news were examined. However, it was also necessary to make a decision as to what mainstream bulletins to use, in order to test whether the cuts to the specialist programmes were being compensated for elsewhere, as RNZ has suggested. The decision as to what these bulletins would be was guided by pragmatic considerations such as cost, and empirically motivated by RNZ comments as to which programmes would contain more agricultural content. The 6am and 12 noon news bulletins were examined because

- 1 they were included on the one-hour tapes purchased and
- 2 they were proximate to the rural news sessions and thus were likely to have a farming audience

It would seem logical that if a special effort were to be made to increase the agricultural content of mainstream news bulletins, the bulletins near the rural sessions might be targeted on the basis that those interested in rural news would then be tuned in. In addition, the newly introduced 12.16pm business news programme,

which was identified by RNZ as a bulletin containing agri-business news, was sampled. It must be noted that the format of the 6-7am and 12-1pm hours changed between the 1996 and 1997 sample weeks. In 1996 there were no feature stories in the 6-7am hour but in 1997 there was. Conversely, in 1996 there were features in the 12-1pm hour but not in the 1997 hour. It was deemed important to include these features, which are a means by which National Radio can place emphasis on a story. The following table shows the dates and programmes sampled.

Table 1: Sample Dates and Programmes, 1996 and 1997

Year	1996	1997
Dates	April 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19	April 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
	July 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13	July 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Programmes	6am on-the-hour news	6am on-the-hour news
	Morning Rural Report	Morning Rural Report
	Midday on-the-hour news	6-7am Features
	Midday Rural Report	Midday on-the-hour news
	Midday Features	Midday Business News
	Country Saturday	Midday Rural Report
		Country Life

To summarise, the sample was chosen in consideration of the following points:

- 1 the need for a sufficiently large sample,
- 2 the need to establish the situation prior to the change in order to have a means of comparison,
- 3 a desire to test whether the restructuring has resulted in any difference in the amount of follow-through (hence choice of complete rather than constructed weeks) and
- 4 resource and time constraints.

4.3.4 Formulation of Categories

The importance of defining categories is demonstrated in Berelson's (1952) statement that "Content analysis stands or falls by its categories" (quoted in Frey et al, 1992, p.197). Care needs to be taken to ensure categories are compatible with the research questions and the researcher should strive for the ideal of exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories, although depending on the research questions this may not always be necessary (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989). Substance and form categories - what is said and how it is said (ibid) - are both present in the coding protocol employed in the study. Categories concocted by other researchers may be appropriate, according to Stempel (quoted in McGregor, 1995). A project familiar to the researcher, *Balance and Fairness in Broadcast News 1985-1994* (McGregor & Comrie, 1995), was consulted and some questions were replicated in this research.

In the coding protocol, descriptive categories are used to identify the story: the date and day of the week, and the year that the story was aired, the story duration, where the story originated and what bulletin it was placed in. In addition, for every *Rural Report* bulletin, data was gathered as to the date, year and time (morning or afternoon) of broadcast, the number of stories and the overall length.

By listening to pre-change and post-change *Rural Report* bulletins, the researcher identified aspects of content which are characteristic of specialist rural news. These were then included in the coding protocol so as to test whether they have been affected by the restructuring process. As already mentioned, the degree of follow-through in *Rural Report* bulletins was examined, with a question asking whether the item was a continuation or update of a story broadcast in an earlier rural news session. This question was asked of all items in *Rural Report* bulletins, except for those in the Monday morning bulletin of each week.

The question as to whether specialist news programmes produce more in-depth coverage and concentrate more on issues than events was tested by the inclusion of two questions asking the coder to identify what the story was concerned with (event, issue, or a mixture), and to rate the depth of the coverage. These

questions also address the criticisms that have been raised that the restructuring has resulted in more superficial coverage.

As discussed in Chapter Two, available literature conflictingly argues both that agricultural news tends to focus on "doom and gloom" or that, due to the influence of advertising, it is misleadingly positive. Other research, such as Te Awa (1996), suggests that specialist news programmes tend to be more positive in outlook. These theories were tested in their relevance for *Rural Report* and mainstream rural stories by the inclusion of a question about the nature of the story: good news, bad news or neutral.

In addition, a question was included asking whether there was conflict in the story. Corbett (1992) suggests that specialist journalists, especially those operating in rural environments, tend to avoid reporting conflict. The results for this question allows for a comparison between the conflict levels of agricultural stories aired in *Rural Report*, and agricultural stories aired in mainstream bulletins.

Another substance category was concerned with what types of stories were covered, to determine the range in both *Rural Report* and mainstream bulletins. In addition, this would indicate whether the changes have meant more or less of certain types of stories being broadcast. After listening to all of the stories at least twice, these categories were formalised, and are reproduced in Appendix B.

As an acknowledgement of the cuts in journalistic resources, a question was included asking whether the reporter's voice was heard, and if so, who the reporter was. This question was asked of all stories.

Finally, a significant feature of the content categories was related to sources and how many were present in each story. A number of characteristics of the sources were recorded, such as whether they spoke for themselves or were cited, how they were identified, and their gender. Again, in acknowledgement of the restructuring and its possible effects, a question was asked as whether or not the source spoke in an interview format.

4.3.5 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis, which must be selected for each category or set of categories, may be: physical (eg. a book, a news page), syntactical (eg. a word, a sentence), referential (something to which a unit refers), propositional (when units are redesigned into propositional units for analysis) or thematic (recurring elements) (Krippendorff, 1980). In regard to television news, it has been suggested that it is the story which is the "most logical and useful" choice of unit (Lichty and Bailey, 1978, quoted in McGregor, 1995, p.322). Another aspect of category formulation linked with the unit of analysis is the unit of enumeration, described by Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) as "the way in which quantification is accomplished for each category and unit" (p.204). For example, it may be a measure in seconds of the length of an item, a rank ordering of depth of content or a frequency count.

In the research project there are two units of analysis, the story and the *Rural Report* bulletin, which allows for a more holistic understanding of the rural news programming. All stories were coded separately and then the whole *Rural Report* bulletin in which these stories aired was also subject to analysis. It is the bulletin that has been publicly identified as shortened but, by also having the individual stories as a unit of analysis, it can be determined what changes to the overall packaging of the show meant for its components. It must be mentioned that *Rural Report* bulletins are inclined to expand items on a thematic basis through the use of the word "meanwhile", which was recognised by the researcher as a linking mechanism rather than an indicator of a new story. Beharrell, Davis, Eldridge, Hewitt, Oddie, Philo, Walton and Winston (1995) write that

the word 'meanwhile' is conventionally used in narrative to refer to a connection between events if this connection is implied or hidden. If 'Meanwhile' is used to mark a boundary in television news, its function is chiefly 'textual', but because it carries overtones of sequentiality and ordering it can function to contribute to the internal coherence of the news (p.177).

The unit of enumeration varied in relation to the question being asked, and is clearly shown on the coding protocol. For example, stories were measured in seconds.

In terms of identifying rural stories in mainstream bulletins, the researcher followed the definitions of the rural news bulletins. In other words, any story topic aired in *Rural Report* was deemed to be a "rural" story wherever else it was aired. In mainstream bulletins where this test was not available, the researcher made a decision based upon a strong rural family background, and a familiarity with agricultural news and what farmers classify as useful and interesting. A story that contained only a passing mention of the agricultural or export sector did not make the story a "rural" story.

In regard to the weekend magazine programme *Country Life*, formerly *Country Saturday*, the unit of analysis was the bulletin only, on the basis that it is made up of a series of reports and features that have changed quite significantly, defying the categorisation of its parts into sections able to be compared with other years.

4.3.6 Implementing the Coding Process, Reliability and Validity

A written coding instrument was developed because even if no coders other than the principal researcher are used, issues of reliability and validity demand that the coding process be visible. It is advised that when only one coder is used either the researcher recode at the end to check their consistency or a second person be asked to code a certain random number of the items (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989). Implementing the coding process should be relatively straightforward if all the preceding steps have been done properly. Clear instructions should be available for the coder/s, again with implications for reliability and validity.

Priest (1996) considers a study would be reliable if "repeating the same procedure would be highly likely to generate nearly the same results" (p.87). It is thus also a measure of the objectivity of the coding framework, or in Berelson's

words, "The degree to which data are independent of the measurement instrument" (quoted in Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989, p.208). Krippendorff (1980) states that there are three different measures of reliability: stability, the same results would be produced at a different time; reproducibility, different coders would produce the same results under varying circumstances; and accuracy, the strongest form of reliability in which results match a known standard.

The principal researcher did all the coding. A measure of intra-coder reliability was taken, in which three randomly chosen stories were re-coded to check for consistency. The result was 93%.

Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) state that there is no convenient formula for calculating validity but that it traditionally involves questioning whether the coding instrument employed succeeds in measuring what it is intended to measure. "One could say that a study was valid if its inferences could be 'proven' through corroboration from other outside evidence" (p.210). Face or content validity asks whether the results are plausible. As is discussed in the results and discussion chapters which follow, there is a high degree of consistency in the outcomes of the content analysis, survey and interview methodologies. In addition, many of the comments made by people in other forums, discussed in Chapter Two, correspond with the research findings. This suggests the research outcomes are valid.

4.3.7 Analysis of Results

In the last of the steps, the analysis of results, the researcher is guided by the hypothesis and research questions. The frequencies obtained may prove or disprove suspicions and be compared with earlier studies and/or the results of other complementary methodologies used in the project. The results are shown in Chapter Five and discussed in terms of other studies and research themes in Chapter Six. The results of the other methodologies employed in the research are in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine.

4.4 Survey

A survey was employed to gain feedback from the agricultural community as to the importance of rural news on National Radio for them, and their reactions to the change.

4.4.1 Choosing a Mail Survey

According to Fowler (1988), there are four means of survey data collection: mail, telephone, personal interview and group administration. He says that the decision as to what means of data collection is employed should be guided by the following considerations: sampling, type of population, question form and content, response rates, costs, available facilities and length of data collection. These aspects were considered in choosing a mail survey for the research and will be now be discussed in further detail.

4.4.2 Sampling and Response Rates

The nature of the sampling frame available is a major influence upon which means of data collection is used, through the type of information available to the researcher. When a specific, as opposed to a general population is required, random sampling methods are inapplicable. Initially, an approach was made to the Federated Farmers' publication, the *Straight Furrow*, to see whether it would be possible to distribute a questionnaire through them. However, they declined on the basis that they were conducting a readership survey which was to include a question about rural radio. (Their results are used for comparison and discussion in Chapter Eight). The sample groups used in the research were accessed through Mr John Stantiall, the Agricultural Extension Co-ordinator of the Department of Animal Science at Massey University, who maintains conference mailing lists, complete with names and addresses. Although this raises problems of representativeness, as those who attend industry conferences would probably have a higher degree of interest than non-

attendees, other characteristics of such populations, such as presumably better literacy skills and level of motivation, would tend to work in favour of the mail surveyors. In order to have a reasonable sized sample, and to include the views of a range of farmers, the survey was distributed to those on a sheep and beef conference mailing list, and to those who attended a dairy industry conference.

For the survey of sheep and beef farmers, a copy of the questionnaire was enclosed with a conference registration which was being sent by the Extension Coordinator to those on the mailing list. (The survey document is reproduced in Appendix C). A covering letter, explaining the survey and signed by both Mr Stantiall and myself, was also enclosed. Not all the people on the list were farmers but all were actively involved in the agriculture industry. In the case of the dairy farmer sample, a questionnaire was distributed in the conference packs attendees received, and a box provided for completed forms at the venue. The response rate was disappointing, and was probably a result of time pressures on conference attendees, and the surveys becoming "lost" in the large amount of handout material, much of it advertising, given to conference participants. For this reason it was decided to undertake a follow-up exercise, tied in with the mail out of conference proceedings later in the year. The results are shown and discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight.

It is desirable, say Barker and Barker (1989), to have a representative sample that accurately reflects the overall population. A non-probability sample is one which does not satisfy this and thus no sampling error statistics can be calculated. As already discussed, the sampling frame available to the researcher was not representative of the farming population, but was a convenience sample and thus limits how generalisable the results from the survey component of the research project are. However, there is difficulty involved in getting a representative sample of a specific population such as farmers. While mailing lists of people on rural deliveries are available from New Zealand Post for a price, not all people who live on rural deliveries are farmers or involved in agricultural industries. Other databases,

such as those held by agricultural organisations such as Federated Farmers, are not available because of privacy policies.

However, de Vaus (1995) defends the occasional use of non representative sampling, writing that

On occasions researchers are not concerned with generalising from a sample to the population and in such cases representativeness of the sample is less important...Some research is not all that interested in working out what proportion of the population gives a particular response but rather in obtaining an idea of the range of the responses or ideas that people have (p.77).

He goes on to say that "In the end the decisions about samples will be a compromise between cost, accuracy, the nature of the research problem and the art of the research problem and the art of the possible" (ibid, p.79).

Response rate, says Babbie (1986), is "one guide to the representativeness of the sample respondents" (p.221). Group administered surveys which use a captured sample tend to generate high rates of response, while at the other end of the scale, mail survey returns are notoriously low. As Fowler (1988) points out, in mail surveys it is those who have some particular interest in the subject matter or research who are more likely to return the questionnaire. However, Dillman (1978) has demonstrated that high response rates for both mail and telephone methods are possible if comprehensive and appropriate follow-up is employed. Unfortunately, the names and addresses of those people on the conference lists were not available to the researcher for follow-up, except in the case of the Dairy Conference when this was able to be tied in with the sending out of conference proceedings in September. In fact, at no time did the researcher have access to the names and addresses of the people used in the study, consistent with the Extension Co-ordinator's policy of keeping such information confidential.

While Frey et al (1992) write that there is "no generally accepted minimum response rate" (p.95), Barker and Barker (1986) suggest that a low response rate would be less than 35%. There is a range of material on the topic of response rates in survey questionnaires, and varying acceptable parameters. Of special relevance to

this study is literature regarding surveys of specialist populations. In other disciplines, surveys of vocational groups have worked from response rates of less than or approximately 50%: Lynn, Cao and Horn (1996) achieved 41% in their survey of accounting professionals; Judge, Cable, Boudreau and Bretz attained (1995) 39% in their study of business executives; and Burke (1994), who questioned women who sit on corporate boards of directors, had around 50%.

4.4.3 Type of Population

When a sample is geographically dispersed, such as in rural areas, the mailing process provides the easiest access to respondents. Mail surveys become attractive when collecting data from those who have reasonably high literacy rates and an interest in the topic.

4.4.4 Question Form and Content

The decision to use a mail survey influences the type of questions that can reasonably be asked. While mail surveys allow participants the time to reflect upon and answer open-ended questions, the importance of restricting the use of open-ended questions in mail surveys is documented (see Barker & Barker, 1989; Fowler, 1988). However, Fowler (1988) concedes that open-ended inquiries may provide useful material of an anecdotal nature, rather than anything able to be quantified. Neuman (1994) advances that, in regard to choosing closed or open-ended questions, it is not which form is best but "under what conditions a form is most appropriate" (p.232). Qualitative data, which would result from the use of open-ended inquiries, should only be gathered if the researcher is able to use it and if it is relevant to the research questions. Open-ended questions tend to be more effective in obtaining what is closer to the real views of the respondents, and Fowler (1988) believes participants welcome the opportunity to answer some questions in their own words. However, closed questions are a more satisfactory way to create reliable, codable data.

Taking into account issues pointed out by survey theorists, the questionnaire employed both open and closed-ended questions, in pursuit of both quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix C. Barker and Barker (1989) discuss two types of open-ended questions: fill-in-the-blank-questions and written statements. "A request for a written paragraph or essay is usually used when a researcher is attempting to determine general feeling or to assess the reasons behind a specific attitude or opinion" (p.185). Closed-ended questions may also take on various formats: dichotomous, multi-choice, checklist, rank-order and attitudinal scales. Dichotomous questions (those which use either/or, yes/no) may include a third option to avoid participants who have no opinion being put in what Barker and Barker call a "forced choice situation" (ibid, p.186). Kidder and Judd (1986) also warn that "...on some topics we may not have an attitude that is well formulated enough to be verbalised" (p.220). Rank order questions tend to include five options and should provide an equal number of favourable and unfavourable responses (Barker & Barker, 1989, p.188). In anticipation of data processing it is advisable to number all responses on the survey instrument.

When writing questions it is important to avoid double-barrelled, leading or irrelevant inquiries, the use of negation, and biased or loaded terms. Special attention was paid to this requirement. Pre-testing is essential for isolating problem questions as well as for testing the clarity of instruction and providing feedback about possible oversights or ambiguities. "Pretests involve the initial testing of each item on the questionnaire, the questionnaire as a whole, or any other aspect of the survey that is being conducted" (ibid, p.191). The researcher consulted with two supervisors in the process of designing the questionnaire and when a consensual decision was reached as to format and question content, the survey was distributed to three people in the target audience (ie. involved in agriculture) to complete. Upon their feedback, one wording change was made. Another suggestion, that the print be slightly bigger, was not able to be met, given the financial and postage restraints which meant the

survey could only be one A4 page in size. The time it took for the three people to complete the instrument formed the basis of the time frame offered to respondents.

Neuman (1994) identifies two key principles for survey design: avoid confusion and keep the respondents' perspective in mind. These principles are important when dealing with contingency questions (questions in which the answer given determines whether later questions are to be answered), which, if being employed, need to be clearly presented and explained. Used properly "...contingency questions can facilitate the respondents' task in completing the questionnaire, because they are not faced with trying to answer questions that are irrelevant to them" (Babbie, 1986, p.206). Some contingency questions are used in the survey instrument, in particular to accommodate those who are not listeners of the rural news programmes.

Much research has been done on the effect the ordering of questions has on responses. Kidder and Judd (1986) suggest beginning with easier questions, finishing with requests for social and demographic information, and keeping topically related questions together. In addition, all questions should be linked to the purpose of the questionnaire. As questions must be ordered in some way, the estimated effect of the order should be noted although the designer of the mail questionnaire has no control over the sequence in which respondents choose to answer.

The question order was to some extent based on temporal considerations, with the first question going right back to the time when change was first mentioned, and then developing to respondent's reaction to the changes when they occurred. As already mentioned, the survey was limited to a page in length so it was particularly important that no space was wasted on questions that did not have relevance for the goals of the questionnaire. Adhering to Kidder and Judd's (1986) advice, demographic information was sought at the end of the questionnaire.

While it is commonly thought that mail questionnaires should be as brief as possible, Dillman (1978) found that the optimal length of general public surveys is

twelve pages or 125 items and de Vaus (1995) states that "In surveys of specialised populations with relevant topics length seems to be less important" (p.109). As already mentioned, the questionnaire instrument used in the research was one page, with both sides of the paper utilised, and a total of ten questions.

4.4.5 Resources

The availability of resources is also a consideration for the survey researcher, with surveys done by mail or telephone generally being the cheaper options, although follow-up in postal surveys can become costly. Other, non-monetary resources available to the researcher will also be a factor: while mail surveys require little in the way of staff and facilities and are thus ideal for a graduate student, interview-based surveys will only be an option if trained and preferably experienced interviewing staff are available. In addition, self administered surveys have the benefit of not being affected by the introduction of bias through interviewer behaviour or appearance, for as Kidder and Judd (1986) point out, simply the way the interviewer speaks and looks can impact upon answers.

4.4.6 Length of Data Collection

Mail surveys will only be feasible when the researcher has a relatively long time frame in which to work. Fowler (1988) suggests that mail surveys usually take approximately two months to execute, compared with a telephone survey which can realistically be done within days. Time was not a pressing consideration in the research although the follow-up for the second conference was done somewhat later than desirable.

4.5 Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews were used to gain some insight into the reaction of rural journalists to the changes, and what the restructuring has meant for the way they go

about their job. They were also used to obtain other perspectives, namely those of a former *Rural Report* editor, a politician and Radio New Zealand management.

4.5.1 Interview Questions

"Qualitative interviews begin with something called an **interview schedule** (or interview guide) that lists the most important topics to be covered..." (Priest, 1996, p.108). Patton (1990) states the schedule is only a "basic checklist" and instead of standardised questions, such as what form the basis of the survey, question order and wording should be adapted to each specific situation (p.280).

The following topics were covered with rural reporters Jill Galloway and Hugh Chappell:

- background (ie. the length of time they have been involved in journalism and/or rural reporting)
- the effect of the restructuring on their job
- the impact (if any) the restructuring has had on the rural news service
- what they believe motivated the changes
- mainstreaming
- the role of *Rural Report* and *Country Life*
- public radio generally.

With Peter Burke, a former editor of *Rural Report*, I discussed the same issues, except, as he is no longer a reporter, that of how the restructuring has affected his job. The Rangitikei MP and former National Cabinet Minister, Denis Marshall, who was the first person to publicly announce the changes, was asked about the following:

- his interest in the issue
- any concerns he may have about the cutbacks
- what he sees as the role of public radio and whether there is still a place for publicly funded broadcasting

- his response as to whether the restructuring is related to rural people's loss of political influence.

Finally, RNZ Programme Commissioner, Michael Peck, was asked

- what motivated the restructuring
- what the organisation sees as the role of, and future for, specialist rural programming
- the number of rural reporters now employed by RNZ
- the policy of mainstreaming
- whether coverage has suffered under the new system
- his reaction to criticism of Radio New Zealand as being city-driven.

4.5.2 Number and Length of Interviews

According to Priest (1996) there is no pre-determined, necessary number of interviews. In some circumstances "...it's necessary or important to interview only a few people, as when a case study of a particular small, individual media organisation is being conducted and the number of people with important roles in the organisation is quite limited" (p.107). The benefit of interviewing a number of people, according to Seidman (1991), lies in the ability the researcher has to connect their experiences and, if relevant, check the comments of one against others.

Priest (1996) does recommend that an in-depth interview be at least half an hour in length. The interviews undertaken for this project varied in length from 20 to 80 minutes.

4.5.3 Steps in the Interview Process

One interview, with RNZ Programme Commissioner Michael Peck, was conducted by telephone. The other four were conducted face-to-face. Initial contact was made with all participants by telephone, and the nature of the research explained and an outline of what topics would be covered was provided verbally. Immediately prior to the interview, participants were given a checklist of points to be covered. In

general terms, the interviews dealt with the public aspects of participants' experience (ie. their job).

Once the interview data is gathered and written up, it needs to be interpreted. "The vast array of words, sentences, paragraphs and pages have to be reduced to what is of most importance and interest" (Seidman, 1991, p.89). Seidman advises that this is best done inductively, warning against forcing excerpts into predetermined categories. However, my own judgement as to what was important was informed by themes covered in the literature review and the findings of the other methodologies. Finally, the researcher needs to leave open the possibility that another different interviewer may have interpreted the data in a different way.

