

**COMMUNICATION AMONG AGRICULTURAL POLICY INFLUENCERS: A
DELPHI STUDY**

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Agricultural policy affects the agricultural industry in its entirety. It affects everything from the type of food that is grown to how it is processed and distributed. Agricultural policy influencers impact the development of the policy and ultimately impact the future of agriculture. Understanding how these policy influencers impact policy is important to understanding policy development. Knowing where agricultural policy influencers get information, how they prefer to have it presented and how they prefer to communicate with other agricultural policy influencers is vital to understanding and impacting the agricultural policy process. The purpose of this study was to describe agricultural policy influencers' preference for three aspects of the communication process; (1) sources of information, (2) formats of information, and (3) methods of communication with other agricultural policy influencers. Two Delphi studies were administered to distinctly separate but intersecting expert groups: Congressional agricultural aides, and agricultural lobbyists. These Delphi studies determined each group's preference for sources of information on agricultural policy, their preference for formats of information, and their preference for methods of communication while communicating with other policy influencers. Since communication is relational, the study broke communication into three sections; (1) communication with peers, (2) communication with members of the opposite expert group with whom there is a close relationship, and (3) communication with members of the opposite expert group with whom there is not a close relationship. Consensus was developed separately for each question and for each group of experts. Data are presented separately throughout this

study. In discussing the findings, this study looks at preferences from both sides of the communication interaction. In this way, the study takes two separate Delphi processes and develops them into one clear picture of communication during the policy process. Both groups of experts preferred to have written communication in the form of email and verbal communication in the form of face-to-face and telephone conversations. In addition, both groups preferred to have information presented in the most concise and least time consuming fashion. The data points to the importance of interpersonal relationships, and the need concise and efficient communication methods throughout the policy process. Recommendations for future research and for practitioners are included at the end of the study.

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Nothing that is worth working for can be accomplished completely alone. No matter what we do, we must have help from those around us. It is with the help of God, my committee, and my family and friends that I have been able to complete this thesis; therefore, it is only appropriate that thanks is given to those who helped.

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I once asked Dr. Deb how to know when I was done with my thesis. She looked at me and with a laugh said “Victor, you’re never really done with your thesis, you eventually just stop writing.” There is also more that could be written, more that could be added, and more that could be studied, but for now, I am going to stop writing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study	2
Objectives/Research Questions.....	3
Objective One: Communication Through Congressional Agricultural Aides	3
Objective Two: Communication Through Leading Agricultural Lobbyists	3
Definition of Terms and Concepts	4
Limitations of the Study	6
Basic Assumptions	7
Importance of the Study	7
CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	9
Theoretical Framework	9
The Policy Process	10
Influence Triangle Theory.....	11
Group Theory	12
The Iron Triangle Theory	12
Power Cluster Theory.....	14
Locating Information – Congressional Agriculture Aides	16
Locating Information – Agricultural Lobbyists	18
Communication Among Agriculture Policy Influencers	19
Exchange of Knowledge	20
Perception of Knowledge Exchange	21
Review of Literature Conclusion	22
CHAPTER III METHOD.....	24
Research Design	24
Population and Sample.....	25
Instrumentation.....	28

Data Collection.....	30
Data Analysis	30
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS	33
Congressional Agricultural Aides Delphi Study.....	33
Round 1 – Open-ended Questions.....	34
Round 2 – Gathering Opinion	36
Round 3 – Developing Group Opinion	41
Summated Group Opinion.....	47
Agricultural Lobbyists Delphi Study	53
Round 1 – Open-ended Questions.....	54
Round 2 – Gathering Opinion	57
Round 3 – Developing Group Opinion	62
Summated Group Opinion.....	67
CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	74
Discussion of Findings	74
Communication through Congressional Agricultural Aides	75
Communication Through Leading Agricultural Lobbyists	79
Implications	83
Recommendations for Further Research	86
Recommendations for Practice.....	89
Recommendations for Congressional Agricultural Aides.....	89
Recommendations for Agricultural Lobbyists	90
Recommendations for Researchers, Educators, and the Public	92
Conclusion.....	94
REFERENCES	95
APPENDIX A PARTICIPATION INVITATION.....	99
APPENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT	100
APPENDIX C SAMPLE COMMUNICATION.....	102

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	Page
1	Round 2 Congressional Agricultural Aides Group Preferences for Sources of Information.....37
2	Round 2 Congressional Agricultural Aides Format Preferences38
3	Round 2 Congressional Agricultural Aides Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Peers39
4	Round 2 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month.....40
5	Round 2 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Methods while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN once a Month.....41
6	Round 3 Congressional Agricultural Aides Preference for Locating Information.....43
7	Round 