4.6 Conclusion

The specific procedures involved in applying the three methodologies employed in this study of rural news have been outlined. The previous chapter discusses the theoretical considerations involved in their selection. The following five chapters are concerned with the results of the content analysis, questionnaire survey and interviews.

CHAPTER FIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The application of content analysis is central to the establishment of how the restructuring has affected *Rural Report* content, and to determine if, as Radio New Zealand (RNZ) claim, there is now more emphasis on agricultural news in mainstream bulletins. As agricultural journalism has seldom been studied in New Zealand, the content analysis is also exploratory in nature, seeking to establish general characteristics of rural journalism on radio.

The following programmes were content analysed:

- *Rural Report*
- 6am and 12 noon news bulletins
- Midday business news (1997 only)
- Features broadcast in the 6-7am and 12-1pm hours

For the purposes of this research, the term "mainstream" consists of the 6am and 12 noon news bulletins, the business news, and the features. However, of particular importance are the differences between 1996 and 1997 *Rural Report* content.

Appendix A shows the coding protocol used in the content analysis of *Rural Report* and mainstream bulletins. The aspects of content covered by this chapter are the number of stories, average story length, place of origin, story topic, continuation of coverage, event orientation, story depth, good news and bad news, conflict, sourcing and the use of the reporter voice. The tabulated findings, which compare 1996 and 1997 results, show that *Rural Report* content has suffered as a result of the restructuring. The results also provide an indication of how mainstream agricultural news differs from specialist rural news.

The weekend show (previously called *Country Saturday*, now called *Country Life*) is treated differently. These programmes are written up descriptively in the closing pages of this chapter. Of particular importance in this qualitative examination is what changes were made when the programme was shortened (from two hours to one), and how this, combined with the changes to *Rural Report*, affects the rural news service provided by National Radio.

5.2 Number of Stories

The sample days chosen were 15-19 April and 8-12 July 1996, and 7-11 April and 7-11 July 1997. Mainstream news and the *Rural Report* programmes were examined. A total of 232 stories were included in the sample: 130 from 1996 and 102 from 1997. One hundred and ninety seven stories were broadcast in *Rural Report* and 35 aired in the mainstream news programmes examined. The business news programme was introduced in 1997 and thus is not included in the 1996 sample. However, even when the figure for this programme is taken out, in 1997 there were more agricultural stories in mainstream news: 13 in 1997 compared to 10 in 1996. With the business news included, the 1997 total rises to 25. This would appear to offer tentative support for Radio New Zealand's claim that there is more emphasis on agricultural content in mainstream bulletins.

Table 2: Number of Agricultural Stories, 1996 and 1997

Bulletin type	1996	1997
Morning 'Rural Report'	58	35
Midday 'Rural Report'	62	42
6am News	3	5
Midday News	3	6
Midday Business News	n/a	12
Features	4	2
TOTAL	130	102

The restructuring of *Rural Report* has resulted in fewer stories being covered. As is apparent in the above table, the total number of stories dropped between 1996 and 1997. In 1996, the majority of agricultural news items were broadcast in the specialist news bulletins. Following the restructuring, there has been a drop in the number of items aired by *Rural Report*, accompanied by an increase in the amount in the 6am and 12noon news bulletins, and the use of the midday business news section as an agribusiness news outlet. However, this has not been sufficient to bring the total number of stories to pre-change levels.

In 1996 the morning *Rural Report* bulletin averaged 5.8 stories per programme, and ranged from 5 to 7 items. In 1997, there was an average of 3.5 stories, with a range of 1 to 5 stories. The midday session has traditionally contained more stories, an average of 6.2 items in 1996, with a spread of 2 to 9 items, falling to 4.2 stories in 1997, and a range of 3 to 5. There were more feature stories (in which important news stories are examined in greater depth) on agriculture in the period before the restructuring, despite the RNZ pledge to put greater emphasis on mainstream rural content. However, it must be recalled that only one hour of *Morning Report* was sampled.

5.3 *Rural Report* Bulletin Length

The timing of *Rural Report* bulletins took into account their entire length, rather than the sum of the component stories. In 1996, the newsreader would begin the session by outlining what was to be covered, something which no longer happens in 1997, when time is at a premium.

The 1996 *Rural Report* bulletins ranged in length from 832 seconds to 977 seconds, and averaged 915.75 seconds, or approximately 15 minutes. In 1997, *Rural Report* averaged 313.75 seconds, just over 5 minutes, and ranged from 268 to 424 seconds. The morning and afternoon sessions were similar in length, with morning sessions not, on average, more than 10 seconds longer.

5.4 Story Length

The average length of stories varied in terms of where they were aired. Unsurprisingly, on-the-hour news items tended to be shorter, and feature stories the longest. The average story length overall was 144.38 seconds in 1996 and 80.66 seconds in 1997.

Table 3: Average Story Length, 1996 and 1997, by Bulletin

Bulletin	1996	1997
Rural Report	148.48	79.97
Features	158.75	260.00
On-the-hour news	52.83	56.27
Business news	n/a	77.58

The stories in the 1996 sample, of which there were 130, ranged in length from 20 seconds to 370 seconds (with both of these extremes being broadcast in morning *Rural Report* sessions) and added up to a total of 18,770 seconds. In comparison, in the 1997 sample, just 8228 seconds of air time was devoted to rural content. There were 102 stories, ranging in length from 12 seconds to 357 seconds.

Table 3 shows that *Rural Report* stories appear to have suffered the most, on average being just over half the length of what they were in 1997. Consequently, it becomes apparent that the restructuring has resulted both in fewer stories being covered (see Table 2), and less time for those which are covered. However, lending some credence to Radio New Zealand's claims that mainstream news is putting more emphasis upon agricultural content, the feature and the on-the-hour news stories have become slightly longer, although in the case of features, there are fewer of them. The indications are that the stories in the business news are comparable in length to *Rural Report*, although both are far from being at pre-restructuring level. It must be noted however, that despite the mainstream news sample being the equivalent of four weeks of agricultural content, it is a small sample and not generalisable.

5.5 Place of Origin

Table 4 summarises the geographic origin of all 232 stories broadcast by Radio New Zealand over the sample weeks. Wellington is obvious as the single most popular place of origin in both 1996 and 1997. The results show a marked increase in stories originating in the capital city: prior to restructuring 18.5% of items originated in Wellington but by 1997 this figure had risen to 41.2%. This finding is consistent with criticisms of Radio New Zealand outlined in Chapter Two, and is discussed further in the following chapter.

Table 4: Place of Origin of All Rural News Items

Place of origin	1996		1997	
	No. of stories	Percent	No. of stories	Percent
Auckland	7	5.4	4	3.9
Wellington	24	18.4	42	41.2
Dunedin	1	0.8	1	1.0
Christchurch	4	3.1	2	1.9
Hamilton	9	6.9	1	1.0
Palmerston North	4	3.1	4	3.9
Other North Island city/town	16	12.3	11	10.8
Other South Island city/town	12	9.2	6	5.9
North Island regional	12	9.2	4	3.9
South Island regional	6	4.6	12	11.8
Offshore islands	1	0.8	0	0.0
Overseas	16	12.3	7	6.9
Unspecified	18	13.9	8	7.8
TOTAL	130	100	102	100

There were slight increases in the percentage of stories coming from Dunedin and Palmerston North, and a quite marked increase in South Island regional (4.6% to 11.8%). Overall, the South Island does not appear to have suffered from the changes, increasing as a place of origin, as did the North Island. This was possibly due to a decline in the number of stories from offshore islands and overseas. The number of stories originating in Christchurch and other South Island cities/towns approximately halved, while those from regional South Island increased, suggesting that the reporters are producing more of their items by telephoning around the districts. It is

unsurprising that both Palmerston North and Wellington have increased, given that rural reporters remain in these centres. Finally, 1997 saw relatively fewer stories which were unspecified in regard to their origin.

5.6 Story Topic

Content categories were devised to show what sort of agricultural news is aired on *Rural Report*, if the restructuring has affected the range, and to determine whether the type of agricultural stories aired in mainstream bulletins differs markedly in any way. The 1996 and 1997 results for *Rural Report* are shown in Table 5. See Appendix B for a description of the categories employed.

Table 5: Classification of *Rural Report* Content

Category type	1996		1997	
	No. of stories	Percent	No. of stories	Percent
Trade and markets	20	16.8	15	19.4
Industry structures	7	5.8	12	15.6
Industry initiatives	12	10.8	5	6.5
Activities and conferences	6	5.0	5	6.5
Pests and disease	9	7.5	12	15.6
Social	9	7.5	0	0.0
Government policy	6	5.0	7	9.1
Environment and land use	4	3.3	2	2.6
Agri-business	4	3.3	3	3.9
Research and training	6	5.0	2	2.6
Co-operatives	14	11.7	2	2.6
Weather	4	3.3	5	6.5
Expert recommendations	8	6.7	2	2.6
International	7	5.8	2	2.6
Other	3	2.5	3	3.9
Total	120	100.0	77	100.0

The range of items in 1997 is nearly as extensive as prior to the changes except for one notable exception: the disappearance of the social category, concerned with social issues such as health (mental and physical) and education. There were nine stories in this category in 1996, but none in 1997. The discrepancy between the

years may be accounted for by the fact that 1996 was an election year, so issues such as rural health and education may have been judged more newsworthy than in 1997. Another explanation may be that as the shorter timeframe means fewer stories can be aired, functional news (ie. prices at the Napier Wool Sale, analysis of a new trade agreement, dairy company payouts) takes precedence over social coverage. This would be consistent with the situation in America, where the agricultural media have been criticised for providing little coverage of social issues (eg. Reisner & Walter, 1994). This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

On the other hand, categories that increased slightly between 1996 and 1997 were those of trade and markets, activities and conferences, agri-business, government policy, weather and "other". Making more marked jumps were the categories of industry structures (5.8% to 15.6%) and pest and disease (7.5% to 15.6%). Less emphasis was placed on industry initiatives, environment and land use, research and training, expert recommendations, international stories and news of co-operatives. The latter's drop, from 11.7% of stories in 1996 to 2.6% in 1997, is easily explainable. Co-operatives were big news in 1996 due to the proposed mergers of the Tui and Kiwi dairy companies, and fertiliser companies Ravensdown and SouthFert, but by 1997 these issues had been resolved and were no longer major news stories.

The most significant category in *Rural Report*, both prior to and following the restructuring, is trade and markets. Other than that, the spread over categories is consistently wide ranging, with no one category type contributing more than one-fifth of content.

Table 6 shows the range of story content covered by mainstream news in both 1996 and 1997. These results are of interest to determine if, and in what way, the type of stories covered by mainstream news differ from those aired in *Rural Report*. The results demonstrate that mainstream news covers a narrower range of agricultural stories, thus confirming that specialist rural news has an important contribution to make to the comprehensive coverage of agricultural events and issues by radio. The

Table 6: Classification of Mainstream Content

Category type	1996		1997	
	No. of stories	Percent	No. of stories	Percent
Trade and markets	1	10.0	6	24.0
Industry structures	2	20.0	2	8.0
Industry initiatives	~	~	3	12.0
Activities and conferences	~	~	~	~
Pests and disease	4	40.0	5	20.0
Social	~	~	~	~
Government policy	~	~	~	~
Environment and land use	~	~	~	~
Agri-business	~	~	3	12.0
Research and training	1	10.0	~	~
Co-operatives	~	~	~	~
Weather	1	10.0	3	12.0
Expert recommendations	~	~	1	4.0
International	1	10.0	1	4.0
Other	~	~	1	4.0
Total	10	100.0	25	100.0

findings would also suggest that if *Rural Report* ceased to exist as a separate programming entity, and Radio New Zealand instead further absorbed agricultural news stories into the mainstream bulletins, then this would not guarantee a comparable range of rural news to listeners. The above table shows that, consistently throughout 1996 and 1997, mainstream news did not cover the categories of activities and conferences, social, government policy, environment and land use, or co-operatives. A significantly sized category in *Rural Report* that was not covered by any mainstream programme is that of Government policy. The possible implications of this will be discussed in relation to current concerns in the rural sector in the following chapter.

Mainstream news has consistently covered industry structures, pests and disease, weather and international stories. Pests and disease was the biggest category in both 1996 and 1997, contributing a proportionately higher number of stories to mainstream news than to *Rural Report* (20% and 40% of mainstream content, compared with 7.5% or 15.6% in *Rural Report*). In 1997, mainstream coverage of the categories of industry initiatives, weather and "other", increased. Falling into this

latter category was the lead story in the noon bulletin on 10 April, about a Wairarapa woman killed by a stag on her farm.

The business news programme introduced into the midday show in 1997 and targeted as a place for agricultural content aired twelve stories over the two sample weeks. These fell into four categories, all of which are consistent with the programme's business focus: trade and markets, agri-business, industry initiatives and expert recommendations. To gain a more comprehensive picture of how mainstream news is compensating for the shorter rural shows, the stories aired in business news were closely examined. The business news bulletin, introduced in 1997, has been identified by RNZ as an outlet for agri-business content. Table Two shows that the programme aired twelve rural stories during the 1997 sample weeks, but this figure is misleading in that it hides the repetitious nature of much of the content. To illustrate this point, the following lists show the nature of agricultural content aired on the business news programme. Of the 12 items aired in 1997, six were unique to the programme, and consisted of the following topics:

- 1 Forestry is poised to become New Zealand's biggest export earner.
- 2 There are problems for the Apple and Pear Marketing Board's marketing programme in Europe (this story was done by a former full-time rural reporter, Hugh Chappell).
- 3 There are problems in the relationship between Carter Holt Harvey and its Chilean associates.
- 4 Fletcher Forest has sold its Nelson interests.
- 5 A summary of meat schedule prices.
- 6 The trading results of food processing company, Cedenco.

My familiarity with *Rural Report* content suggests that of these six stories, items 1, 2 and 5 would be consistent with the programme's focus and accordingly can be seen as a genuine "pick up" by the business news in the absence of a longer *Rural Report*.

The remaining three are much more business oriented, and were deemed agricultural news only because of the primary industry focus of these companies. Although *Rural Report* has long been recognised to have a business/marketing slant, it is concerned more with the business of farming than manufacturing.

The remaining six items included in the business news over the two 1997 sample weeks are listed below. They are accompanied by a brief explanation of why they are not deemed to be additional rural content:

- 1 Tasman Extract has strong overseas interest in their green tea production
This topic had already been aired in the morning's *Rural Report*.
- 2 Summary of meat schedule prices. This is a variation on the item in the *Rural Report* bulletin which follows.
- 3 Harvard Professor Michael Porter talking in Auckland. The *Rural Report* bulletin that follows also covers this, and although the business programme's coverage is more extensive, it is not concerned solely with the agricultural component of the talk.
- 4 New Zealand has reached a new trading agreement with Taiwan. This is a short item in which the agreement is announced, with the newsreader saying there will be more in the rural news bulletin that follows. *Rural Report* also does more on the topic in the next morning's bulletin.
- 5 Australia's *Marketing* magazine supports Wools of New Zealand's branding strategy. This is an exact repeat of the morning's *Rural Report* story.
- 6 Wellington economist and trade specialist reacts to the proposed cuts to subsidies farmers in the European Union receive. This was covered in both the previous day's midday *Rural Report*, and the morning's rural bulletin.

This illustration is not meant to suggest that the repetition of story content between *Rural Report* and other bulletins is anything new, or is inherently a bad thing. But it appears the argument that *Rural Report* cutbacks have been offset by an increased

agri-business focus in business news is a fallacy. Ideally, the business news slot should complement *Rural Report*, as Hugh Chappell's item on the Apple and Pear Board does, rather than repeat pieces of it. However, the cutback in the number of full-time rural reporters obviously hinders the degree to which this can occur.

5.7 Follow-through

As outlined in Chapter Two, one of radio's unique features is its immediacy, lending itself to providing updates at regular intervals. A specialist rural timeslot on radio would be one of the first points of reference for a farmer who needs to keep up with the decisions and actions which will impact upon him or her. My familiarity with how *Rural Report* has covered events and issues in the past suggested that this follow-through has been an integral part of their coverage. For example, during the 1996 sample, *Rural Report* covered the events surrounding the proposed merger/takeover of the southern fertiliser co-operative, SouthFert, with the following stories:

16 April 1996 - Morning *Rural Report*: SouthFert shareholders are to vote on rival bids for the company. The reporter discusses feelings toward the merger/takeover and mentions the problem of Commerce Commission Approval.

16 April - Noon *Rural Report*: SouthFert has been inundated with proxy votes about the proposed merger.

18 April - Noon *Rural Report*: SouthFert shareholders are at a meeting to vote on rival bids. The reporter is at the scene and is interviewed by the host.

19 April - Morning *Rural Report*: Ravensdown bid accepted by SouthFert.

In addition, the July sample week ran another story about the continuing dispute between SouthFert and Ravensdown over the length of the takeover bid, stating that

despite a Judge's ruling it appears the case will go back to the courts. In the same period, none of these events were covered in mainstream news.

Each *Rural Report* item (apart from those on Monday mornings) was coded as to whether it was a continuation or update of the week's earlier news stories, with the aim of determining whether this feature of rural news has continued following the changes. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Continuation of Coverage in *Rural Report* Stories

Is the story a continuation?	No. of stories	1996	1997	
		Percent	No.of stories	Percent
Yes	41	38.0	20	29.4
No	67	62.0	48	70.6

As the table indicates, there has been a drop in the percentage of stories which provide updates or follow through on particular events or issues, from 38.0% of stories in 1996, to 29.4% in 1997. Importantly, while the 1996 sample weeks included a number of issues that lent themselves to this sort of on-going coverage (eg. the already mentioned SouthFert takeover and the proposed merger between two dairy companies in the North Island), the 1997 weeks also had their share of sagas, namely the debate over the decision not to introduce Rabbit Calicivirus Disease (RCD) to New Zealand, and the announcement that the Ministries of Forestry and Agriculture were to merge.

5.8 Event Orientation

The event orientation of news is well documented, and has been identified as a news value in the classic list devised by Galtung and Ruge (1973). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) write that "An 'event' routine is helpful for the organisation because compared to more abstract processes, it is more easily and less ambiguously defined as news. Events are more defensible as news" (p.121).

The coding protocol included a question as to what the story was concerned with: an event only, an event with an issue mentioned, an event with an issue covered in some depth, or an issue only. This question was adapted from that used by McGregor and Comrie (1995). Whether the restructuring has resulted in more or less issue or event coverage was thus examined, and the results for *Rural Report* are shown in Table 8. It was expected that the shorter time slot and the cutting of reporter resources would lead to increased event coverage, as issue coverage tends to require a longer time frame and input from experienced staff.

Table 8: Event Orientation in *Rural Report* Stories

Event orientation	1996		1997	
	No. of stories	Percent	No. of stories	Percent
Event only	18	15.0	19	24.6
Event with issue mentioned	25	20.8	30	39.0
Event with issue in some depth	44	36.7	20	26.0
Issue only	33	27.5	8	10.4
Total	120	100.0	77	100.0

Between 1996 and 1997 there was an increase in the event orientation of *Rural Report* items, from 15% of stories in 1996 to 24.6% in 1997. Nearly two thirds (63.6%) of 1997 items were concerned with an "event only" or an "event with issue mentioned" in comparison to 35.8% of stories prior to the change. The single largest category in the sample weeks before the restructuring was "event with issue covered in some depth", followed by a substantial proportion which were concerned specifically with the coverage of issues. Since the restructuring, issue coverage has dropped markedly.

The mainstream news programmes were also examined to give an indication of how mainstream rural news may differ from specialist coverage in terms of event or issue coverage. In the following table these results are combined, because of the small sample and little difference between 1996 and 1997.

Mainstream news items were concerned with issues in less than 10% of instances and were most likely to be about an event with an underlying issue

mentioned. In the latter instances, the event tends to be used as a "news peg", from which some, albeit limited, discussion of an issue is made. The collated results for mainstream news are similar to the findings for 1997 *Rural Report*.

Table 9: Event Orientation in Mainstream News

Event orientation	Combined 1996 and 1997	
	No. of stories	Percent
Event only	8	22.8
Event with issue mentioned	17	48.6
Event with issue in some depth	7	20.0
Issue only	3	8.6
TOTAL	35	100.0

5.9 Story Depth

In response to concern that has been raised as to the effect of less time on the depth of *Rural Report* items, the following scale was employed to judge the depth of stories:

Shallow 1 2 3 4 5 In-depth

A story was deemed to be in-depth if it provided background and context, and interpreted what the event/issue would mean for the farming community (ie. not just stating that New Zealand has signed a new trade agreement with Taiwan, but explaining what this will mean for different sectors of the industry eg. dairy and forestry exports). The depth was also often related to sourcing, and the inclusion of various points of view. However, a story that contained only one source could be judged to be in-depth if, for example, it was an extended interview with a particular person, such as a visiting beef expert, or the winner of the Young Farmer of the Year.

This scale was also used to rate the depth of mainstream stories. Pre-change and post-change results for *Rural Report*, and collated results for 1996 and 1997 mainstream news, are shown in Table 10.

In regard to *Rural Report*, the major loss appears to be at the top end of the scale, with a reduction in the number of very in-depth and comprehensive stories. In 1996, a fifth of items were coded as such but in 1997 less than 2% offered this extent of coverage. However, as the table shows, in no instances were any stories coded as being shallow. The trend, in the specialist slot, has been for an increase in the

Table 10: Depth of All Rural Stories

Story depth	1996 Rural Report		1997 Rural Report		Mainstream	
	No. of stories	Percent	No. of stories	Percent	No. of stories	Percent
1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2	1	0.8	1	1.3	4	11.4
3	30	25.0	39	50.6	19	54.3
4	65	54.2	36	46.8	9	25.7
5	24	20.0	1	1.3	3	8.6
Total	120	100.0	77	100.0	35	100.0

number of stories occupying the middle ground, classified as neither shallow nor in-depth. Whereas in 1996 almost three quarters of items were coded on the scale as either a '4' or a '5', less than half of the 1997 stories were this highly rated.

However, the results are not totally discouraging, with the specialist rural team continuing to produce a number of relatively in-depth stories, especially when compared to what is available via mainstream news. Table 10 also shows the cumulated results for mainstream news, and when compared with the figures for *Rural Report* it becomes apparent that *Rural Report*, even in its current form, offers a depth that mainstream news cannot match. It was only in features and on one occasion, in a business news story, that mainstream news was able to reach the high point on the depth scale, with the largest category being the middle mark of '3'. Of course, this is unsurprising, and does not necessarily reflect negatively on the quality of Radio New Zealand's mainstream news, which must cover a range of news items within time constraints. What these findings do illustrate is the need for a specialist rural news slot if in-depth information about the agricultural sector is to be provided. While RNZ features did perform well in terms of depth, with an average in 1997 of just one agriculturally related item per week, they are not regular enough to be useful.

And, as these features tend to be related to the day's top news stories, any manipulation to ensure agricultural coverage would amount to a quota system, which is at odds with the nature of news. (See Chapters Six and Nine for further discussion of mainstreaming and news quotas).

5.10 Good News and Bad News

The question of a positive or negative slant on news is often contained within content analyses concerned with the coverage of particular groups or topics. In regard to agricultural news, it was pointed out in Chapter Two that there has been criticism both of agricultural journalism's reluctance to cover negative issues surrounding, for example, pesticide use, and its concentration upon the "doom and gloom" aspects of farming. In addition, scholarship which suggest that specialist news tends to be more positive in outlook was discussed. For these reasons, it was seen as important to include a question as to whether a story was good, bad or neutral news, and to correspond these answers with the type of bulletin (ie. mainstream or specialist).

Table 11 compares 1996 and 1997 *Rural Report* and Table 12 shows the collated results for mainstream bulletins. While the mainstream news comes from 20 sample days, it is a small sample and for this reason, and because no major variations existed between 1996 and 1997, the results are aggregated. This enables the research to construct a stronger picture of mainstream Radio New Zealand news.

Table 11: Good News and Bad News in *Rural Report*

News type	1996		1997	
	No. of stories	Percent	No. of stories	Percent
Good news	29	24.2	21	27.3
Bad news	22	18.3	10	13
Neutral	69	57.5	46	59.7
Total	120	100.0	77	100.0

Table 12: Good News and Bad News in Mainstream Agricultural Stories

News type	Combined 1996 and 1997	
	No. of stories	Percent
Good news	7	20.0
Bad news	13	37.2
Neutral	15	42.8
Total	35	100.0

In *Rural Report* the neutral category dominated in both 1996 and 1997, and good news outweighed bad news. Following the restructuring, the proportions of good and neutral news rose slightly, at the expense of bad news. The mainstream figures appear more complex: whereas the results for good news are consistent with findings for the specialist rural news, bad news was a more dominant force, with 37.2% being coded this way (compared to 18.3% and 13% in *Rural Report*), and there were less neutral news items.

5.11 Conflict

Chapter Two discussed Corbett's (1992) research into the different levels of conflict contained in news items both within and between newspapers. She concluded that specialist news tends to cover fewer conflict-based stories, and that newspapers circulating in rural communities appear to publish less conflict-based news. To test the relevance of these ideas for specialist rural news on radio, a question was included in the content analysis coding protocol asking whether the story contained conflict, which was defined as two or more sides holding opposing views. The results are shown for both *Rural Report* and mainstream news, to illustrate the difference in conflict levels between specialist and non-specialist news.

Table 13: Conflict in All Rural Stories

	Rural Report 1996		Rural Report 1997		Mainstream 1996 and 1997	
	No. of stories	Percent	No. of stories	Percent	No. of stories	Percent
Does the story contain conflict?						
Yes	14	11.7	14	18.2	8	22.9
No	106	88.3	63	81.8	27	77.1

In 1996, 11.7% of *Rural Report* items contained conflict, rising to 18.2% in 1997. However, the figures for mainstream news were consistently higher: 20% of stories in 1996 and 24% in 1997 (giving the tabulated average of 22.9%) were coded as including conflict. It appears that mainstream news is more likely to broadcast rural news which contains an element of conflict, with a peak figure of almost a quarter of items in 1997. Between 1996 and 1997, the percentage of stories containing conflict increased in both *Rural Report* and mainstream bulletins.

5.12 Sources

5.12.1 Number of Sources

Sourcing is an important aspect of the news process. Chapter Two mentioned the concerns which surround cutbacks in reportorial resources and the effect of this on source diversity, which were addressed in this research by including content questions about the sources used. Tables 14-19 summarise the findings from this section.

Table 14: Number of Sources and Average Number Per Story

Sources	1996 Rural	1997 Rural	1996 Mainstream	1997 Mainstream
Number of sources	205	108	17	40
Average per story	1.7	1.4	1.7	1.6

A total of 370 sources were used over 232 stories. In 1996 *Rural Report* bulletins the number of sources ranged from 0 to 7, and mainstream ranged from 1 to 7. In 1997 the number of sources in *Rural Report* stories ranged from 0 to 5 and mainstream from 0 to 3. Overall, there were eight stories which employed no sourcing. Only two items, both in 1996, made use of seven sources. Of the 1996 *Rural Report* stories which had sources, 54.2% had one source, 29.7% had two, 8.5% had three sources and 7.6% had four or more. Of their 1997 counterparts with sources, 65.8% had one source, 23.3% had two sources, 8.2% had three, and 2.7% had four.

Table 14 shows that the average number of sources per *Rural Report* story has fallen slightly since the restructuring. Although the figures may appear rather low, they reflect *Rural Report* subject matter and how the show uses sources. For example, *Rural Report* has been recognised as a "technology transfer" (Mandeno, 1997) and a number of their items are concerned with the distribution of information, rather than news in the conventional sense. For example, a story about the findings of research into the usefulness of cow and calf covers employed just one source, the researcher. In such a case no real benefit would be gained from having any other sources - the aim of the story is simply to distribute data to the agricultural community.

Table 14 also shows that whereas prior to the restructuring of *Rural Report*, mainstream and specialist agricultural stories used, on average, the same number of sources, in 1997 mainstream stories are tending to use slightly more.

5.12.2 How Sources Are Used

The way a source is used is an important aspect of the sourcing debate. Table 15 shows that the restructuring appears not to have had any great effect upon the way a source's viewpoint is put across: in 1996 *Rural Report* stories, 112 of the 205 sources (54.6%) of sources either spoke for themselves or did a combination of speaking for themselves and being cited; in 1997 this dropped almost 3% to 51.8%. The most marked change, however, is the drop off in sources who speak only for themselves, from 13 (6.3%) in 1996 to one (0.9%) in 1997. This is accounted for by the drop in the number of interview segments, in particular those done by the host in the studio.

Table 15: How the Sources Are Used

Is the source...	1996 Rural	1997 Rural	1996 Mainstream	1997 Mainstream
Speaking for themselves	13	1	3	0
Being cited	93	52	6	26
Both	99	55	8	14
TOTAL	205	108	17	40

The results for mainstream news are more extreme. The proportion of sources who were cited only grew from 6 (35.3%) in 1996 to 26 (65%) in 1997. This is also reflected in Table 17 where a high percentage of "gender unknown" sources reflects the mainstream tendency to identify sources less adequately, stating, for example, that "The Wool Board says...", or "The PSA says...".

Table 16 shows what type of sources are most commonly employed in *Rural Report* and mainstream stories. The results tentatively support scholarship that suggests resource cuts in the media result in fewer voices being heard. Although there were more agricultural items aired in 1996 and hence more sources, 1997 does appear to have a slightly narrower range. Industry associations and companies are important groups in both 1996 and 1997, but in 1997 Producer Boards and Federated Farmers/Women's Division Federated Farmers took on a greater importance. These latter associations are major institutions within the agricultural community and the role they play in defining and creating the news is important, as will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Table 16: Source Type in All Rural Stories

	1996 Rural		1997 Rural		Mainstream	
	No. of sources	Percent	No. of sources	Percent	No. of sources	Percent
Industry association	24	11.8	11	10.1	8	14
Scientist/researcher	10	4.9	3	2.8	4	7
Company	34	16.5	12	11.1	7	12.3
Producer Board	12	5.8	14	13	3	5.3
FF/WDFP	8	3.9	11	10.1	4	7
Other farmer lobby groups	~	~	4	3.7	~	~
Govt/local Govt	11	5.4	5	4.6	2	3.5
MP	9	4.4	2	1.9	~	~
Minister of Agriculture	5	2.4	4	3.7	2	3.5
MAF	10	4.9	8	7.4	2	3.5
Event organiser	7	3.4	3	2.8	~	~
Farmer	19	9.3	8	7.4	4	7
Report	2	1.0	2	1.9	2	3.5
Overseas Govt source	10	4.9	1	0.9	4	7
Consultant	9	4.4	2	1.9	~	~
Expert	7	3.4	3	2.8	3	5.3
Tradenz	3	1.5	~	~	~	~
Union organisation	~	~	5	4.6	2	3.5
Ministry of Forestry	1	0.4	~	~	3	5.3
Health and education groups	5	2.4	~	~	~	~
Election candidates	3	1.5	~	~	~	~
Vox pop	4	2.0	~	~	~	~
Other	12	5.8	10	9.3	7	12.3
TOTAL	205	100.0	108	100.0	57	100.0

The range of sources in mainstream news is narrower than in *Rural Report*, although the small sample size must again be considered. Sources used proportionately more in mainstream news are the overseas Government source and the scientist/researcher.

5.12.3 Gender of Sources

Throughout the news media, females tend to be consistently under-represented as sources (McGregor & Comrie, 1995; Tuchman, 1978b). Agricultural research in New Zealand suggests that the situation may be even worse in rural news (Shaw, 1993; Fountaine, 1996). The relevance of these findings for rural radio were tested by the inclusion in the content analysis protocol of a question relating to the gender of sources.

Table 17: Gender of Sources

Gender	1996 Rural	1997 Rural	1996 Mainstream	1997 Mainstream
Male	152	81	13	20
Female	17	10	0	2
Unknown	36	17	4	18
Total	205	108	17	40

Table 17 demonstrates that there is a consistent trend, across both mainstream and specialist rural news, to employ sources that are male. In 1996 *Rural Report* stories, 152 of the 205 sources (74%) were male, as were 81 of the 108 (75%) in 1997. In 1996, 8.3% of sources were female, up slightly in 1997 to 9%. The mainstream news' use of female sources is particularly low: there were none in the 1996 sample stories, up marginally to 2 (5%) in 1997. These findings are discussed in regard to other studies of general news, and in terms of women's role in agriculture, in the next chapter.

5.12.4 Source Speaking Times

Table 18 demonstrates that between 1996 and 1997 there has been a significant decline in the time sources speak for. In 1996 sources spoke on *Rural Report* for an average of 80.8 seconds each. Following the restructuring sources speak for 38.1 seconds, less than half of the previous time. The average speaking time in mainstream news is slightly more than in 1997 *Rural Report*, although it should be noted that this mainstream figure includes features, in which sources traditionally have the opportunity to speak for longer.

Table 18: Source Speaking Times

	1996 Rural	1997 Rural	Mainstream
Total source speaking time	9053	2136	970
Average source speaking time	80.8	38.1	38.8

5.12.5 Interview Segments

Table 19 provides a good indication of the change in *Rural Report* format. As will be discussed shortly, in regard to the use of the reporter voice, the interview, done both by the reporter on the spot and the host in the studio, has become a rare news technique rather than an oft-used tool. Of the 120 *Rural Report* stories in 1996, 75 (62.5%) included an interview segment, which averaged 105.6 seconds in length. In 1997, just 6 of the 77 items (7.8%) broadcast an interview component, and these segments were approximately half the time, 52.5 seconds.

Table 19: Number and Length of *Rural Report* Interview Segments

	1996 Rural	1997 Rural
Total interview seconds	7920	315
Number of interview segments	75	6
Average interview length (seconds)	105.6	52.5

5.13 Use of the Reporter Voice

It quickly became apparent, in listening to pre-change and post-change *Rural Report* stories, that the structure of the stories had changed quite drastically. Whereas in 1996, a "voice report" was common, in 1997 stories tend to consist of the in-studio host reading the item, with source soundbites where necessary. Table 20 summarises the results.

Table 20: Use of Reporter Voice in *Rural Report* Stories

Is the reporter voice heard?	1996		1997	
	No. of stories	Percent	No. of stories	Percent
Yes	74	61.7	9	11.7
No	46	38.3	68	88.3

In 1996 the reporter voice, through the use of a "voice report" or an interview between the newsreader and the reporter, was heard in 61.7% of stories, falling to just 11.7% in 1997. In 1996 there were 13 different reporters who filed stories on

Rural Report, falling to five in 1997. Kevin Ikin, the Wellington-based reporter and presenter, was the most heard reporter in 1997, filing five of the nine stories which included a voice report. These findings reflect the staffing changes that have been made, as well as the shorter time frame for stories.

The results in regard to those agricultural stories broadcast in mainstream bulletins were inconclusive. The reporter voice was not a major component of mainstream news stories in either 1996 or 1997, although there was an increase in its occurrence: in 1996 only three out of ten (30%) used the reporter voice compared with 11 out of 25 (44%) stories in 1997. A possible increase in the use of the rural reporter specialist in supplying the increased agricultural content for mainstream news was unable to be tested due to the small number of items utilising the reporter.

5.14 Rural Features: *Country Saturday* and *Country Life*

Known as *Country Saturday* in 1996 and now repackaged and relabelled as *Country Life*, the weekend magazine programme is another component of the rural news service provided by National Radio. It was decided to write about the format changes descriptively, rather than attempt a quantitative analysis, because of the dramatic changes which include the discontinuation of some sections. However, in the following tables, the average length of sections is provided, to give some indication of the way the programmes are organised.

The Saturday programme, while not strictly news, provides a summary of the week's happenings, and was traditionally an important outlet for feature making by the rural reporters. However, as pointed out in Chapter Nine, this programme is now made by the Features Department.

Only four Saturdays were examined, with the aim of providing an overview of what is available for weekend listeners. In 1995, the programmes of the 13th April and 13th July were examined. The commonly cited length of the 1996 show is two hours but this includes the 6am, 6.30am, 7am, and 7.30am news breaks. The

time of actual programme was approximately 100 minutes, or one hour and forty minutes. Table 21 shows the components of the show, and the average length of the segments (excluding the songs and introduction, which fit around the longer segments).

The week's main news is an abbreviated account of the key rural news stories from the preceding week. In the *Country Saturday* format this was followed by the Fishing Report, which was either one long story, as in April when it took an in-depth look at the Fishing Industry Association conference and the topics addressed, or a number of shorter items. A similar format was used in the Forestry Report. The Rural Round-Up, which took approximately 5 minutes, employed three reporters, representing different areas of the country (the northern part of the North Island, the

Table 21: Segment Length in Country Saturday

Time	Segment	Average length*
6am NEWS BULLETIN		
6.05am-6.30am	Introduction	
	Week's rural news	9 minutes
	Song	
	Fishing Report	11 minutes
6.30am NEWS BULLETIN		
6.35am-7am	Introduction	
	Forestry Report	8 minutes
	Song	
	Rural Round-Up	5 minutes
	Interview	7 minutes
	Music and preview	
7am NEWS BULLETIN		
7.05am-7.30am	Introduction	
	Feature	21 minutes
	Song	
7.30am NEWS BULLETIN		
7.35am-8am	Introduction	
	Environmental News	3 minutes
	Environmental story/ies	14 minutes
	Birdwatch	5 minutes
	Song and wrap-up	

*The average times for the segments have been rounded to the nearest minute.

southern North Island, and the South Island), speaking about regional conditions in regard to factors such as weather and growing conditions. The interview segment tended to be between 6 and 8 minutes in length, and would involve a reporter talking with some agricultural figure, such as a retiring agricultural scientist, or the President of the Federated Farmers.

The feature component in the second hour takes an in-depth look at an issue, in a longer time frame of about 21 minutes. In April it was concerned with agrichemical use, and July's topic was the potential for, and issues surrounding the development of, a hemp industry in New Zealand.

The environmental news segment contained a range of items about, for example, the Kiwi Recovery Programme, and the RCD virus. Around this time another two, longer stories were also aired: such as an item concerned with the first wind farm opened in the Wairarapa, a three-minute story about a company making hats with possum fur, and an interview based item with the Department of Conservation caretaker on Stephens Island.

It is therefore apparent that the programme contained a diverse range of content, not necessarily about agriculture in the conventional sense, but concerned with resource and land use topics, and going so far as to include a nature component, in the form of Birdwatch. The hosts introduced each segment and kept listeners aware of what was coming up in the programme, all of which was interspersed with songs, often chosen for their relationship to the subject of a preceding item.

The 1997 equivalent airs from after the 7am news, up until 8am, and is called *Country Life*. It is also broadcast on Friday evenings. There were format changes both between 1996 and 1997, and between the two 1997 programmes analysed, although the latter were organisational changes rather than content based. The programme averages 51 minutes in length.

The features in 1997 were on the Forestry Research Institute at Rotorua, and Maori rural drift to Northland. In-depth story topics were concerned with : the

Table 22: Segment Length in Country Life

Time	Segment	Average length*
7am NEWS BULLETIN		
7.09am-8am	Introduction	
	Regional Round-up	4 minutes
	Week's main rural news	6 minutes
	Feedback	1 minute
	Story	7 minutes
	Feature	25 minutes
	Story	5 minutes
	Wrap-up	

*The average times for the segments have been rounded to the nearest minute.

possible banning of hunting in the United Kingdom, which was mainly based around an interview by Kim Hill, aired earlier in the week; a story about farm forestry, involving an in-depth interview with a farm forester; discussion of the 1997 pipfruit markets; and a profile of an English market which sells New Zealand lamb. The 1997 programme includes a feedback section, inviting listener response or comment, and also uses a "guest" in the Regional Round-Up, who outlines something that is happening in their region, or what conditions are like. Other than this "guest", the whole country is now covered by one reporter, reflecting the cut in reportorial resources. In terms of length, all the components have stayed reasonably consistent, but the Fishing and Forestry reports, the Environmental News and the Birdwatch, as well as the songs, have all disappeared as the bulletin time has been halved. However, Radio New Zealand has indicated that a new environmental show will be introduced later in 1997 (Thompson, 1997a, p.2).

The weekend programme, although not news in the same sense as *Rural Report*, is an important part of National Radio's coverage. The new show, *Country Life*, has retained the summary of the week's rural news, and the regional round-up. On the other hand, the fishing and forestry sectors have lost the extended reports on their industry, and those with environmental interests can no longer hear environmental news or the Birdwatch. The songs have also gone, decreasing the entertainment value of the show.

The feature component of the weekend show may be particularly important given the effect of the restructuring on the weekday bulletins. Not only do the features cover a diverse range of topics, the longer timeframe means they have the ability to provide in-depth examination of topics. Despite the *Country Life* programme being shorter than its 1996 predecessor, the average length of the feature has risen, from 21 minutes in 1996 to 25 minutes in 1997.

Two feature topics in the sample are of particular interest. In July 1997, the feature on Maori rural drift in Northland includes discussion of the social aspects of this phenomenon, which is important in light of earlier findings that the social category has disappeared following *Rural Report's* restructuring. This provides support for having a feature outlet, which is free to explore such topics, as part of Radio New Zealand's rural service.

The April 1996 feature story on pesticide use is also of interest because of research which has accused the agricultural media of ignoring the topic due to the importance of the advertising revenue agrichemical companies provide. Sommer and Pilisuk (1982) claim that the four periodicals they studied were largely supported by their pesticide advertisers. They write that "Farmers have a difficult time finding reliable sources of information about pest control procedures" (p.41), and suggest that an independent farm periodical may therefore be desirable, although they question whether such a publication would survive in the marketplace. Logsdon (1992) made a similar argument, and on this basis, it was suggested in Chapter Two that National Radio, as a publicly funded broadcaster, is New Zealand's solution to any problems caused by a reliance on agri-business revenue. That National Radio's rural programmes have covered the topic of pesticide use on more than one occasion (there were also stories on the issue in April 1996 *Rural Report* bulletins) provides support for this. Other broadcasters' efforts to tackle the topic have been more controversial, as the following comment, written in regard to a television documentary aired on Television One in 1997, shows:

Hound got a call the other day from TVNZ's promo department telling us a documentary was soon to be screened. It was the very same doco that had caused all the fuss lately...Rubber Gloves and Green Fingers. The programme has been a bit of a hot potato with TVNZ worried it was defamatory and its makers, equally worked up that it wasn't being shown... ("If you can't beat 'em", August 18, 1997).

5.15 Conclusion

The results show that the restructuring of *Rural Report* has had a notable impact upon content, particularly in regard to the number of stories covered, the length of stories, the increased role of Wellington as a place of origin, the drop in issue coverage and decrease in story depth, less speaking time for sources and fewer interview segments. The results have also built a picture of characteristics of specialist rural coverage, and how it varies from that provided by mainstream news programmes.

Analysis of the specialist rural programming has also included the weekend show, *Country Life*. Although the programme has been halved in length, and the Fishing and Forestry Reports have disappeared altogether, the news summary and regional round-up remains much the same as before, providing a good overview of the week's main events and conditions around the country. However, the effects of the restructuring are visible in that the round-up is done by one reporter, as opposed to three in 1996. Given the cut to reporter numbers, there are logistical challenges in maintaining a comprehensive overview of the country, although this may be partially offset by the use of a "guest" farmer. The feature has also been retained and appears to be a valuable outlet for the examination of an event or issue related to rural life. A broad sweep of topics are covered, ranging, in the sample period, from pesticide use to Maori rural drift in Northland.

The following chapter discusses the content analysis findings in relation to other studies of broadcast news, and with reference to themes in the study of agricultural journalism.

CHAPTER SIX CONTENT ANALYSIS DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

The content analysis results, summarised in the previous chapter, demonstrate that the recent restructuring has impacted upon *Rural Report* and *Country Life* content. The aim of this chapter is to discuss these findings in relation to themes in agricultural and broadcast news research.

This research goes some way towards meeting Walter's (1992) call for, amongst other things,

studies of the content of communications about agriculture and how it is processed. This line of research would examine the images of agriculture and agricultural issues that various sources - newspaper and magazine articles, television, advertising, movies, research reports, etc. - communicate to the public and policy makers... (p.30).

6.2 Story Length

The findings for *Mana* news in McGregor and Comrie (1995) have some pertinence for this research, as *Mana* news is, like *Rural Report*, a specialist National Radio programme which underwent restructuring during the period in which it was examined. The changes in *Mana* news story duration, from a 288 second average in 1990, to 136.3 seconds in 1994, were, as with *Rural Report*, the result of programme format changes. However, while the *Rural Report* bulletins now have shorter stories, and fewer of them, "Mana news stories have decreased in length during a time span in which the programme length shortened and more stories were covered in each programme" (McGregor & Comrie, 1995, p.30).

When it is considered that the specialist news team now consists of two reporters, in comparison to the previous ten, and that the programme length has been significantly reduced, the impact of the restructuring on coverage is predictable. In

Chapter Nine, reporters Jill Galloway and Hugh Chappell discuss these constraints further.

6.3 Origin

Following the restructuring a greater percentage of agricultural news stories originated in Wellington, from 18.5% in 1996 to 41.2% in 1997. This provides support for Johnston's prediction, outlined in Chapter Two, that "the whole feel of public radio is going to be more Wellington based...National Radio...is largely produced in Wellington and is starting to sound like that" (quoted in Sargent, 1996, p.14). Others have also criticised Radio New Zealand for having an increasingly big-city focus. Thompson (1997b) quotes an unnamed source as saying "...that in their opinion RNZ was rapidly going blind in provincial and rural New Zealand. 'It's fine in Auckland and Wellington,' they said, 'but the rest of the country is just a big black hole, dead air'" (p.4).

The leap in the number of items originating in Wellington is not surprising, given that during the 1997 sample weeks, one of the two full-time reporters was based in Wellington. There may also be a correlation with the number of stories that are initiated by organisations such as Federated Farmers and the various industry boards, which are based in the capital city and are significant sources of agricultural news. However, when these results are compared with those in McGregor and Comrie (1995) it becomes apparent that agricultural news items are less likely to originate in Wellington than are political, health, crime and Maori stories. National Radio, in the form of *Morning Report*, was the broadcaster in their study which had the highest Wellington figures, at 67.5% for news and 68.6% for Features.

It should be pointed out that one of the motivations behind the restructuring of the rural programmes was the reallocation of rural reporters as regional reporters, in an effort by Radio New Zealand to increase the quantity and quality of their

regional coverage. However, the content analysis did not include an examination of regional content, so it is not known whether this has occurred.

6.4 Conflict and Event Orientation

The conflict element of news has often been scrutinised, and is identified by Galtung and Ruge (1973) as a news value. Cohen, Adoni and Bantz (1990) found, in regard to television news, that 53% of the news items they sampled contained some component of social conflict, and that such items tend to be aired closer to the beginning of the newscast, reflecting their perceived newsworthiness.

The occurrence of conflict has also been linked with specialist and mainstream news and, as discussed in Chapter Two, with rural and urban circulatory areas (Corbett, 1992). *Mana* news, a specialist broadcast programme, was the least likely of all broadcasters studied by McGregor and Comrie (1995) to air stories that contain controversy. While National Radio's *Morning Report* news items were inclusive of controversy in 22.6% of cases, and features in 38.3% of instances, the figure for *Mana* news was 12.8%. The content analysis results in the previous chapter are consistent with this: 11.7% of *Rural Report* stories contained conflict in 1996, rising to 18.2% in 1997, and mainstream news averaged conflict in 22.9% of items.

On the surface, these figures lend tentative support to Corbett's (1992) suggestion that specialist reporters are less likely to cover conflict-based news stories than are their general counterparts. Yet when it is pointed out that the majority of rural topics aired in mainstream news were also covered by *Rural Report*, a more probable explanation becomes that conflict based stories have a greater attraction for mainstream news. Mainstream news tends to be "hard news", which is characterised by an "A versus B" format, whereas programmes such as *Rural Report* and *Mana* are a mixture of hard and soft news, in which there is less need to juxtapose viewpoints, and therefore less conflict. The topics that mainstream news covered in the sample

weeks were, for example, often related to pests and disease (Rabbit Calicivirus Disease, the discovery of gypsy moth, Mad Cow Disease) or other "big" events (eg. release of the Opuha Dam report, Federated Farmers' criticism of the way current account figures are calculated). Stories such as these are at the intersection of agriculture and the wider public, and tend to have a natural conflict element that can be exploited.

Conflict has also been linked with the mainstream media's attraction to events, which are inclined to be both less ambiguous and more conflict-filled. Reisner (1992) studied event orientation in regard to animal rights coverage and found that

The mass media, also generally uninformed about agriculture, covers events such as rallies and demonstrations in preference to more normal ongoing activities, such as routine farm production (p.48).

The content analysis results also show that *Rural Report*, the specialist news programme, provides more issue coverage than mainstream news. However, the degree of issue coverage fell following the restructuring, which supports the idea that time constraints impact upon the coverage of issues, and reinforces the importance of an extended specialist news slot for providing comprehensive news coverage. This is supported by Reisner and Walter (1994), who write that

At the typical general-interest newspaper, news-gathering routines, economic imperatives, and journalistic norms predispose journalists to produce event-based and conflict-filled stories of interest to the widest possible public (p.526).

6.5 Good News and Bad News

Overseas research has faulted both the agricultural media's apparent unwillingness to address negative aspects surrounding agricultural practice, such as possible problems with pesticide use, (Sommer & Pilisuk, 1982) and also the "doom and gloom" angle of much coverage (Gay, 1986). It has been suggested that beat reporters tend to

concentrate on positive stories, with the occasional exception of the scandal story (Reisner & Walter, 1994). However, the results of this project show that *Rural Report* provides a high number of neutral (ie. neither good nor bad) stories, whereas mainstream news, while being relatively consistent with *Rural Report* in terms of good news, has significantly more bad news. As there were few stories covered in the mainstream news that were not also covered in the specialist rural news slot (namely the NASA farm-on-the-moon story, and some agri-business items), it does not appear that *Rural Report* is avoiding bad news stories, but that, as with conflict, mainstream news is more attracted to this extreme.

It is consistent both with overseas scholarship (eg. Nelkin, 1987; Corbett, 1992) and New Zealand broadcasting research (eg. Te Awa, 1996) that specialist news tends to be more positive in outlook. The relatively large neutral category in *Rural Report* is often related to the way it approaches stories, taking a positive approach to a negative situation. For example, an unfavourable situation, the "Mad Cow" outbreak in the United Kingdom which led to a drop in demand for beef products, is given a positive spiel in a story about New Zealand being well placed to supply replacement stock to British farmers. Other news items which tended to be classified as neutral were those concerned with seminars and conferences, such as a 1996 story about a seminar being held to address the subject of the farm labour crisis.

6.6 Categories of Rural News

The results indicate that following the restructuring there is a narrower range of story topics. Masterton and Patching (1990), discussing broadcast news generally, state that "For those who have to compile bulletins, the shorter the bulletin the greater the problem of choosing what goes in. In longer bulletins it is usually easier to achieve a balanced line-up of items" (p.39). However, the *Rural Report* range is still more comprehensive than that of mainstream news, suggesting that specialist rural programming is necessary if the range of news is to be maintained.

Two key concerns were identified in the previous chapter, which are consistent with other agricultural research or with current concerns within rural communities. These are:

- 1 that since the restructuring there have been no social stories on *Rural Report*, and that social aspects of agriculture were not covered at all by mainstream news in the sample weeks and
- 2 that while *Rural Report* covers Government Policy in both 1996 and 1997, mainstream news does not at any time.

However, these criticisms do not appear to be specific to radio content. The emphasis within *Rural Report* on issues such as trade and markets is consistent with my earlier unpublished study of agricultural content in newspapers (Fountaine, 1996) as well as with overseas research discussed in Chapter Two (eg. Hillgren, 1989). My findings as to the types of agricultural news provided by three general and one specialist newspaper, which classified news by Olowu's (1990) categories, found that the majority of stories were concerned with "pricing and marketing" and the human interest category, which included social implications of agricultural practice, was the smallest in all cases. In addition, like mainstream radio, the general newspapers sampled were more likely than the specialist publication to publish international content that makes no direct linkages with New Zealand agriculture.

In the United States, a similar preoccupation with commercial aspects of agriculture has been identified as a point of concern (eg. Walter, 1996). This may have implications for other types of coverage, as Reisner and Walter (1994) found that in newspaper coverage of agriculture there is a lack of socially orientated stories.

The results for *Rural Report* show that following the restructuring, the social news category has disappeared altogether. Although the fact that 1996 was an election year may have boosted the amount of social news aired, a drop off in social news is not an incongruous outcome of the drastic pruning of programme length

which forces socially based stories to compete with more immediately "functional" news. Mainstream news did not cover any socially-based stories during the sample weeks, suggesting that if there is any likelihood of rural social issues being covered, it will be in the specialist timeslot. In a similar vein, rural reporter Jill Galloway has publicly expressed her concern over the loss of specialist reporting resources, saying: "I think specialised reporting is very important when covering farming and agribusiness issues, *as well as the social issues which impact so much on regions*" (quoted in Barton, 1996, p.11 - my emphasis). As suggested in the closing pages of the previous chapter, given the cutbacks to the weekday *Rural Report* bulletins, the *Country Life* feature may be particularly important as an outlet for in-depth examination of such issues.

Government policy, a significant category in *Rural Report*, was not covered by any mainstream programmes, which has some relevance to the current feelings within the New Zealand agricultural community that the sector is experiencing a loss of political influence. This again stresses the importance of retaining the specialist slot if the range of topics is to be maintained. It also suggests that rurally-orientated political stories are being broadcast only to those believed to have specific rural interests rather than being seen as of national importance. This is backed up by McGregor's (1995) research which showed agriculture is not an important issue in political coverage printed by daily newspapers: in coverage of the 1993 General Election less than 1% of stories mentioned agriculture as an issue.

As discussed earlier, in Chapter Two, the cuts to rural radio have been interpreted in terms of an urban/rural divide. In the rural community, some see the restructuring as part of a wider erosion of services, as demonstrated in comments made by survey participants (see Chapter Eight). Former Prime Minister Mike Moore sums up the feelings of many when he writes, in the agricultural newspaper *Country Wide*, that

rural New Zealand has gone from being the backbone of the economy to becoming an afterthought. Things are out of balance. No one speaks for rural and provincial New Zealand in Government...Rural interests on everything from Treaty issues, transport, gun laws, resource management, health, education services are seldom heard... (Moore, 1997, p.2).

While Moore's criticisms are aimed primarily at Government, they also hint at concerns about a growing gulf between rural and urban understandings. Although the media would no doubt argue that they are merely reflecting society (ie. that if the politicians are not addressing rural issues, then the media will not be either), sparse coverage of rural political issues, confined mainly to specialist programming, does nothing to help these groups understand one another. And, says Walter (1992), "The most apparent practical need is for stronger linkages among agricultural and non agricultural publics" (pp.30-31). He sees this as fundamental to the development of sustainable agriculture.

The wider importance of these content findings can be summarised in a statement made by Reisner and Walter (1994), who studied specialist and general newspapers in the United States. They concluded that

neither general newspapers nor farm magazines offer consistent or complete coverage of current agricultural practice or current social concerns. *Instead, each presents its audience with a fragmented and often biased picture of agriculture and the demands society is making on it* (p.534, my emphasis).

The attitudes and concerns of rural journalists and radio listeners toward, amongst other things, the content of rural radio programming, is discussed further in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine.

6.7 Sources

McGregor and Comrie (1995) write that "Sources of news, people cited, quoted or who speak in stories, impact decisively on the presentation and construction of news" (p.41). The sources employed by *Rural Report*, and the way they are used both before and after the restructuring can be compared with other broadcast news

findings. In the *Balance and Fairness* study undertaken by McGregor and Comrie (1995), National Radio's *Morning Report* items averaged 1.4 sources, its features 2.3 and the specialist programme, *Mana* news, 1.5. The figures for *Rural Report* are comparable with *Mana* news: 1.7 sources per story in 1996 to 1.4 in 1997. This drop in the number of sources supports the theory that the more constraints journalists work under, (eg. deadlines and geographic location), the narrower the range of sources relied upon for stories (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

In the 1997 sample, the stories aired in mainstream news had a slightly higher number of sources per item (1.7) although *Rural Report* sources have consistently spoken for longer. However, in the aftermath of the restructuring there has been a drastic reduction in source speaking time, from 80.8 seconds in 1996, to an average of 38.1 seconds in 1997. Additionally, sources in *Rural Report* prior to the restructuring were often interviewed: a notable 66.9% of speaking sources were interviewed in 1996, dropping to 10.7% in 1997, which compares to 18.8% of broadcast sources in McGregor and Comrie (1995).

The results for the number of sources in specialist and mainstream stories on National Radio differ from those for specialist and general newspapers. The specialist newspaper sampled in Fountaine (1996) had a greater average number of sources per story than did any of its mainstream counterparts.

Reisner and Walter (1994) found, and this is consistent with the results for *Rural Report*, that specialist rural reporters "rely on agricultural sources - agricultural scientists, agribusinesses and their public relations agencies, commodity groups and farmers - for most of their editorial copy" (p.527). An example of the way these groups "make" the news, from 1996, is a short item announcing that "The Meat Board says that it is a myth that most of New Zealand's meat exports are used for manufacturing purposes". The Meat Board is the only source used. Another example is the 1996 story concerned with the reaction of Federated Farmers to the appointment of a new United States Commerce Secretary. Yet another item begins with "Wools of New Zealand says that...", and goes on to tell how Australia's

Marketing magazine has come out in support of their Fernmark branding strategy, with the two story sources being Wools of New Zealand and the magazine editorial.

Another story, from 1996, concerned with a Federated Farmers statement that the current account deficit figures do not show the real extent of Government debt and are contributing to the high New Zealand dollar, demonstrates the difference between mainstream and *Rural Report* coverage. The mainstream version of this story is 58 seconds long, is done by the Economics Correspondent, and has the President of the Federated Farmers as its only source. The *Rural Report* version of the same subject is 309 seconds in length, involves the reporter looking back on the Federated Farmers' campaign against the high dollar, and has five sources, three of them from Federated Farmers and two from Government.

These examples not only illustrate how organisations such as the Federated Farmers can create a news story by making their opinion on something known, but also demonstrate how *Rural Report* acts in an in-depth, follow-up role. This aspect of the programme continues following the changes. For example, in 1997, a 28-second item in the business news, announcing that New Zealand has reached a comprehensive new trade agreement with Taiwan, is followed up in a more in-depth, 129-second *Rural Report* story which outlines benefits for specific agricultural sectors.

The disproportionate number of male and female sources in news stories has been the subject of scrutiny. Fountaine (1996) found a 5-9% range of female sources in newspaper's agricultural news stories. Unpublished research by McGregor (cited in McGregor, 1992) found that 13.5% of general print stories use female sources, with a further 3.3% using both male and female sources. The situation is echoed in results for the broadcast sector. While McGregor and Comrie (1995) found the proportion of women as sources, across topics of health, crime, Maori news and politics, ranged from 13% to 34%, the results for rural radio stories are consistently less than 10%.

Gay (1986) touches on the importance of this issue for women involved in agriculture. She quotes a female farmer who "wants many more members of the news media 'to make women equal' on the farm. 'I am a farmer, not a farm wife or farm woman. This terminology will become more important because women are so involved in farming'" (p.54). According to Shaw (1993), farming women feel that specialist rural publications portray women more realistically than the general media. Testing this, Fountaine (1996) found that the specialist newspaper sampled did in fact have more female sources, although the figure was still less than 10%. A similar situation occurs in National Radio's rural programming: *Rural Report* performed better than mainstream news, but still has a peak figure of just 9% female sources. The restructuring does not appear to have had a negative impact on the proportion of female sources, which rose very slightly between 1996 and 1997, from 8.3% to 9%.

Tuchman (1978b) has attempted to explain the underrepresentation of females by reference to the news media emphasis upon institutionalised sources. In the rural arena it is sources such as Federated Farmers and other industry organisations who play a key role in creating and defining the news, and these organisations have few women active in high profile positions. As Shaw (1993) points out, it is the Federated Farmers or industry boards whose comments on major industry decisions are deemed newsworthy, and because there are few women in these positions, "the image of the knowledgeable farmer is male" (p.81).

According to Rawlings (1997), just two of the 36 director positions on the Meat, Wool and Dairy Producer Boards are filled by women. In addition, a report recently released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (based on 1990-93 data), entitled "*Change and Diversity: Opportunities for and Constraints on Rural Women in New Zealand*", criticises the rural media for their portrayal of women, stating that "The inability of (sic) refusal of rural newspapers like *NZ Farmer*, *Rural News* and *Straight Furrow*, to represent the reality of rural women's lives is both indicative of and condones some very outdated ideas" (quoted in Rawlings, 1997, p.11). In an attempt to rectify the situation, MAF is to send the report to producer

boards, seeking their support and ideas on how more women can become involved, and is also applying to Unesco for funding to extend their Gender Equal programme. If Tuchman's (1978b) argument is correct, provided these moves lead to more female representation in agricultural organisations, there should, in time, be a flow-on effect on the number of female sources in the news media.

6.8 Mainstreaming

The content analysis results demonstrate that mainstream news and *Rural Report* news differ in certain ways, leading to the conclusion that any further increase in mainstream news, at the expense of the specialist programme, would not guarantee the same range and follow through of topics, or depth of coverage. The importance of having a specialist outlet for agricultural news has also been illustrated by research into rural news content in newspapers. In general newspapers, the specialist farming page is central to the coverage of rural stories, with the farming page carrying more agricultural content than any other single news page (Fountaine, 1996).

It has already been pointed out that there is some overlap of content between *Rural Report* and mainstream news. Of course, this also happened before the restructuring, as certain rural news topics have long been recognised as having a wider public importance. However, given that Radio New Zealand has identified increased emphasis on rural content in other news programmes as compensation for the reduced specialist slot, the mainstream content was scrutinised to determine what form this has taken. The previous chapter showed that of the twelve rural stories aired in the business news segment, just three appear to be genuinely additional content, with the others being either repeats or inconsistent with the *Rural Report* focus.

The Chief Executive of RNZ, Sharon Crosbie, states that "...we have...adopted a policy of mainstreaming rural stories to better reflect their importance to all of New Zealand. There will, therefore, be a greater emphasis on

rural news in our main news bulletins" (Crosbie, 1997a, p.14). It is indisputable that there is agricultural content in mainstream National Radio news, and that this coverage can be of high quality. A letter in the *New Zealand Farmer* praises the coverage given by National Radio's Kim Hill to the issue of hormone treated beef (Cassidy, 1997, p.12), demonstrating that mainstream news can provide valuable agricultural coverage. However, the stories covered by mainstream news during the 1997 sample weeks appear to be news on their own merits. Coverage by mainstream news in 1996 and 1997 (excluding the business news content, already summarised in the previous chapter) was concerned with the following topics: Rabbit Calicivirus Disease and Gypsy Moth, the merger between the ministries of Forestry and Agriculture, the release of Opuha Dam report, the Fishing Industry Association's adoption of a voluntary code of paying foreign crews the minimum wage, the launch of an Occupational Safety and Health campaign against Leptospirosis, the killing of a woman by a stag on her farm, the continued mad cow disease fall out in the United Kingdom, the opening of New Zealand's first commercial wind farm, NASA's attempts to begin food production on the moon, and the Federated Farmers' claim that the current account figures are misleading. These stories all contain elements of conventional newsworthiness. There was one other story, aired at the end of a midday bulletin in 1997, about a farm tourism venture that allows overseas visitors to adopt a sheep. This item was a "lightener", using music and humour to end the bulletin.

Radio New Zealand's pledge to "mainstream" rural news may be part of a larger trend in agricultural coverage. However, it effectively ignores the unique nature of *Rural Report* and the fact that much of its content lacks the conventional newsworthiness that this would require. *Rural Report* is not confined to covering the big stories but fulfils other functions, some of which are outlined and illustrated below:

- As a "technology transfer": Bay of Plenty Fertiliser has developed a granule fertiliser, a world first (1996); a dairy researcher has found there are no gains in using covers on cows and calves (1996); turnips have proved to be the lowest yielding crop in terms of milk production (1996).
- As a diary of events in the agricultural world: The Dairy Board is going ahead with a joint venture plant in Saudi Arabia to strengthen their marketing thrust in the Middle East (1996); coverage of a Beef Council meeting (1996); and the first major snowfall in Otago (1997).
- As chronicler of achievement: The bee industry has achieved an export milestone, filling a large order to Canada (1997)
- Utilising a wide definition of agriculture, which includes environmental and organic news, such as that the Christchurch Organic Campaign is beginning (1997).

The impact of the restructuring on *Rural Report's* ability to function as a "technology transfer" has been questioned. Walter (1992) expresses concern that North American farmers and agricultural professionals do not have access to channels for communicating the information they generate to those outside their local communities, but the fear in New Zealand appears to be the continued erosion of such channels.

Agricultural communicator Clive Dalton says New Zealand was once famous for its technology transfer. 'We had scientific liaison officers who talked to scientists, interpreted the research, passed it on to farmers...we gave it all away when we restructured and corporatised', says Dalton. The *Journal of Agriculture*, the flagship of practical information transfer, fell victim to progress. Rural radio broadcasts are the latest casualty (McCaw, 1997, p.3).

According to Hillgren (1989) there is currently a move in agricultural journalism away from the traditionally narrow focus on farmers' perspectives, to the consumer perspective. She states that

any urban newspaper can assign a specialist to write about agricultural topics from a consumer perspective. Just a few current issues include pesticides..., hormones in cattle production, meat and beef inspection, adequacy of federal inspection of foods, the impact of drought on the nation, and the quality of groundwater contaminated by pesticides (p.36).

Several of these issues, or variations on them, were included in Radio New Zealand's mainstream coverage in the sample periods in 1997. Walter (1992), while recognising the value of "agroecological" coverage, writes that

Similarly, the public needs easier and surer exposure to information about the practice and structure of agriculture, as well as information about how to practice sustainable food and fiber consumption" (p.31).

My results suggest that any radio coverage of the practice and structure of agriculture would be more likely to be aired in *Rural Report* than in mainstream bulletins.

Ultimately, the promise of mainstreaming is problematic in a wider sense, for as McGregor and Comrie (1995) point out, news and quotas are incompatible ideas. Journalists would argue that if something is deemed to be news, then it is, and that it should be judged against all other news. Yet RNZ's comments suggest that somehow there will be more rural news, or at least better rural coverage, in mainstream programmes. Chief Executive Sharon Crosbie has said that the cuts to *Rural Report* are accompanied by the adoption of a "mainstreaming" policy, to better reflect the importance of rural stories to all of New Zealand, and to bring an increased emphasis on such news in the main bulletins (Crosbie, 1997a, p.14). The content analysis results do show a slight overall increase in the number of agricultural stories in mainstream news, (although the number of agricultural feature stories dropped) and the introduction of a midday business programme has provided an additional rural news outlet. However, an examination of those stories aired in mainstream bulletins suggests that they were news in their own right. It is difficult to see the Radio New Zealand assurances as anything other than rhetoric, an attempt by the organisation to placate listeners. Indeed, Chapter Seven shows that the majority of survey participants do not believe this "mainstreaming" has occurred, and in Chapter Nine,

Programme Commissioner, Michael Peck, states that mainstreaming was only an option **if no specialist slot was retained.**

6.9 Implications

The results of the content analysis show that the restructuring of *Rural Report* has impacted negatively on content. This chapter has examined key changes in reference to other local and overseas research, and to concerns within the rural community. Radio New Zealand's argument that the shortened *Rural Report* has been partially offset by an increased emphasis upon agricultural news in other bulletins has been examined, with the conclusion that there remains a need for a specialist rural time slot if a comprehensive news service is to be provided. There is both a proportion of rural news that is "news" in its own right, and a range of stories that, while not adhering to conventional notions of newsworthiness, contribute to a comprehensive news service, which entertains and informs both the urban and rural communities of New Zealand.

6.10 Limitations

Although content analysis may be described as an objective methodology, the use of the researcher as the only coder brings an element of subjectiveness to the results. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, this can be minimised if the coding protocol is designed to be as objective as possible, and provided the categories are well defined. The protocol and category definitions used in this research are reproduced in Appendix A and B, and the justification for the aspects of content examined are provided in Chapters Four and Five. Also, in Chapter Two, the scholarship which informed the research is discussed. Content analysis results are strengthened by intelligent theorising.

The researcher's knowledge and experience of content analysis also helps to offset any subjectivity. As McGregor (1995) points out, the methodology encourages

a scientific reading of news in which researchers are "trained to bring to their analysis a common frame of reference" (p.315). The high (93%) intracoder reliability suggests this was done successfully.

The study is also limited by the small sample size for mainstream news. Only thirty five stories were aired in the non *Rural Report* bulletins examined over the 20 sample days, and the range of mainstream bulletins included (6am news, 6-7am features, midday news, midday features and business news) was not large. However, the key aim of the research was to examine the changes to the specialist programming, and the mainstream sample yielded sufficient stories to give an indication of how specialist and mainstream rural content differs, and thus the feasibility of a "mainstreaming" policy.

The type of sampling used, consecutive day weeks, was necessary for the examination of issue follow-through, and how the restructuring has affected this feature of *Rural Report*. However, the use of a constructed week sample could be beneficial, particularly for gaining further insight into the incidence of rural stories in mainstream news.

6.11 Strengths

The content analysis has produced a picture of agricultural news on public radio, both before and after the restructuring process. The sample for *Rural Report* was of a sufficient size. The research recognises the importance of agricultural news as a subject of inquiry, especially given the significance of the rural sector to New Zealand. Additionally, the research contributes to scholarship on public radio, and the effects of its restructuring on specialist programming.

Possibly the most useful aspect of the content analysis has been its objective and rigorous examination of the restructuring, which has produced results differing from those available through other sources. For example, Thompson (1997c) writes that "In the final analysis the restructuring to rural reports on National Radio appears

not to have been as drastic as initially feared" (p.13). He goes on to say that the midday rural session has halved in length, from ten minutes to five minutes, whereas my findings show that the current five minute programme is in fact only about a third of its 1996 length. Thompson also states that the morning bulletin has "remained the same length" whereas my research clearly demonstrates that the 1996 morning programme was on average just over 15 minutes duration, falling to approximately five minutes after the restructuring. In addition, he writes that "True to its word the state broadcaster continues to broadcast much of the material culled from the longer midday 'rural' segment as part of its new, extended, 'agri-business', news section" (ibid). However, as pointed out in the previous chapter, of the twelve broadly agri-business stories aired in this section in the 1997 sample weeks, just six were "additional" coverage (six were repeats), and of these, only three were truly consistent with the type of stories aired by *Rural Report*. While the *Straight Furrow's* continued coverage of issues surrounding the downgrading of rural radio should be commended, much of this content-related information does not bear up to rigorous empirical scrutiny.

6.12 Future Directions

There has been a lack of academic study into agricultural news in New Zealand and therefore there are a seemingly limitless number of research avenues open to exploration. Of particular value would be further investigation into the differences between mainstream and specialist agricultural news and whether, in a commercial application, there is any indication of content being affected by advertisers, as has been suggested by American studies. Also, an examination of changes in the way the news media have covered agriculture in the past twenty years would be of historical interest and could provide some insight into the shifting role of the rural sector.

Finally, the analysis of content is just one component of the research project. In Chapter Nine, rural reporters talk about their jobs and reactions to the

restructuring. This wide approach recognises that "Agricultural journalists work in organisational contexts that constrain the kind of stories published and, therefore, limit their opportunities to make farm coverage resemble what the critics desire" (Reisner & Walter, 1994, p.534). This has also been addressed by placing the cutbacks within the context of wider changes in public radio.

The following chapter is concerned with the results of the mail questionnaire.

CHAPTER SEVEN SURVEY RESULTS

7.1 Introduction

The announcement that the length of National Radio's dedicated rural programmes was to be changed, from approximately thirty minutes a day to ten minutes, and the Saturday morning magazine show halved to one hour, was not well received by the rural community (see Barton, 1996; Thompson, 1997a; Burke, 1996). Adding insult to injury, it was later revealed that the listener figures which partially contributed to this decision came from the "main centres", with Radio New Zealand indicating it would be too expensive to gather data from rural areas (Thompson, 1997a). Thus, this research saw a need to gather information directly from farmers and others actively involved in the agriculture industry as to their attitude toward the rural radio programmes and their restructuring. It was also deemed important to establish what news outlets are most important to them.

Since this research began, two surveys concerning National Radio's rural news service, have been conducted: an MRL poll, funded by RNZ, and a *Straight Furrow* readership survey (Thompson, 1997c). These are discussed further, and used as a basis for comparison, in the following chapter. That these surveys have been undertaken is a further indication of the importance of gathering up-to-date data about an audience component which has until recently been neglected, something this research had already recognised.

7.2 Response Rates

As discussed in Chapter Four, two sample groups were used, both of which came from conference lists collated and managed by the Agricultural Extension Co-ordinator at Massey University. In total, 260 surveys were returned.

The survey was distributed to the first sample group, those on the mailing list for the Southern North Island Sheep and Beef Conference, in April 1997. Three hundred and twenty four surveys were sent out, four of which were returned to sender. From the remaining 319, 126 replies were received, giving a response rate of 39.5%.

The dairy conference sample was initially less of a success. A copy of the survey was placed in the folder of information received by the conference attendees, and a box was provided at the venue for completed forms. However, only 24 were returned at the time, with a further two posted to the researcher in the following week. The unsatisfactory nature of the response is probably explained by the way the survey was distributed, in a pile of other information that included glossy brochures and advertising material. Accordingly, the survey may have been somewhat indistinguishable and lacking in impact. In addition, the three day conference tends to be a busy time for attendees. In an effort to improve the response from the dairy industry, a follow-up exercise was undertaken, again with the assistance of the Agricultural Extension Co-ordinator, John Stantiall. Later in the year, when a copy of conference proceedings was sent to all attendees, another copy of the survey and a covering letter, both printed on bright orange paper, along with a stamped and self addressed envelope, was included. In this way, 381 surveys were sent out, nine of which did not reach their intended destination, leaving an optimum response of 372. The final number received, including the initial 24, was 134, giving a response rate of 36.0%.

In the following tables the results for the sheep and beef, and dairy, industries are shown separately.

7.3 Awareness of the Planned Restructuring

The first survey question inquired as to whether respondents were aware of National Radio's plans to restructure prior to the actual changes being announced or

implemented. Some information had been available through the media (eg. Stevenson, 1996) and people were invited to make submissions to Radio New Zealand.

Table 23: Were You Aware That RNZ Was Planning to Restructure Rural News?

	Sheep and beef		Dairy	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	57	45.2	49	36.6
No	68	54.0	83	61.9
DNC	1	0.8	2	1.5
Total	126	100.0	134	100.0

The majority of respondents from the sheep and beef conference (54%) were not aware of the restructuring plans for rural radio, although, with 57 people (45.2%) indicating they were aware, the numbers were close to an even split. One person did not complete the question. A higher percentage of dairy participants (61.9%) were unaware of the proposed restructuring. Overall, less than a half of all respondents knew Radio New Zealand was considering restructuring rural programming.

7.4 Feelings Toward the Restructuring

The survey respondents were asked to write in their own answers for several questions, the first of which was question two, which consisted of two parts. Those who had replied "yes" to question one (ie. they were aware of the planned restructuring) were asked a) How did you feel about the prospect of the rural news service being restructured? and b) What are your feelings towards the changes now? Those who had answered "no" to the preceding question were instructed to answer part (b) only.

The purpose of this question was twofold: to allow people to express their feelings toward the changes; and to examine whether those respondents who were aware of the planned restructuring felt differently after some exposure to the

restructured shows. It is not possible to show the large number of responses, but a representative selection is outlined below.

A small number of respondents, eight in total (3.1%), indicated that the shortened programmes were not as bad as they initially feared they might be, writing comments such as "At the time I was concerned - now we seem to get as many items covered, albeit each one in less detail" and "It is not as bad as I thought it might be". Those who were not worried about the prospect of restructuring tended to be unconcerned about the new programmes.

The overwhelming feelings amongst both sheep and beef, and dairy, participants were concern, disappointment and unhappiness with the decision. Many felt that this is typical of attitudes and actions towards the rural community. Prior to knowing what the changes would entail, some were hopeful that the restructuring would mean a "better" programme, although others felt sure that the changes would be negative. "I could only see quality content and extent being downgraded if saving money was the objective", wrote one respondent. Another said that "Talk of restructuring is a 'softening up' approach and in rural New Zealand these days generally means you are going to get less, not more".

Following exposure to the revamped programming, some respondents indicated feeling that the service was no longer worth listening to. One person wrote that they "...have not listened to rural news since [the] changes. Used to be interested in deeper examination of issues, don't consider superficial coverage worth tuning into". Another stated that "I had always made an effort to listen to both the 6.20am and 12.30pm programme and now find that I am less well informed. I still grieve the loss (I always used to turn the radio on at 12 and listen until 12.50, now some days I don't bother to even turn it on)". "I just don't listen as often", another said. Yet another respondent wrote that "It used to be my main source of agricultural information. The times are so short that only a few highlights are covered. No 'in depth analysis'. It is hardly worth listening to".

Other reactions were less extreme, with respondents admitting to disappointment and feeling that their earlier concerns had been confirmed, but not indicating that they had given up altogether. Indeed, as Table 27 shows, rural programming is still rated as important to the majority of participants.

Finally, there were a number of respondents who said they were not concerned as they did not listen to any of the programmes. For some, the reasons related to poor radio reception or lack of knowledge about the programmes.

7.5 Listening Habits

In question three, respondents were asked to indicate how often they listen to morning and midday *Rural Report* and the Saturday magazine programme. Four options were provided, ranging from "almost every day" to "never". Those who indicated never listening to the shows were asked to proceed further into the survey.

7.5.1 6.20am Rural Report

Table 24 : Listening Figures for Morning *Rural Report*

	Sheep and beef		Dairy	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Almost every weekday	55	43.7	37	27.6
Once a week	14	11.1	9	6.7
Occasionally	32	25.3	31	23.1
Never	21	16.7	55	41.1
DNC	4	3.2	2	1.5
Total	126	100.0	134	100.0

It appears that those involved in the sheep and beef industries are more devoted listeners of morning rural news than their dairy counterparts. While just 16.7% of the sheep and beef respondents never listen and 43.7% tune in almost every morning, among dairy participants, 41.1% indicated they did not listen, and just over a quarter listen almost every day. Overall, six people did not complete the question.

7.5.2 12.36pm Rural Report

Table 25 : Listening Figures for Midday *Rural Report*

	Sheep and beef		Dairy	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Almost every weekday	78	61.9	50	37.3
Once a week	10	7.9	14	10.5
Occasionally	23	18.3	33	24.6
Never	11	8.7	35	26.1
DNC	4	3.2	2	1.5
Total	126	100	134	100

In both groups, the figures for regular listenership are higher for the midday *Rural Report* programme than for the morning show. The sheep and beef participants are again more devoted listeners, with 61.9% tuning in almost every day, and less than 10% never listening, in comparison to 37.3% of dairy conference attendees who listen each day, and a quarter who do not listen at all.

7.5.3 Country Life

Table 26: Listening Figures for *Country Life*

	Sheep and beef		Dairy	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Almost every week	49	38.9	38	28.4
Once a month	19	15.1	14	10.4
Occasionally	33	26.2	27	20.1
Never	17	13.5	53	39.6
DNC	8	6.3	2	1.5
Total	126	100	134	100

The results for the *Country Life* programme (previously *Country Saturday*) are more evenly distributed, with the greatest percentage of sheep and beef respondents listening almost every week (38.9%), followed by those who listen occasionally (26.2%). The figure for those who never listen to this weekend magazine show is 13.5%, and 6.3% did not complete the question. The largest percentage of dairy participants (39.6%) indicated never listening to the Saturday morning show, followed by 28.4% who tune in almost every week, 20.1%

occasionally, and 10.4% once a month. Overall, there were ten people who did not answer the question.

7.6 The Importance of Rural News

A question was included that asked those who listen to rural news to rate its importance to them. The scale had five options, ranging from very unimportant to very important. The following table differentiates between those who did not complete the question due to earlier instructions (classified as DNC - Did Not Complete - under survey instructions) and those who did not complete the question for unknown reasons, or who provided an unusable answer (eg. circled two options).

Table 27 : How Important Are the *Rural Report* and/or *Country Life* Sessions to You?

	Sheep and beef		Dairy	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Very important	38	30.2	28	20.9
Important	58	46	49	36.6
Neither important nor unimportant	15	11.9	23	17.2
Unimportant	1	0.8	1	0.7
Very unimportant	1	0.8	1	0.7
DNC	4	3.2	3	2.2
DNC (under survey instructions)	9	7.1	29	21.7
Total	126	100	134	100

The majority of sheep and beef respondents (76.2%) indicated that the rural news programming on National Radio is important or very important to them. Less than 2% saw it as unimportant or very unimportant. Nine people did not complete this question under survey instructions (ie. they had already indicated that they never listened to the shows), and four failed to complete it for other reasons.

The dairy participants tended to place slightly less importance on the rural news programmes than their sheep and beef counterparts, possibly reflecting their less dedicated listening patterns (see Tables 24-26). A larger proportion of dairy respondents answered that rural news was neither important nor unimportant (17.2%, compared to 11.9% of sheep and beef respondents), with 57.5% indicating they were

very important or important. A notable 21.7% were not required to answer this question due to the fact that they do not listen to *Rural Report* or *Country Life*.

7.7 Mainstreaming

Table 28 : Are You Confident That There is Now More Agricultural Content in Normal News Bulletins?

	Sheep and beef		Dairy	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	11	8.7	7	5.2
No	89	70.7	68	50.8
Don't know	16	12.7	26	19.4
DNC	1	0.8	4	3
DNC (under instruction)	9	7.1	29	21.6
Total	126	100	134	100

The majority of respondents, 70.7% of the sheep and beef survey participants and 50.8% of dairy respondents, did not feel confident that the amount of agricultural content in other bulletins has increased following the shortening of the rural programmes. This was in comparison to 8.7% or 5.2% who were confident, and 12.7% or 19.4% who did not know. In total, 43 people did not complete the question, 38 of these under instructions not to.

7.8 Importance of Other Sources of Agricultural Information

In an effort to gauge whether the cutbacks have left a gap in the supply of information, survey participants were asked if, following the restructuring of National Radio's rural programming, other sources of information had taken on a new importance.

The findings were quite evenly split: 46.8% of sheep and beef respondents said "yes", that other sources had become more important, and 41.3% said "no"; 36.6% of dairy participants indicated that other sources had become more important; and 38.8% said that this had not occurred. Those who admitted that other

Table 29 : Have Other Sources of Agricultural Information Become More Important?

	Sheep and beef		Dairy	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	59	46.8	49	36.6
No	52	41.3	52	38.8
DNC	6	4.8	4	3
DNC (under survey instructions)	9	7.1	29	21.6
Total	126	100	134	100

information sources had become more important were invited to specify what these other sources were. One person stated the Internet but otherwise it was written information that was being increasingly relied upon, in particular specialist publications and farming news in daily newspapers. However, further elaborative comments were made, suggesting the often complementary relationship between print and broadcast news. One respondent wrote that "Radio provides instant news - backed up by periodicals and newspapers". The special qualities of radio news were also pointed out: "My husband and I both really miss the radio contact with other rural districts and what was happening. We could do other things while being informed. Reading takes time we do not have". Others wrote that "Radio summarises a lot in a short time, quicker than reading but still needs time to cover many topics", and that it is "Impossible to get immediate news through any other medium. Radio can provide summary of news, allows us to follow stories in more detail through newspapers etc once identified". A telling remark came from a participant who indicated that reading material had become more important although this "doesn't replace [the] 'listening' opportunity of radio".

7.9 The Effect of Restructuring

The survey participants who listen to the specialist rural news slots on National Radio were asked to evaluate what effect the changes had had on the programmes. The responses provided in the questionnaire ranged from "greatly worsened" to "greatly improved".

Table 30 : What Effect Have the Changes Had on the Rural News Service?

	Sheep and beef		Dairy	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Greatly improved	0	0	0	0
Improved	1	0.8	2	1.5
Neither improved nor made worse	15	11.9	30	22.4
Worsened	60	47.6	47	35.1
Greatly worsened	36	28.6	21	15.7
DNC	5	4	5	3.7
DNC (under survey instructions)	9	7.1	29	21.6
Total	126	100	134	100

Over three quarters of the sheep and beef respondents (76.2%) believed that the effect of the changes has been to worsen or greatly worsen the programmes. A further 11.9% were more ambivalent, feeling that the shows have neither improved nor been made worse. Less than 1% thought the programmes had been improved by the restructuring. Five people did not complete the question or provided unusable answers, and a further nine were under instructions not to answer.

The majority of dairy industry respondents (50.8%) also felt that the programmes had been worsened or greatly worsened by the restructuring. However, 22.4% did not believe there had been any effect (ie. the shows had neither improved nor worsened) and one-fifth of those surveyed were not qualified to answer the question due to a lack of familiarity with the programmes.

7.10 Main Sources of Agricultural News

All the survey participants were asked to identify their most important sources of agricultural news. Six possibilities were provided: specialist publications such as the *New Zealand Farmer*, *Straight Furrow*; daily and/or local newspapers; National Radio; other radio stations; television news; and an "other" category where respondents could specify sources not already mentioned. Respondents were instructed to choose up to three sources.

This data was useful for showing where radio fits in as an agricultural news medium, as well as for providing a basis for comparison with overseas research into farmers' preferred news media.

Table 31: What Are Your Three Most Important Sources of Agricultural News?

	Sheep and beef	Dairy
Specialist publications	121	129
Daily and/or local newspapers	100	110
National Radio	85	60
Other radio stations	2	8
Television news	11	31
Other:		
Consultants' and industry newsletters	15	5
Farm Discussion groups and conferences	7	6
Internet	2	0
Teletext	2	1
Farming with Pictures videos	2	1
Personal contacts	2	5
Lectures/journals	0	2
Agri-Tech	0	1
Overseas farm publications	0	1

All survey respondents were asked this question, and all answered it. The most used source of agricultural news amongst both survey groups was specialist farming publications, with 250 of the 260 respondents indicating this as a source, followed by 210 using daily and/or local newspapers, and 145 listening to National Radio. Other radio stations and television news scored relatively low, suggesting that National Radio is the most important broadcaster of agricultural news for those involved in the sheep, beef and dairy industries. It should be pointed out, however, that those in the dairy industry sample appear to have a higher regard for both television and other radio stations' news than do their sheep and beef counterparts. An option was provided for an "other" category, with consultant and industry newsletters being the most mentioned, followed by farm discussion groups and conferences, and personal contacts. Additional answers included the Internet, Teletext, Farming with Pictures videos (distributed to farmers as part of a joint venture between the Bank of New

Zealand and the Meat and Wool Boards), lectures and journals, the *Agri-Tech 2000* television programme, and overseas farming publications.

7.11 Characteristics of Respondents

The final survey question inquired as to the respondent's gender, occupation and place of residence. The following tables summarise these findings.

Table 32: Gender of Participants

	Sheep and beef	Dairy
Male	111	101
Female	14	33
Mixed	1	~
Total	126	134

The great majority of sheep and beef respondents (88.1%) were male, with 11.1% female, and one joint effort by a couple, classified as mixed. There was a higher proportion of female respondents in the dairy survey, 24.6%, but male respondents still dominated.

Table 33: Occupation of Participants

	Sheep and beef	Dairy
Farmer	120	83
Non-farmer	6	51
Total	126	134

The "farmer" category in the sheep and beef results includes those who are involved in cropping, forestry and dairy, as well as sheep and/or beef. Farmers dominated amongst the respondents, accounting for 120 of the returned surveys (95.2%). The six non-farmer respondents were a breed manager, a marketing co-ordinator, an agricultural field officer, a meat company executive, a consultant and an industry project manager.

The larger non-farmer category in the dairy industry survey (38.1% of respondents) consisted of consultants, those from the agricultural service industry, bankers, students, lecturers and tutors, scientists and Dairy Board executive.

Table 34: Participants' Place of Residence

	Sheep and beef	Dairy
Auckland/Northland	~	4
Bay of Plenty	~	6
Hawkes Bay	10	10
Horowhenua	4	4
King Country	1	~
Manawatu	37	41
Rangitikei	20	1
Rotorua	~	1
South Island	~	9
Taranaki	8	20
Waikato	~	18
Wairarapa	35	11
Wanganui	8	3
Wellington	1	6
Unspecified	2	~

The residency results for the sheep and beef respondents show a greater concentration in the lower North Island, reflecting that the conference mailing list employed was for the Southern North Island Sheep and Beef Farmers' conference. The largest groups of respondents were from Manawatu and Wairarapa.

Dairy conference attendees came from a wider number of places, ranging from Auckland/Northland to the South Island. Due to the relatively small number of South Island respondents these were all added together under the South Island, rather than specifying particular provinces. Manawatu, Taranaki and Waikato were the most common areas.

7.12 Additional Comments

The survey respondents were invited to make any additional comments. Those who did so tended to write about rural radio's importance to them, or to add more

information about their reaction to the restructuring. A selected summary of these comments is included in the following chapter, where they are discussed in relation to the themes developed in Chapter Two.

7.13 Conclusion

In total, 260 people involved in agriculture completed the survey. While response rates were less than 50%, and conference attendees are not representative of the wider rural community, the survey was valuable for gathering data from a group that was originally ignored in RNZ's listener polls. The results show that rural people do place importance on specialist radio news, and that generally the restructuring has not been seen as beneficial. The additional, qualitative data, which provides further insight into the role of rural news on radio, is discussed in relation to research themes in the following chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT SURVEY DISCUSSION

8.1 Introduction

The survey questionnaire was employed to ensure that the views of a key audience component, those actively involved in agriculture, were included in the research. Input from the audience helped create an overall picture of the restructuring and also addressed a gap in knowledge that had resulted from Radio New Zealand's initial failure to poll those outside of main centres. The questionnaire was also a means of gathering data about farmers' sources of agricultural news.

Since this research began, two other surveys of the agricultural community have been undertaken. The results for these polls, one by the *Straight Furrow* and the other commissioned by Radio New Zealand, are discussed below. This chapter also includes discussion of the qualitative data gathered in my survey, which is related to the themes developed in Chapter Two.

8.2 Rural Radio Surveys

Thompson (1997c) quotes a RNZ-commissioned MRL poll which shows that approximately 40% of farmers listen to rural National Radio, and that about 10% of total RNZ listeners live in rural areas. He writes that "The poll has convinced RNZ it made the right decision in keeping the rural news segment in *Midday* and *Morning Report* after original restructuring plans called for scrapping the show altogether" (p.13). Radio New Zealand's survey showed that 17% of farmers listen to midday rural news four or more times a week, another 12% listen 2-3 times, and 10% tune in once a week or less. The poll also found lower listening figures for the morning programme: 19% listen more than twice a week and 13% once a week or less (ibid). The findings from my survey show higher regular listening figures at midday - 61.9% of sheep and beef respondents, and 37.3% of dairy participants, indicated listening

almost everyday - although this disparity is likely to be a result of differences in sample size. However, the results shown in the previous chapter do support RNZ's finding that the midday show is more popular than its morning counterpart (see the interview with Jill Galloway in the following chapter for a way of boosting the listenership of the morning *Rural Report*). Finally, RNZ's results showed a "moderate drop in listenership" (ibid) since 1991, which is consistent with a slight decrease in *Morning* and *Midday Report* listenership generally. However, it is possible that the restructuring has affected the listening figures for rural news. Some respondents in my survey wrote that they consider rural news no longer worth listening to, or that its brevity makes it easy to miss. The MRL poll does not appear to enquire as to listeners' attitudes toward the restructuring.

The Federated Farmers' newspaper, the *Straight Furrow*, conducted a readership survey that included a question about the radio restructuring. They received 280 responses from their farmer readers and their partners, which showed that 65% of farmers, and 51% of their partners, listen to rural news on National Radio. As with my results, the levels of listenership were found to be lower among dairy farmers. Other relevant outcomes were that just 2% of respondents feel positively about the changes, and 32% feel the changes are "not at all favourable". Additionally, radio as a medium was not perceived as serving the rural community well: over 50% of participants indicated it serves them "not very or not at all well", and just 8% felt rural people's needs are well met.

8.3 Key News Sources

The results for question nine of the survey, as to what are the most important sources of agricultural news for farmers, provides data which is compatible with research overseas. Reisner and Hays (1989) quote the finding that farmers consistently rate farm magazines as primary sources of production information. Similarly, Ford and Babb (1989) found that farm magazines, along with other farmers and family and

friends, were the most used sources of information. The New Zealand equivalent of these "farm magazines" are specialist publications such as the *New Zealand Farmer* and *Rural News*, published in newspaper form, as well as more specifically targeted publications like *Dairy Exporter*. These were identified by 96.2% of survey respondents as an important news source.

Ford and Babb (1989) also point out that "in the new information age, commercial sources of information have developed...Private newsletters, consultants, and commodity brokers all play a part in disseminating information in today's agricultural economy" (p.465). Such information sources were the most cited "other" source in my survey, suggesting that New Zealand is following overseas trends. However, there is no suggestion, in either my results or their research, that these producers of information are replacing the traditional media forms. Indeed, Ford and Babb (1989) conclude that

Given the importance of information in today's agriculture and the need for providing the same information in different forms and outlets, there is more than ample room for the service of both public and private providers of information (p.476).

8.4 Themes in the Qualitative Data

In the survey document, a question invited respondents to make any further comments on the restructured rural programming. For the research, this was a means of gathering qualitative data which provided further insight into the views of listeners. For the survey participants this was an opportunity for mentioning any points of concern the survey may not have addressed, or for expressing personal views. Consistently, certain themes outlined in Chapter Two emerged in this comment section. Due to the large number of comments that were made in response to this section, not all were able to be reproduced here.

The economic, social and political importance of agriculture to New Zealand is outlined in Chapter Two. Survey respondents in particular addressed the economic role their industry plays, reasoning that as key earners of export income they are entitled to hearing rural news on National Radio, and that the industry (and thus the country) is disadvantaged by not having access to comprehensive, up-to-date information. One person expressed

Disbelief that the reporting on New Zealand's major exporting industry should be reduced to such a small segment of the total news reporting.

In a similar vein, others wrote that:

The separation of rural and urban is becoming so great that apart from farmers few New Zealanders would recognise/acknowledge that agriculture is still important to the New Zealand economy.

Considering the importance both presently and in the future to the NZ economy it should have more profile than currently does.

Often linked with this was a feeling that the rural community has lost status, or is being ignored by those in positions of power. One person wrote that the restructuring

Shows a general disregard of the importance of agriculture in New Zealand that comes right from the top - politicians especially.

In Chapter Two the rural/urban divide, alluded to in much of the coverage of the restructuring, was discussed. The existence of such a dynamic is demonstrated in the comments made by survey respondents, such as that the changes "Further widen [the] gap between town and country". Others believe that the rural programming has a wider role to play in promoting understanding between farming and non-farming groups:

I think that not only farmers were disappointed by the restructures, these programmes keep a lot of people in touch with rural New Zealand.

In this modern day of 'greenie' and action groups etc. I think it is very important to keep city people well informed of rural news. We need better communication, not worse.

I feel that I am much better informed about business/urban issues than urban people are about rural issues, despite their importance to export earnings. Increasingly urbanised society has increasing problems understanding issues relating to biological systems as seen by naive attitudes toward Kaimanawa horses, biological control systems etc.

As pointed out in Chapter Two, coverage of agriculture by the mainstream media, especially television, has been the subject of some criticism, both here and overseas. The survey data in the previous chapter shows that *Rural Report* and/or *Country Life* are important or very important to 66.5% of respondents, and National Radio is the most important broadcast source. These findings are supported in comments made by survey participants. According to one, the shortening of *Rural Report* is a particular loss given that it is one of the sector's few broadcast outlets:

Disappointment as it already seems that only a meagre amount of good information is supplied to the rural sector via radio and television. What has occurred definitely does not seem to be an improvement.

In the following chapter, former *Rural Report* editor Peter Burke also addresses this subject. Another respondent points out the importance of broadcast news in isolated areas:

I am annoyed that the restructuring was based on a predominantly urban poll. When you only get mail (papers etc.) three times a week the radio is an important life line to daily news.

Seems a further erosion of service to rural communities to whom communication is important due to isolation.

The policy of mainstreaming, offered by RNZ as compensation for the reduced *Rural Report*, prompted mixed reactions amongst survey respondents. The great majority (60.4%) do not feel confident that there is more agricultural news in other bulletins, a finding that is given empirical backing in the content analysis

conclusion that what small increase there has been in the number of stories is not sufficient to offset the shortened specialist slot (see Chapters Five and Six). Another person makes a telling statement, also borne out in the content analysis, that "Rural issues have always been included in mainstream news **when deemed important enough** (eg EEC, GATT issues etc.)" (my emphasis). A number of survey participants, such as the following person, expressed their support for a specialist timeslot:

I prefer all the rural news at one time so I can make sure I'm in the house and listening to it at that time. I know non-farmers listen to it as well - generally people who want to be informed.

Others commented that more agricultural coverage in other bulletins is a positive move:

By putting more ag [ricultural] news into the main bulletins I feel that agricultural news and issues are more exposed to the non agricultural listeners.

However, other participants pointed out that the rural news programmes are more in-depth, and accordingly still preferable. In the same vein as the content analysis findings, one person wrote that

The extra content in normal news bulletins does not compensate for reduced content of Rural News.

This same person then went on to comment that "It is far easier to listen to news than trying to get information from the many publications that I try to wade through at night", supporting Hillgren's (1989) argument that one of the modern farmer's biggest problem is "information overload" and my earlier suggestion that radio has a part to play in combating this (see Chapter Two). In the previous chapter, comments made in relation to the question as to whether other sources have become more important following the restructuring, also provide some insight into radio's unique qualities.

The impact of RNZ's restructuring on the amount of information immediately available to a respondent is shown in the following statement:

Immediacy of information [is] lost as our newspaper, *Wanganui Chronicle*, isn't very current with its ag [ricultural] news, saves them until Thursday farming feature. Creates increased feeling of isolation. *New Zealand Farmer* arrives [on] Friday or Monday after [being] published the Wednesday before!"

The effect of the loss of rural reporters and the shortened time slot on the amount and format of the news is addressed by a dairy conference respondent who wrote that

We feel there is a lot of news to be reported, which just isn't sought out or reported on. Time does not permit now.

Another suggested that the restructuring has adversely affected the key strengths of the programmes, writing that "...the depth of the programme and interviews were the important feature of the old programmes".

Amongst survey comments were suggestions as to how RNZ's coverage of agriculture could be improved. A further move toward merging rural and business news would be welcomed by some participants. One wrote that

I prefer business news to agricultural news as is more applicable to farm business, perhaps could combine rural and business news.

Variations on this were also expressed by former and current rural reporters, who in particular were supportive of placing business and rural news adjacent to one another. (See the following chapter for further discussion of this). A different angle was taken by a respondent who suggested the responsibility for quality rural news lies elsewhere:

I believe it is up to agriculture industries to 'manage' newsworthy issues and items and see that they are aired appropriately. If this can be done effectively then these issues may be better understood by the wider community, not just the rural sector. That would be to the long term advantage of the rural sector.

Finally, not all of those who took part in the survey were supportive of the rural programmes. The occasional negative comment was made, particularly centring around the basic level of information contained in the bulletins. For example:

It was only ever an easy listening program. Most of the information was rather shallow in depth and seemed often to assume we were all ignorant apart from the reporters.

All rural programmes have a bias towards urban listeners and lack expertise as to sheep and beef production, marketing, management and science.

I'm not sure who listens to the *Rural Report* as they do not now give any in depth topics of particular interest to practical farmers, please bring back the farmers talking to farmers.

However, what such comments fail to recognise is the broad target audience of the rural programming, as those involved in the industry point out in the interviews which follow in Chapter Nine.

8.5 Survey Response Rates

At the 1996 Sheep and Beef conference a survey was distributed to seek feedback as to the effectiveness of the conference. The low female attendance figures, as well as the low survey response rate by women, was identified by the evaluators as a point of concern. An overall response rate of 60% was achieved, yet just 3 out of the 7 female attendees filled in the survey (42.8%). Ninety percent of those at the conference were male. It seems likely that the low percentage of women responding to my survey reflects low female attendance figures at agricultural conferences generally.

8.6 Implications

The survey exercise has clearly demonstrated that, in the rural community, the restructuring of RNZ's rural programming is perceived negatively. However, the

medium remains important, with National Radio rating in the top three sources of news for survey respondents and being, by a significant margin, the most important broadcaster. The additional comments made by participants provide a unique insight into the role of *Rural Report* and *Country Life*, and support the comments and findings discussed in other parts of this research.

8.7 Limitations

The sample for the survey was not representative of the rural community but consisted of those who attend agricultural conferences. However, within the sample there were both farmers and non-farmers, which means that included in the results are the views of those who are involved in the agriculture servicing sector (eg. bankers), who are also an important key audience component.

The response rates were adequate but not overwhelming. A follow-up procedure would no doubt have been beneficial but external limitations (ie. privacy policies in regard to conference databases) prevented this. As pointed out earlier, the low rate of agricultural conference attendance by women has been identified by conference organisers as a problem, and is reflected in the survey findings.

8.8 Strengths and Future Directions

At the time the survey was planned, no current research on rural people's listening habits or their feelings toward rural programming existed. In fact, following the restructuring it was revealed that the figures used by RNZ came from the "main centres", with the organisation indicating that it was too costly to gather data elsewhere. This research aimed to fill that gap in knowledge by giving those in the rural community the chance to have their say about the restructuring and its effects on radio content. Despite the fact that in the interim period RNZ has commissioned a survey, as has the *Straight Furrow*, the qualitative data this research gathered is

particularly valuable for the further insight it gives into participants' feelings. The results of the other surveys are useful as a basis for comparison.

Finally, the questionnaire included a question asking respondents to indicate the sources of news most important to them. This has meant the New Zealand findings can be compared with the results of research in the United States, and also identifies, for future studies, those media worthy of further investigation. The data shows that, as in North America, it is specialist publications which are the most important source of news for those involved in agriculture. It would be worthwhile to further research whether overseas criticisms of such publications, particularly centring around their relationships with advertisers and the effect of this on content, are valid here. Another avenue for investigation is the finding that daily and/or local newspapers were also rated highly, which contrasts sharply with American research which suggest such publications publish superficial, "cute and folksy" stories. It would be interesting to examine in what different, and apparently more respected ways, our daily newspapers treat agriculture.

In terms of surveying the rural community, it would be useful to further examine what farmers feel are the key characteristics of a good news service (eg. speed and accuracy), and what role advanced communication technologies such as the Internet can play on the modern farm.

In the following chapter, rural reporters, a former *Rural Report* editor, and politician and former National Cabinet Minister Denis Marshall, talk of their reaction to the restructuring. In addition, Programme Commissioner Michael Peck discusses the Radio New Zealand viewpoint.

CHAPTER NINE INTERVIEWS

9.1 Introduction

The qualitative interviews generate further insight into the changes made to National Radio's rural news programmes through speaking with people who are, or who have been, involved with them. The interviews were semi-structured and ranged in length from twenty to eighty minutes. One interview was done by telephone.

The people interviewed were reporters Jill Galloway and Hugh Chappell, the former who takes a negative view of the restructuring, the latter who is more positive; former *Rural Report* editor Peter Burke, who suggests a solution; Rangitikei MP Denis Marshall, who offers a political perspective; and RNZ Programme Commissioner, Michael Peck, representing the management point of view.

The interview methodology is employed primarily to add to the content analysis and survey data. The findings are not representative, as the sample consists of an eclectic group of people, ranging from reporters to a politician, who were convenient and accessible. However, in interviewing these people, any criticism of news media research which does not intersect with reporters' experience is offset. This thesis allows the journalistic voice to be heard. The reporters have long backgrounds in journalism and therefore are able to provide a valuable historical overview. Importantly, the interview process is also a means of giving Radio New Zealand the chance to further discuss the reasoning behind the restructuring.

The format of this chapter is different from the preceding chapters, where the results and discussion were shown in separate chapters. Here, the interviews are written up individually, and followed by an outline of the key points. In the interview write-up, the words of the interviewees are used as much as possible, as are selected longer excerpts, following Seidman's (1991) advice that "although inevitably

the researcher's consciousness will play a major role in the interpretation of interview data, that consciousness must interact with the words of the participants as fully and as accurately as possible" (p.87). In the sections which follow, the key points raised are discussed in reference to both earlier research and the views of other interviewees. By interviewing a number of people, the researcher gains the ability to connect their experiences and check the comments of one against others (Seidman, 1991).

9.2 The Reporters

Two former full-time rural reporters who remain working for Radio New Zealand were interviewed: Jill Galloway, working in Palmerston North, and Napier-based Hugh Chappell. However, at the time of the interviews the two had different roles, with Jill temporarily continuing to work as a full-time rural reporter, and Hugh working under the new system, as a regional reporter.

9.2.1 Jill Galloway

At the time of the interview, Jill Galloway was working as a rural reporter, along with one other person, Kevin Ikin, based in Wellington. However, this was a temporary situation, until a replacement could be found, upon which her role would become primarily that of a regional reporter.

Jill has worked in rural journalism for fifteen years. Over that time there has been a "gradual erosion" of the service offered by National Radio. She recalls that at one time seventeen reporters were employed to cover rural news. More recently, prior to the 1997 restructuring, there were ten reporters, although she points out that at full strength the team consisted of twelve, but two who had left earlier were not replaced, or were replaced by general reporters. These twelve reporters were placed around New Zealand, in Auckland, Hamilton, Hawkes Bay, Manawatu, Nelson, Christchurch and Dunedin, plus four in Wellington, and a chief reporter.

Jill sees "Rurals" as an alternative source of news, playing a similar role to that of *Mana* news (a specialist Maori news programme), providing the type of news that is not readily available via mainstream channels. However, she points out that mainstream news bulletins do cover agricultural news, particularly when there is a wider impact. For example, the announcement that the meatworks at Taumaranui are to close is of interest because of the job losses involved. Part of Jill's job is to produce rural stories for mainstream news bulletins and she may get two or three items onto *Morning Report* each week. However, in terms of mainstream agricultural content, Jill believes that a rural story has to be "hard hitting" to get covered. *Morning Report*, she says, tends to be "conflict driven". She gives a recent example of the programme picking up on a story about the Federated Farmers' operating loss, which was set up to be Malcolm Bailey, the President of the Federated Farmers, versus a detractor. In contrast, Rurals offers different sorts of stories, and rural reporters cannot afford to "shaft" their sources in such ways as long term contacts are important to rural news.

The policy of having more agricultural content in business news is seen by Jill to be a positive move. She says that the rural team would like their morning bulletin to be placed closer to the business news, which airs prior to 7am, for two reasons: 1) listening figures rise every quarter of an hour up until 7.30am and thus the rural programme would have more listeners than it does now, in its slot prior to 6.30am; and 2) it is better thematically linked.

In terms of the audience, rural news is not designed solely for the rural community. Indeed, Jill believes the downgraded service is a loss for the business community generally, as well as for others with rural interests. She makes the analogy that a person need not own shares to have an interest in business, or live in Palmerston North to have an interest in city issues, so too a person need not be a farmer to be interested in farming matters. Jill's belief is that "no story should be foreign to anybody" and accordingly a specialist rural reporter should assume listeners do not know, for example, what fly strike is. In other words, the programme

is not totally farmer orientated but aims to be "acceptable and understandable" to the general public. However, there is recognition that rural programming may have a different importance for rural communities, given their relative isolation and the fact that despite significant numbers of people living outside city boundaries, much news is city driven. In addition, she points out that Radio New Zealand is guided by a charter which requires them to represent all New Zealand and minority groups.

Jill feels that the changes were not entirely commercially orientated. She suggests that the restructuring was two pronged: RNZ needed to save money (and there are some in the organisation who see the programmes as "only rurals", making it an easy target) and required the expertise of the rural reporters elsewhere. She quotes the budget drop, from \$27 to \$19.4 million, but feels that management could have pushed harder for increased funding. Traditionally, Rurals has been a "fantastic training ground", with many former rural reporters going to on to "great things".

The changes, Jill believes, have meant a loss of "expansive coverage", with the shorter time-frame affecting the scope of the programme and resulting in less time for stories such as those concerned with technology transfer. The format of stories is also affected. In particular, the interview-based story, with its question/answer format, tends to be too time-consuming for the shorter programme. Also of concern under the new system, with rural reporters working predominantly as regional reporters, is that there may not always be the time for producing rural content. While rural journalists tend to be long-serving, with good background knowledge and experience - demonstrating "commitment to the product and job satisfaction in the field" - Jill has some reservations that specialist reporter knowledge may not now be fully utilised.

However, that the specialist programmes still exist is an achievement, "a reaffirmation of Rurals as a specialist team", as originally they were to be removed altogether. Radio New Zealand staff became aware of the proposed changes at the start of 1996 and were told that the section may, to use the management jargon,

"cease to exist as a discrete unit". The rural reporters made a staff submission which Jill fears was "largely ignored", although she understands that the RNZ Board (in particular, Dennis Dutton, ex Friends of Public Radio) was specifically concerned with the rural programming changes. Ultimately, the rural team wanted to maintain the unit's team structure and the opportunity to make features, but they were disbanded and the *Country Life* show is now made by Features.

Finally, Jill feels that the restructured service is "a shadow of its former self". She points out that once programmes are downgraded or removed the public does not get them back.

9.2.2 Hugh Chappell

Hugh Chappell began his career as a rural broadcaster in Hamilton in 1971. The rural broadcasters were responsible for researching, interviewing, editing, compiling and presenting the *Country Session*, which was broadcast nationally. In addition, he was one of two reporters who put together a daily 20 minute programme which aired in the Auckland province, from Kaitaia to the King Country. These programmes were specifically aimed at farmers and based around the provision of advisory material. Something of a "two headed dog", the reporters also produced a rural news programme for commercial radio, servicing commercial clients and compiling one to two minute "ad-lib" commercials for businesses. From 1971-76 the rural reporters also did some television work for *Country Calendar*, and until the split between radio and television in 1976, some reporting for national television news.

In the mid to late 1970s the emphasis changed from farmer orientation to concern with a wider audience, and while the slot remained twenty minutes, the *Country Session* was renamed *Rural Report*. By this time any content of an advisory nature had gone and the focus was on the business and marketing side of agriculture. In 1985, due to the income generation that was occurring on the commercial side of the operation, there were 18 rural reporters, based in Whangarei, Auckland,

Hamilton, Rotorua, Gisborne, Hawkes Bay, Palmerston North, New Plymouth, Masterton, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch, Timaru, Dunedin, and Invercargill. "About the only place that didn't have a person was Eketahuna". However, 1985 saw a number of positions transferred from the regions back to Wellington, and a change in who the reporters were professionally responsible to. While Auckland, Hamilton, Hawkes Bay, Palmerston North, Christchurch and Dunedin had a national responsibility to Wellington, the others were responsible to their local stations.

The Saturday programme (now called *Country Life*), began when the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries "bought time" on National Radio and compiled *Landline*, an information type production aimed primarily at farmers. Later, this changed to a Dunedin based rural reporter presenting a 30 minute show which involved him talking with a farmer, who would be revisited at different times of the year. More recently, the rural team were asked to produce a show to fill the Saturday morning time slot and they began a 30 minute programme, consisting predominantly of a documentary. In the late 1980s management suggested a "green programme" be introduced. The Saturday morning slot eventually grew to being two hours in length, containing fishing and forestry reports, as well as a "green" component. This was the pre-restructuring *Country Saturday* programme (see Chapter Five for an outline of the *Country Saturday* and *Country Life* format).

In November 1995 RNZ management told staff that some programming changes were to be made and called for suggestions from each news groups. These submissions were summarised and taken to the RNZ board, who came back with *The Future State Model*. Hugh says

...the board then came back and included in that were suggested changes...they included the creation of regional journalists to strengthen RNZ's regional news input and the disestablishment of the Rurals team.

Consequently, Hugh's role has changed from a total emphasis on rural reporting to this being just one part of his job. The new expectation is

that issues of a regional nature that would be of interest in other parts of New Zealand...will be covered for either *Morning Report* or *Checkpoint* and in addition to that, material of a network news nature...will also be provided. In many cases these stories can be of a rural nature...but they may also relate to hospital issues, to education issues, to social issues, whatever.

He goes on to say that his role as a regional reporter takes priority, although this does not preclude rurally orientated stories being covered as regional stories, if they are deemed sufficiently newsworthy:

The priority is to gather material for either *Morning Report* or *Checkpoint*. Now if that happens to be of an agri-business nature, so be it, but in terms of rural news, that doesn't take the same priority as it used to...unless we're talking about floods, or crises in the apple industry, or whatever it may be...which you would then put into a *Checkpoint* or *Morning Report* programme.

Later, he further illustrates the different focus of *Rural Report* and mainstream news, saying that "If there were 200 growers going to Social Welfare in Hastings because they couldn't make any money from apples, then suddenly you've got a big story. But if its only 20 then it would be a rural news story". Hugh also points out that there is not much point in sending half a dozen stories to *Rural Report* every day or couple of days, as the shortened time frame means they are unlikely to get to air. He suggests that as a result a lot more "filtering" occurs, as reporters become more choosy in regard to the stories that they feed to Rurals.

On the subject of mainstreaming Hugh points out that every story must have a news element. He says that rural stories have to stack up, and there "has certainly been no policy by management to accommodate more rural news stories in *Morning Report* but what there has been, perhaps, is a greater recognition that those stories which will command a news presence will in fact be used". He points out that rurally-oriented stories are well covered in mainstream news bulletins when they are the big stories of the day. In addition, mainstream news may be preferable when a story needs to go to air quickly: "If I'm doing something exclusive from the Apple

and Pear Board now I want it to get to news as soon as possible...so I would copy it to Rurals as a point of information and send it straight to news."

The role of *Rural Report* may be to "pick up" extended news stories which are not substantive enough to warrant a package on *Morning Report* or *Checkpoint* but which still deserve coverage. Hugh believes there is still a need for a separate timeslot, and that *Rural Report* is important as part of the mix. However, the current five minute length is frustratingly short, especially in regard to interviews, which need to be reduced to 45 seconds, whereas before there was two minutes available. In addition, the facility for a two and a half minute story no longer exists, restricting the amount of good information that can be aired. "If you want to cover a rural issue adequately you could with a two and a half minute package, you could have three different voices...[now] the quality hasn't lessened but the overall balance can be reduced". The show's ability to provide continued coverage has also lessened. Whereas prior to the restructuring Hugh would be providing constant updates throughout the Apple and Pear Board marketing season, this year this has not happened to anywhere near the same extent. Consequently, "The in-depthness of rural information that used to come across the airwaves no longer does".

Hugh believes that the major reason behind the restructuring was to have less specialist programming. In his view, there were some areas that "stuck out like a sore thumb as being specialist" - the Maori news, rural news and sport. All these have been cut back or reconstructed, and Hugh welcomes this streamlining. He suggests that rural listeners concerned at the shortened rural news sessions should listen to the agri-business slot, which has a greater audience share and therefore should prompt more people to have a "greater appreciation of what's going on in the rural sector". In regard to the line between rural news and business news, Hugh made the following comment:

Rurals is an unfortunate term because Rurals...tends to suggest farming, and the majority of the time the material that one is compiling has nothing to do with farming. It has an element but only because it is marketing, whether it be marketing apples or marketing meat. In the course of a year I would have talked to...probably five times as many marketing people as I did farmers, maybe more.

Another motivation behind the restructuring was the need to strengthen regional news, as local commercial newsrooms were not providing the package news items desired by *Morning Report* and *Checkpoint*. Hugh believes the rural reporters were seen to have the experience and knowledge of the regions necessary for good provincial coverage.

Finally, Hugh thinks that the future for public radio is quite bright, with listening surveys continuing to show high audience share. However, he has some concern over the compartmentalisation of features and news (*Country Life*, previously made by the rural team, is now produced by Features), pointing out that the organisation's poor track record for internal communications has the potential to lead to double-ups.

9.2.3 Points Raised

It was hypothesised at the beginning of the research that the rural reporters would see the restructuring to be the result of managerial influence and commercial imperatives. Both Hugh and Jill believe that one of the main reasons behind the changes was the desire of management to utilise their reporting skills in other areas. The changes in public radio that have led to this were outlined in Chapter Two, and are also addressed by RNZ programme manager Elizabeth Alley, when she states that the organisation

was forced to push the rural reporters - based in Whangarei, Hamilton, Napier, Palmerston North, Nelson, Canterbury and Otago - into taking a wider news gathering role following the sale of the broadcaster's commercial stations to the Radio Network. The sale meant former Radio New Zealand stations could no longer be relied upon to provide regional news coverage for the network. As the rural reporters were the only RNZ presence in provincial New Zealand, they were required to fulfil this role. (Thompson, 1997c, p.13).

While Jill addresses the role that funding cuts have played in this latest restructuring, Hugh feels that the changes to *Rurals* are consistent with a shift by management toward having less specialist programming. He supports a separate *Rural Report* slot, but does not appear to share Jill's concerns that the specialist knowledge rural reporters bring to their job will be under-utilised under the new regime. However, Thompson (1997b) identifies this change of focus (from rural to regional), and concerns that this will result in reporters being unable to concentrate on their specialist area, as a reason for some rural reporters' reluctance to sign new contracts.

Another point raised by Jill, in regard to the loss of expansive coverage and its impact on technology transfer, is consistent with concerns in the wider rural community. Mandeno (1997) notes the importance of *Rural Report* in the technology transfer process and McCaw (1997) discusses new communication techniques, in particular conference workshops, that aim to make scientific information more accessible to farmers. The recent announcement, in September 1997, that New Zealand On Air is to no longer fund the television series *Agri-Tech 2000*, in addition to the *Rural Report* cutbacks, may mean such forums will take on a new importance in the next decade.

It was discussed in Chapter Two that specialist news reporters tend to have close relationships with their sources, and while strong agricultural background and associations are generally perceived as useful in rural coverage (Meyer, 1987) some research suggests that specialist reporters may be compromised by their closeness to the sector upon which they report (eg. Reisner, 1991; Corbett, 1992; Nelkin, 1987). Although this research is not qualified to remark on the impact of a close relationship between the rural reporters and their sources, it is noted that Jill said the rural reporters cannot afford to "shaft" their sources, as long term contacts are important in the field. An example of this, Kevin Ikin, the National Radio rural reporter named as Landcorp Agricultural Communicator of the Year (1997), was commended "for

the accuracy of his reporting and **the integrity with which he treats his sources**" ("Top journalist from meat round", 1997, p.2 - my emphasis).

Both Hugh and Jill welcome the closer relationship between rural and business news, seeing them as thematically well linked. This is consistent with management comments and overseas research which has documented a move toward the "businessing" of agricultural news.

Finally, the content analysis results and discussion, in Chapters Five and Six, show that mainstream news does cover agriculture but tends to be attracted to the big stories. This is supported in comments made by both Jill and Hugh. Jill also mentions the conflict component of *Morning Report*, which is borne out in the content analysis, which found that mainstream news is consistently more likely to contain conflict than is *Rural Report*. Finally, Hugh stated his belief that the reallocation of rural reporters, and the shortened time-slot, has meant there is less continuation of coverage, citing the example of the drop in the number of stories he has done throughout the apple and pear marketing season. This too was a finding of the content analysis methodology (See Chapter Five, Table 7).

9.3 Former *Rural Report* Editor, Peter Burke

Peter Burke was involved in rural broadcasting for ten years, from 1977 to 1987, initially as an agricultural reporter for Television One and in 1981 moving to Radio New Zealand's "Rurals" where he advanced to Chief Reporter and Editor. He sees these as the heyday years of agricultural journalism, when "farming news on television and radio was actually perceived to be worth something". Currently, he works in a public relations role at the Kapiti Coast District Council, and also owns a farm. From his position outside of the industry, he feels that the economy of the country is no longer reflected in the media, who tend to trivialise rural issues. In regard to Saturday night primetime television programming, he suggests that "We have *Tux Wonder Dogs* as opposed to the sheep dog trials, and that sums it up really".

Peter believes the news media have a role not just to reflect society but to be pro-active and seek out what is happening, but that the potential for this is lessened by moves such as RNZ's change in focus from rural to regional reporting. "Unless they're covering rural issues on an on-going basis they're...going to pick up on the obvious stories, but they're never going to do anything in-depth".

It is Peter's belief that RNZ has made a "gross error of judgement in disbanding rurals", and that CEO Sharon Crosbie did not do enough to prevent the cutbacks, motivated by "so-called ratings", which have done the rural community a disservice. He thinks that RNZ has been trying for years to cut Rurals out, but that once agriculture had the power to prevent this, and reporters were prepared and able to fight for its retention. Now, reporters are frightened of losing their jobs and "the power of agriculture generally, even in government, has declined". In Peter's eyes, the restructuring demonstrates that Crosbie and the RNZ board are city driven, and that National Radio is becoming a "city station".

In Peter's view, the role of the rural news programming is two-fold: it acts as a direct information carrier to those in the industry, and also as a bridge between rural and urban communities, "making country matters interesting to a wider audience". Since the restructuring, the programmes have become "almost unrecognisable...so diluted [they are] almost non existent", which is a foreseeable consequence of fewer reporters.

Rural Report was once primarily a farm advisory programme, but with Peter at the helm there was a move toward popularising farming news, with the aim of making it more understandable. "The secret was to try and take developments on the farm and put them in a context where they actually were meaningful to people in the street. If Rurals is going to survive it has to do that". He says that there is a tendency for journalists with a strong agricultural background to talk in jargon, but that they need to have the ability to interpret events for the wider community.

Peter believes that radio is a cost-effective medium for listeners who can do a job and absorb information at the same time. He is a big supporter of public radio, which he thinks needs to be adequately and properly funded, perhaps by sponsorship:

I was an advocate of that way back, and said that *Rural Report* should've been sponsored, and I don't think that would've detracted from the type of programme that we were producing. If you said *Rural Report*, brought to you by Merck, Sharp and Dohme, makers of Ivomec, and if you included that four times in a half an hour, and you sold it, and you paid your wages through that, then I wouldn't see any problem. I think public radio's been a little bit precious in that respect, it's getting that balance which says what is sponsorship and what is advertising...if you sold the programme, as opposed to selling the commercials within programmes you could raise revenue...providing money that otherwise isn't there, and preserving some of the quality without really upsetting it too much.

Finally, Peter would like to see *Rural Report* in a higher profile time slot. He believes placement is important and the morning programme should be adjacent to business news, with which it is better linked, rather than Maori news. He would also like to see a programme which targets new farmers. He is a supporter of the *Country Life* programme, believing it is a useful radio forum, particularly for lifestyle, an audience segment who are hungry for information but largely ignored.

9.3.1 Points Raised

Peter takes a wider view of broadcast coverage of agriculture, mentioning the changes he has seen over the past twenty years. Many of his comments are consistent with those discussed in Chapter Two (eg. Prickett, 1996; Thompson, 1997a) which tend to be dismissive of television coverage. In particular, Peter relates the diminished coverage to a loss in rural clout and failure by organisations such as the "city-driven" RNZ to recognise the importance of the sector. This belief in a rural/urban divide is a theme of the restructuring, discussed in Chapter Two. Peter's comments also have relevance to the recent announcement (in September 1997) that NZOA has decided to no longer fund the television series, *AgriTech 2000*. In a letter to *The Dominion*, Liz Brook argues that the programme's demise is the result of the

television station's discrimination against farmers. She argues that the placement of the show, at noon on Saturdays,

is a prime example of the lack of thought that goes into time slots for these types of shows...TV1 should get real and provide time-slots for programmes aimed at the audience they are intended for. It was the time-slot that killed this programme, not the content (Brook, 1997, p.10).

In terms of offering solutions, Peter suggests that programmes such as *Rural Report* could be sponsored. He distinguishes between advertising and sponsorship, and believes it could be done without a negative effect on the show. However, such a move would need to take account of the case for a non-commercial rural news alternative, given the research which documents advertiser influence on content (See Reisner, 1991; Reisner & Walter, 1994; Walter, 1996; Sommer & Pilisuk, 1982). Of course, non-commercial media such as RNZ rely on public funds, and given the gradual decline in the amount they are allocated, the future may see a re-examination of ideas such as sponsorship. As Chief Executive Sharon Crosbie says, "At the end of the day you can't go to a shop with \$19.4 million and expect to come out with \$27 million worth of radio programming" (cited in Thompson, 1997a, p.2).

Peter Burke feels that under the new regime, specialist reporters are limited in their ability to be pro-active in news-gathering. Hillgren (1989) has similar reservations, stating that "good stories go unreported when no one is assigned to keep a close eye on the beat" (p.19). She also argues that there is a limited number of editors and reporters with deep agricultural knowledge in the United States, something which Burke alludes may also be the case here, when he comments on the trivialisation of agricultural news on television.

Finally, in Peter's view, specialist rural reporters must produce content which is understandable to the wider public, as well as being useful to farmers. He sees this as essential to the survival of *Rurals*. Hillgren (1989) also discusses the sometimes controversial moves being made to encourage the news media to take a "fresh look"

at agricultural reporting and Gay (1986) quotes the head of the University of Missouri agricultural journalism department, Dick Lee, as saying that newspaper farming pages will disappear altogether as "reporters write more for a non-farm audience" (p.20). A similar point was made by Jill Galloway, who states that a *Rural Report* story should be "acceptable and understandable" to all listeners. There is recognition amongst Burke, Chappell and Galloway that specialist rural news has both farmer and non-farmer listenership.

9.4 A Political Perspective: Denis Marshall

The Rangitikei Member of Parliament (MP), Denis Marshall, raised initial concerns about Radio New Zealand's planned changes to rural programming, and from there the issue became quite public. "I work a lot with rural radio so was aware of what was going on. Clearly Radio New Zealand had pretty much made up their mind up about how they were going to operate so it was never going to be easy to turn them around". He points out that there have been many changes at RNZ over recent years, citing the selling off of their commercial arm and a return to "core activities". Denis states

We had always fought very hard to retain the provincial, rural part of the network and there was naturally a lot of resistance to the merging of the rural reporting role, into more of a regional, general news role. I would say it's made it much more difficult for the rural reporters to cover the issues although they're still doing it remarkably well. But we do miss the extended coverage on rural radio and I for one believe that the reduction in the midday reporting probably has encouraged rural listeners to move away to other stations.

He listens to the Saturday show on a regular basis and believes it still manages to cover the regions well, and that Jill Galloway, in her role of general reporter, still manages to produce rurally-orientated news stories. The new format, he says, "absolutely objectively", still provides a good quality service. However, he

feels that the loss of the midday programme is a "tragedy", and would like to see this revert to its former self. In regard to the policy of mainstreaming, Denis believes that

We are, of course, getting a better injection of provincial, rural type stories through the national news network than we were before - I assume that was a deliberate policy decision by Radio New Zealand management, if it was, it appears to be working.

Of concern to Mr Marshall is the risk that the voice of the people of provincial New Zealand will not be heard to the same extent, although he does believe that privately owned radio stations are moving to fill the gap left by the National Radio restructuring. He gives the example of a friend of his, a local sheep breeder, who was interviewed extensively for the farming programme broadcast on a Southland radio station.

So other people are moving to fill the market, it's just that there's not quite the national network that there used to be, but...other people can come into the market for rural radio and represent that segment so it doesn't disappear altogether...it's not all bad news, our voice is not disappearing, it's just being heard in different ways.

Asked whether he believes there is still a place for publicly funded radio, Denis Marshall replies yes, that it remains very important, especially for coverage of arts and culture. He wants to see a continuation of Government support for public radio and believes there are excellent programmes on air. However, he stresses that the rural community does not have to rely on public radio to be heard.

In response to concerns within the rural community as to the sector's loss of a political voice, Denis refers to the process of urbanisation which has changed, and continues to change, the face of rural New Zealand. He believes this transformation has been slower here than in some other countries, and that the process is unstoppable unless the country makes social payments to people to encourage them to populate rural areas. He feels that on a population basis rural people get more spent on them than do residents of some of the larger cities (eg. Auckland,

Wellington, Christchurch) but that as population shifts continue, so too will funding changes. In addition, the way farming operates is also changing, and downward commodity trends and bigger farms negatively affect the small communities which were so important to New Zealand's development.

Denis Marshall suggests that while people have a tendency to believe that if they had greater political influence these things (ie. the restructuring of rural programming) would not happen, they are actually outside their influence, and happen regardless. However, under the new MMP electoral system, there are less constituent MPs (and the new list MPs tend to be urban based) and Marshall's predominantly provincial electorate has increased in size, all of which may mean less political representation for rural dwellers. Denis, who has been the member of Parliament since 1984, sees himself as a rural representative in Parliament, and is currently involved in the Primary Production Select Committee. He was a farmer prior to entering politics, and still owns a farm in the region.

9.4.1 Points Raised

Denis Marshall places the restructuring of RNZ's rural programming, and the reaction of the rural community to this, into the wider context of urbanisation. He suggests that such change is inevitable in the face of this process. However, he goes on to suggest that rural people need not rely on publicly funded outlets, and that private enterprise has a role to play. He gives the example of a privately owned Southland radio station which produces a farming programme. In the same area, agri-company CRT Southland owns 90% of the region's television station, which airs a farming programme three times a week. At the same time, there has been little interest by public funds allocator, NZOA, in funding rural programmes. In September 1997, they decided to discontinue funding for *Agri-Tech 2000*, and not to fund an application from rural broadcaster, Tom Clarke, for a daily rural news service (Clarke, 1997, p.4).

Although Denis Marshall correctly points out that there are other media outlets directed at farmers, international experience suggests that publicly funded broadcasting remains a desirable option. As mentioned earlier, in regard to Peter Burke's comments about sponsorship, and as discussed in Chapter Two, research overseas has suggested there may be potential for advertisers, who indirectly fund commercial news media, to negatively influence content. Logsdon (1992) sees publishing without agri-business advertising as the most effective solution to the possible problem.

In conclusion, Denis Marshall has a positive attitude toward National Radio's rural programming, pointing out that the rural news service remains of a high quality, although he would like to see the midday programme reinstated to its pre-restructuring length. Like Burke, he feels that the *Country Life* programme is very worthwhile (see Chapter Five for a descriptive account of this show and its predecessor, *Country Saturday*). Marshall has noted an increased amount of regional stories, and believes Jill Galloway still manages to include a rural slant in many of her items.

9.5 Radio New Zealand Management

The Chief Executive of Radio New Zealand, Sharon Crosbie, was not available for an interview but suggested I contact Elizabeth Alley of Programme Development. Ms Alley agreed to answering written questions but when these were supplied, it was programme commissioner Michael Peck who telephoned me with the replies.

9.5.1 Michael Peck, Programme Commissioner

Radio New Zealand outlines two factors which motivated the restructuring of National Radio's rural programming: the loss of income as a result of the discontinuation of the contract for news supply to The Radio Network (TRN), and the loss of regional input as a result of the sale of the commercial arm. The question

of how regional news was to be resourced was answered when an evaluation of all programming identified that there was a huge amount of resources going into agricultural news. Thus, it was decided to make rural journalists "multi-purpose".

Radio New Zealand believes the role of specialist rural programming is to serve the rural community, as required by the charter, and, as the rural sector is still important in New Zealand society, to also keep the general audience informed. When asked what he sees as the future of specialist rural news, and whether there will be further moves to absorb rural coverage into business news, Peck responds that there are no more changes planned. He does not think that rural news will end up being part of business news given that a commitment to specialist rural programming has been made. However, business-oriented rural stories do have an outlet in the business section.

The number of rural reporters working for the organisation is expressed as 5.5 full-time equivalents. This includes the two who produce *Rural Report*, the two who produce *Country Life* and the rural input of the regional reporters. These regional reporters do not have time quotas for the two parts of their job (ie. rural and regional) but are required to cover news events in their area as they happen. However, in response to my inquiry as to approximately what amount of time they would spend on regional and rural news, Peck confirms that it would probably work out as an 80/20 split. Peck points out that Rurals' level of resourcing compares favourably with 1 full-time equivalent for business news, 1 for health, 1 for education, 4 for politics, 1.5 for the arts, and 1 for religion. There is no reporter covering the science beat. Given these relatively high staffing levels, I enquired whether this is to be maintained. Peck replied that there are no changes planned. Peck suggests that, in his personal opinion, some of the agricultural resources might be better allocated to health or education. "Farmers are pretty important but not as important as what they used to be". However, RNZ has made a commitment to specialist rural programming, as demonstrated in their decision not to remove the shows altogether,

as was originally planned. The organisation sees the rural audience as both significant and important.

The subject of mainstreaming has been addressed throughout this research, on the basis that it was proffered by RNZ's Chief Executive Sharon Crosbie as compensation for the reduced specialist programming. However, Peck says mainstreaming has not occurred as the specialist rural news slot was retained. Originally, it was planned to discontinue the rural news segments altogether and instead ensure rural stories appeared in other outlets throughout the day.

Michael Peck, representing the RNZ viewpoint, denies that rural coverage has suffered as a result of the restructuring. Although *Country Saturday* has halved in length (and is now known as *Country Life*), it continues to cover all the main rural stories and to provide in-depth coverage. In regard to the shortened weekday news programmes, he argues that a number of stories are covered in-depth by programmes such as *Morning Report* and *Checkpoint*. These are the stories that he suggests stop being rural stories and become major news items. He believes that the coverage has "hardly reduced" and points out that a recent survey shows little change in listenership since 1991. In terms of programme length, Peck suggests that "less can be more", and that the shorter show deals with the important stories, without the "padding". In addition, according to Peck, it has been the various rural lobby groups who have made their feelings known to RNZ, rather than any individual farmers, and that "our listenership has not responded adversely". When asked, he replies that a more adverse response may have made a difference.

Another criticism which has been outlined throughout the research is that of RNZ being too city driven and neglecting its rural audience. Peck disagrees with these criticisms and states that the organisation does as much regional reporting as it can. He points out that while *Country Life* has been shortened to one hour, it is also aired on Friday nights, and other shows have a regional and rural focus where relevant (eg. Kim Hill's programme and *Morning Report*).

9.5.2 Points Raised

It appears that RNZ has a relatively high amount of reportorial resources devoted to rural programming, although it must be pointed out that only two of the 5.5 full time equivalents are covering rural news stories on a daily basis. Two others are in Features, producing the Friday night/Saturday morning magazine show, *Country Life*, and the regional reporters are required to cover regional issues as well as rural stories. Of course, there is likely to be a degree of overlap between regional and rural stories, and Rangitikei MP Denis Marshall points out that Jill Galloway appears to produce a number of rurally-oriented stories in her new role. However, according to Thompson (1997b) the specialist rural reporters were unwilling to sign their new contracts partially because of the fact that regional reporting would take precedence over rural reporting:

A source inside RNZ said the reporters were reluctant to be, "turned into ambulance chaser", in the regions. The draft contracts reportedly provide for the six reporters to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to provide coverage for important national breaking stories. On a day-to-day basis they will be expected to cover whatever is the big news event in their region. This could be a plane crash, a court case, a murder inquiry or a provincial local body dispute. *Straight Furrow* understands part of the reporters' reluctance stems from concerns they will be unable to concentrate on their specialist area, rural and farming news (p.4).

In the interview with Galloway, she expresses her reservations that under the new regime the regional reporters may lack the time to cover rural stories. Hugh Chappell, working under the new system at the time he was interviewed, said that his regional role takes priority, although he also points out, like Marshall, that regional stories can have a rural slant. Both he and Jill are positive about the closer relationship between Rurals and business news.

There was agreement amongst all interviewees that mainstream news does cover the "big stories", a finding also borne out in the content analysis and suggested in the comments made by some survey respondents. However, to examine the worth of the "mainstreaming" approach outlined by Sharon Crosbie, the mainstream content

was compared with *Rural Report*, and it was found that differences existed between them. It was concluded that a total embracing of mainstreaming would not ensure the same range of stories, degree of follow-through, or depth. However, as Michael Peck and the reporters point out, the package stories on *Morning Report* and *Checkpoint* do provide in-depth coverage of important rural stories.

There was little evidence that supported Crosbie's claim that the shortening of *Rural Report* was being accompanied by mainstreaming, an increased emphasis on rural news in other bulletins. However, the reason for this was discovered during the interview with Michael Peck, when he stated that mainstreaming has not occurred because of the decision to keep *Rural Report* as a specialist programme. Earlier, in Chapter Six, I suggested that the announcement of mainstreaming may have been an attempt to appease listeners, and amounted to little more than rhetoric. It remains unclear why these earlier comments were made, but they are inconsistent with RNZ's current stance.

Finally, Michael Peck expressed the organisation's commitment to rural programming, pointing out that the original plan to end the specialist shows altogether was not implemented. There continues to be significant reporter resources channelled into rural news, and a commitment to increasing the amount of regional news should have long term benefits for provincial areas.

9.6 Limitations

The interviews provide some insight into reportorial, political, and management viewpoints. However, it is only a small sample and in no way generalisable. In addition, it has been demonstrated that there is often a discrepancy between accounts of attitudes gained through interviews, and observation of the behaviour related to those attitudes (Jankowski & Wester, 1991). In some parts of the interviews there is a reliance upon the subject's accuracy of recall, and therefore a possibility that the information may not be totally correct. Seidman (1991) also suggests that the

interviewer leave open the likelihood that other interviewers would have told different stories.

It is difficult to judge what effect the interviewer's inexperience had on the establishment of rapport and thus the quality of information gathered. However, Seidman writes that a genuine interest in other people is the most important characteristic an interviewer should have, and therefore a personal background in agriculture and an academic interest in the news media should compensate for my lack of experience.

9.7 Strengths and Future Directions

The interviews have yielded information which would not otherwise be available, and contribute to the establishment of a comprehensive account of the restructuring. According to Tuchman (1977), it is advisable to use other methodologies to further validate content analysis findings, and the interviews and survey fulfil this requirement. For example, interviewee Jill Galloway talks of the conflict component in *Morning Report* news, which was also a finding of the content analysis, as outlined in Chapter Five. The interviews also allowed for clarification of the RNZ viewpoint, particularly in regard to mainstreaming. In addition, it was made apparent that the organisation continues to channel a relatively high amount of resources into rural programming.

In terms of future directions, it would be useful to undertake further discussion of agricultural journalism with practitioners and the audience. Although this research has focused upon the rural news provided by a publicly funded media outlet, two interviewees addressed commercial alternatives in the form of sponsorship and private radio outlets. Commercial imperatives impact on public radio in different ways, and it would be beneficial to examine the perspective of specialist media professional who work in purely commercial environments. If

examples of advertiser influence on editorial content were to be found, it would strengthen the case for the continuation of National Radio's rural news programming.

9.8 Conclusion

This chapter has written up the interviews and discussed the key points in relation to other research findings. The viewpoints of a range of people - former and current reporters, a politician and RNZ management - have been included, and areas of similarity noted. Earlier, in Chapters Seven and Eight, listeners' reaction to the restructuring, gathered through a survey questionnaire, were documented and discussed.

The following chapter, the conclusion, provides an overview of the research, discussing the content analysis, survey and interview outcomes, and how they contribute to an overall picture of the rural news restructuring.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

The goal of this research was to build a holistic picture of the restructuring of Radio New Zealand's rural programming, placing the changes within the wider context of agricultural news and public radio. The recent nature of the changes, which were announced in December 1996 and implemented in January 1997, made the subject topical and relevant.

Three methodologies were employed: content analysis, a questionnaire, and qualitative interviews. This combination of methodologies is key to the success of the research. While content analysis is in many ways the central method, for an examination of restructuring should first establish what effect, if any, the process has had on programme content, Tuchman (1977) advises that is strengthened by its use in conjunction with other approaches. Therefore, the audience and the producers of rural programming were also studied, and a survey and interviews were deemed the most appropriate means of accessing the viewpoints of these groups.

So what of the hypotheses advanced at the beginning of the research? The results show that the nature of Radio New Zealand's specialist rural news has changed. The impact of cutting back the daily news programme, *Rural Report*, from approximately 15 minutes to just five, on elements such as story depth, format (ie. the use of the interview), and soundbite length have been documented. In Chapter Five these findings are tabulated to allow for easy comparison between 1996 and 1997 and also, where applicable, to highlight the differences between mainstream and specialist rural coverage. *Country Saturday*, the weekend programme, did not escape unscathed, but has been shortened and repackaged as *Country Life*, and now also airs on Friday evenings. Programme time constraints and a loss of reportorial resources appear to have been the cause of the changed face of specialist rural news on National Radio.

It was also predicted in Chapter One that the rural reporters would see the changes to be the result of managerial influence and commercial imperatives. Although the scope of the interviews grew, to include the perspectives of rurally based politician Denis Marshall and former *Rural Report* editor Peter Burke, it was expected that they would believe the restructuring occurred for similar reasons. In Chapter Nine, these interviews, along with one conducted with Radio New Zealand's Programme Commissioner Michael Peck, are written up and discussed. In brief, reporters Hugh Chappell and Jill Galloway both see the changes as being motivated by the desire of management to use their skills elsewhere, for as a result of earlier restructuring the rural reporters were the only National Radio presence in the provinces. Jill also mentions the budget cuts, whereas Hugh believes the rural restructuring was part of a wider move toward de-specialising, which he feels is a positive thing. Peter Burke and Denis Marshall suggest that external factors, such as the declining power of agriculture, and the process of urbanisation, contributed to the decision to restructure. Radio New Zealand addresses the impact of the earlier restructuring, resulting in the impending end of the contract between themselves and The Radio Network, and current budgetary constraints. Programme Commissioner Michael Peck points out that rural news remains well resourced, as demonstrated by a comparison with other news groups.

The third research hypothesis was that the feedback from the rural community, gained by means of a mail survey, would show that they perceive the changes negatively. As demonstrated in Chapters Seven and Eight, this was clearly the case, with the majority of respondents (63.1%) feeling that the changes have worsened or greatly worsened the rural news service.

In many ways, these results are unsurprising, for they are a likely consequence of a restructuring which imposes time constraints and reduces the number of specialist rural reporters. However, an empirical confirmation of this is valuable, particularly one which places the restructuring into its full context, of changes in both agriculture and public radio.

To broadly summarise, Chapter Two surveys the literature surrounding the topic, in regard to agricultural news and public radio. In this chapter, academic scholarship is combined with commentary about both the restructuring and the media treatment of agriculture generally, taken principally from specialist rural publications such as *Rural News* and the *New Zealand Farmer*. The following themes were identified and discussed: public radio in New Zealand, the news needs of farmers, the mainstreaming of agricultural news, sourcing, commercial imperatives, specialist agricultural reporting, farming as business news, and the rural/urban dichotomy.

Chapters Three and Four were concerned with the methodologies employed in the research. In Chapter Three, the reason for the combination of content analysis, survey and interviews was discussed, and each individual method defined, and its purpose and limitations outlined. In addition, where relevant, ethical considerations, are addressed. Chapter Four outlines the research questions and the steps taken in the data-gathering process.

The content analysis results and interpretation were the subject of Chapters Five and Six. By applying a content analysis protocol to 1996 and 1997 news stories, it became apparent that the restructuring has adversely affected *Rural Report*. In particular, the following changes were noted: fewer stories per bulletin, shorter stories, the increased role of Wellington as a place of origin, a drop in issue coverage, a decrease in story depth, shorter source speaking times, and a drop off in the number of interview segments. In addition, it appeared that mainstream news covers a narrower range of stories and that, following the restructuring, some categories of rural news are not being covered to the same extent (eg. social issues). These key findings were addressed in Chapter Six, where they are linked with the themes outlined in Chapter Two, and related to current concerns in the agricultural sector. Later, in Chapter Nine, many of these same findings are given credence in comments made by reporters Jill Galloway and Hugh Chappell.

The survey, a copy of which appears in Appendix C, allowed for the gathering of information about aspects such as level of listenership and awareness of

the restructuring plans, as well as providing a valuable insight into the role of rural news for the agricultural community. In Chapter Seven, the survey data is tabulated, and shows, among other things, relatively high levels of listenership, respondents' disbelief that the rural content of other programmes has increased, and that National Radio is one of the top three sources of news for farmers, and the most important broadcast source. Chapter Eight discusses these findings in relation to two other recent surveys (conducted by Radio New Zealand/MRL and the Federated Farmers' publication, the *Straight Furrow*), and examined the points made in respondents' comments, many of which were again able to be related to the research themes set out in Chapter Two.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, the interviews are written up and analysed. A range of people, occupying different roles and with a different perspectives, were interviewed: rural/regional reporters Jill Galloway and Hugh Chappell, former *Rural Report* editor Peter Burke, Rangitikei Member of Parliament Denis Marshall, and Radio New Zealand's Programme Commissioner Michael Peck. Once more, links were able to be made between what these people had to say, the research themes, and findings of the other methodologies.

The goal of providing a comprehensive picture of Radio New Zealand's rural restructuring remained a driving force throughout the research. For example, the interview subjects were widened from the original concentration on reporters, to incorporate the political perspective of Rangitikei MP Denis Marshall, one of the first to announce the changes that were to be made, as well as to include former *Rural Report* editor Peter Burke and RNZ management. However, limitations exist. The "rural community" is not fully represented by agricultural conference attendees, with the small percentage of female respondents being one indication of this. In addition, the response rates were not high, and were hindered by the difficulty of doing follow-up. However, they are comparable with those of other occupational groups (eg. Lynn et al, 1996; Judge et al, 1995). The interviews, too, use a convenience sample, involving the opinions of a select few, rather than being truly representative.

There were conflicts in the information that informed the research, particularly surrounding the policy of mainstreaming. In early 1997, RNZ Chief Executive Sharon Crosbie, replying to criticism of the restructuring, wrote that the cutbacks to *Rural Report* were to be accompanied by an increased emphasis on agricultural news in other programmes. However, in an interview, RNZ's Programme Commissioner Michael Peck said that this policy of mainstreaming had not occurred, and was only an option **if no specialist rural slot was retained**. This conflict in information was not able to be clarified, given that Sharon Crosbie declined to be interviewed. As it was, Crosbie's comments had led to the inclusion of a survey question about mainstreaming, and the results show that the majority of survey respondents do not believe that there is more emphasis on agricultural news in other bulletins. Other interviewees with whom this was discussed were also dismissive. Of course, as pointed out earlier, in Chapter Six, mainstreaming is a problematic concept, suggestive of quotas and at odds with the nature of news.

This conflict aside, the findings of the different methodologies are supportive of one another. For example, the majority of survey respondents feel that the rural news programming has worsened following the restructuring. The content analysis confirmed that certain aspects of coverage, such as story length and depth, have been adversely affected, and all interviewees, other than Radio New Zealand's Michael Peck, admitted to some reservations about the new style.

The research, in establishing reliable and unbiased data about the nature of the changes, has also demonstrated that information available in other forums may at times be incorrect or misleading. For instance, in Chapter Six, I examine Thompson's (1997c) comments in light of the content analysis findings and refute his claim that the changes have not been as drastic as initially feared. Importantly, the findings have also been contextualised. The changing face of public radio in New Zealand is a central issue that must be recognised. To embrace, for example, a belief that the restructuring occurred because of RNZ's blatant disregard of the importance of the rural sector would be to belie the importance of the resource problems facing

public radio. However, it should be noted that, in September 1997, New Zealand On Air (NZOA) made a decision to discontinue funding the *AgriTech 2000* television series, and according to Clarke (1997), an application by rural broadcaster Tom Clarke to make a news programme was also turned down. These decisions may be part of a trend which deserves monitoring.

The research is in part motivated by a need to redress New Zealand's poor tradition of news media scholarship. McGregor and Comrie's (1995) work on broadcast news has been of importance to this thesis, as has American academic writing on agricultural news. This research has combined information from these and other sources with small pieces of commentary and discussion, particularly from the specialist rural media, to simultaneously show linkages between this situation and others, and to begin a theory of agricultural news that recognises the uniqueness of the New Zealand situation.

Therefore, the impact of this research on the discipline is to provide a much needed New Zealand perspective on rural news. In addition, given that the American research tends to be preoccupied with the relationship between advertising and agricultural news production, this research is unique for its examination of a non-commercial medium, albeit one which is conscious of ratings and budgetary constraints. The thesis topic recognises the importance of agricultural news in a country for which rural production remains vital to economic success, and in which farming is part of the national psyche.

Finally, future research directions have been outlined in regard to the three methodologies, in the closing sections of Chapters Six, Eight and Nine. To briefly summarise, it would be useful to examine newspaper coverage of agriculture in light of themes developed overseas, namely the commercial pressures on specialist rural media, and the way daily newspapers cover agriculture. Do New Zealand newspapers cover agriculture in ways significantly different from their American counterparts, which have been criticised for increasing the potential for polarisation between rural and urban communities? The survey showed that specialist

agricultural publications, followed by daily/local newspapers, are the two most important sources of rural news for farmers, and therefore these media forms may be especially worthy of investigation. Further examination of how women are portrayed in the agricultural media is also pertinent, given the findings released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) in their *Change and Diversity: Opportunities For and Constraints on Rural Women in New Zealand* report, and in light of the consistently low numbers of women as sources.

The research has also raised questions about the future of broadcast rural news, particularly in regard to publicly funded forms. In the survey, National Radio rated as the most important broadcast outlet. Denis Marshall points out that the farming community does not need to rely on publicly funded media, and suggests that privately owned radio stations are moving to fill the gap left by RNZ's restructuring. However, in light of American research which has suggested the impartiality of the farm press is compromised by its reliance on agri-business, there may remain an argument for the retention of National Radio's *Rural Report* and *Country Life* (see Chapter 2.6). The public/private funding debate is worthy of further attention.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, former *Rural Report* editor Peter Burke suggested that there is a deeper symbolism in the fact that television no longer broadcasts coverage of the national dog trial championships (in the form of *The Dog Show*) but airs, in a primetime weekend slot, *Wonder Dogs*, a programme in which teams of pet dogs complete obstacle courses to the accompaniment of a humorous commentary. That the working dog, something of a national icon in itself, has been replaced, in the public eye, by scarf-wearing canines who retrieve socks from sheds, demonstrates a shift in broadcast programming which may reflect wider social change. Throughout the research, members of the rural community have voiced similar concerns, worried that the cutbacks to *Rural Report*, and more recently, *AgriTech 2000*, are part of a wider trend that marginalises agriculture.

However, it must be recalled that the media landscape is constantly changing, so that while the level of funding public radio receives continues to decline, the

number of media forms with which they must compete grows. While on the surface agriculture and public radio may appear to have little in common, both have, over the past two decades, encountered enormous change, and both face great challenges in the future if they wish to prosper. This thesis recognises the value of a continued association between them.

APPENDIX A
CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING PROTOCOL

General (to be completed for each story broadcast Monday to Friday)

1. What is the number of the story? _____

2. What day of the week is it broadcast?

Monday	1
Tuesday	2
Wednesday	3
Thursday	4
Friday	5

3. What day/month/year is it broadcast? _____

4. Which bulletin broadcast the story?

6am news	1
Morning Rural News	2
6-7am feature	3
Midday news	4
Midday Business News	5
Midday Rural News	6
Midday feature	7

5. What is the duration of the story in seconds? _____

6. Where does the story predominantly originate?

Auckland	1
Wellington	2
Dunedin	3
Christchurch	4
Other North Island city/town	5
Other South Island city/town	6
North Island regional	7
South Island regional	8
Offshore islands	9
Overseas	10
Unspecified	11

7. If the story is in a rural news session, is it a continuation/update of a story broadcast in an earlier rural news session?

Yes	1
No	2

8. Is the story concerned with an:

Event only	1	
Event with underlying issue mentioned	2	_____
Event with issue covered in depth	3	
Issue only	4	

9. Rate the depth of the story coverage:

Shallow 1 2 3 4 5 In-depth

10. The story is predominantly

Good news	1	
Bad news	2	_____
Neutral	3	

11. Does the story contain conflict? (conflict is defined as two or more sides holding opposing views).

Yes	1	
No	2	_____

12. a) What is the story about?

b) What category of rural news does the story fit into? _____

13. If the reporter's voice is heard, name the reporter

Sources

14. How many sources are there in the story? _____

If one or more source/s proceed to Question 15. Fill in Question 15 once for each source in the story.

15. a) Is the source
- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|-------|
| Speaking for him/herself | 1 | |
| Being cited | 2 | _____ |
| Both | 3 | |
- b) What is the fullest identification of the source in the story?
- _____
- c) What is the gender of the source?
- | | | |
|---------|---|-------|
| Male | 1 | |
| Female | 2 | _____ |
| Unknown | 3 | |
- d) If the source speaks, how many seconds does the source speak for?
(cumulative)
- _____
- e) Is the source interviewed so that questions and answers are broadcast?
- | | | |
|-----|---|-------|
| Yes | 1 | |
| No | 2 | _____ |
- If the answer is 'yes' proceed to the next question. If it is 'no' finish coding now*
- f) What is the length of the interview segment? _____

Bulletin-by-bulletin

(to be completed for each *Rural Report* and *Country Saturday/Country Life* session)

1. What year was the bulletin broadcast? _____
 2. What is the length of the entire bulletin in seconds? _____
 3. How many stories are there in the bulletin? (*Rural Report* only)
- _____

APPENDIX B
CONTENT ANALYSIS CATEGORIES

Trade and markets: News relating to schedules, prices, the dollar, product performance in international markets, market trends, sale reports and trade issues.

Industry structures: News relating to agricultural institutions (eg. MAF, MAWL), covering such things as appointments, international organisation memberships, restructuring and policy.

Industry initiatives: New products and industries (eg. emu farming, hemp growing, rural tourism), branding of New Zealand produce, inventions. Differs from trade and markets in that the focus is not on markets or financial performance, but on the practical processes of development.

Activities and conferences: Diary type news, covering events in the agricultural calendar, such as the Young Farmer of the Year competition, field days, seminars and conferences.

Pests and disease: Coverage of disease outbreaks and the discovery of pests, and what this means for agriculture. Includes coverage of international disease epidemics, such as "Mad Cow Disease", when direct links are made between other countries and New Zealand.

Social: Coverage of aspects of rural life which are not production related. Quality of life issues, such as health (mental and physical) and education.

Government policy: Specific government policy in regard to agriculture, including legislation, bills and select committees, as well as the impact on agriculture of other Government policies. Local government issues are also included here.

Environment and land use: News relating to issues of land use, the environment, and organic farming.

Agri-business: Operating results for agribusiness organisations, redundancies, sales and investment news.

Research and training: Rural training issues such as farm safety, research results, university research plans and developments.

Co-operatives: News of mergers and other co-operative activities, such as pay-outs to dairy farmers.

Weather: Coverage of weather and weather patterns, and their impact on crops and stock. Includes natural disasters.

Expert recommendations: News items about experts' opinions and predictions. May be coverage of a speech, or an interview based story.

International: Coverage of agricultural happenings overseas, with no specific links made in regard to effects on trade or the New Zealand situation.

Other: A category for those stories, generally of a one-off variety, which do not fit into any other category. For example, the two items about a Wairarapa woman who was killed by a stag on her farm were placed into this category.

APPENDIX C
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

CHANGES TO RURAL NEWS ON 'NATIONAL RADIO '

I am seeking help to gather data for my Masters thesis which is being undertaken in the Human Resource Management Department, Massey University. I have been awarded a Massey University Masterate scholarship for my research on agricultural news and am interested in your views on the recent changes that have been made to National Radio's rural news service. This is an opportunity for you to participate in an important research topic on which there has been little investigation.

The questionnaire should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Only summarised findings will be used and replies are completely confidential. Your filling in of the questionnaire implies consent of your participation in the research project. You have been selected because of your attendance at the (specify Sheep and Beef, or Dairy) Conference. The final results will be collated and supplied to the agricultural media so that participants can be informed of the findings.

If you have any queries about the questionnaire please contact me on (06) 376 4519. Your support of this project is very much appreciated.

Susan Fountaine

The following questions are concerned with National Radio's rural news programmes: the morning and midday Rural News each week day and Country Life (formerly Country Saturday) at 7.06am on Saturday mornings. The changes referred to are the shortened morning and afternoon bulletins (now 5 minutes each), the 'mainstreaming' of agricultural news (ie.the inclusion of more agricultural news in normal news bulletins) and the reformatted Country Life.

1. Changes to the rural news programmes were implemented in January 1997. Were you aware that National Radio was planning to restructure before the changes were announced or made? (please circle the number of your answer)

1. Yes 2. No (if answering 'no' please go to Question 2 Part B)

2. a) How did you feel about the prospect of the rural news service being restructured?

- b) What are your feelings toward the changes now?

3. Please estimate how often you listen to the following programmes: (please circle the number of your answer)

6.20am Rural News: 1. Almost every weekday / 2. Once a week / 3. Occasionally / 4. Never

12.36pm Rural News: 1. Almost every weekday / 2. Once a week / 3. Occasionally / 4. Never

Country Life: 1. Almost every Saturday / 2. Once a month / 3. Occasionally / 4. Never

If you listen to none of these programmes, please proceed to Question 9

4. How important are the 'Rural News' and/or 'Country Life' sessions for you? (please circle the number of your answer)

1. Very important
2. Important
3. Neither important nor unimportant
4. Unimportant
5. Very unimportant

Please turn over

5. Do you feel confident that since the Rural News bulletins have been shortened there is more agricultural content in National Radio's normal news bulletins? (please circle the number of your answer)

1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't know

6. Since the shortening of the Rural News sessions, have other sources of agricultural information become more important to you? (please circle your answer)

1. Yes 2. No

If your answer is 'yes', please specify what these other source/s are:

7. What effect do you think the changes have had on the rural news service provided by National Radio? (circle your answer)

1. Greatly improved
2. Improved
3. Neither improved nor made worse
4. Worsened
5. Greatly worsened

8. Please make any additional comments on the changes:

9. What are the three most important sources of agricultural news for you? (please circle up to three answers)

1. Specialist publications (eg. NZ Farmer, Rural News, Straight Furrow)
2. Daily and/or local newspapers
3. National Radio
4. Other radio stations
5. Television news
6. Other (please specify) _____

10. (a) Are you: 1. Male 2. Female

(b) What is your occupation (if a farmer please specify what industry eg. dairy)

(c) What region do you live in (eg. Manawatu, Waikato)

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED - THANK YOU

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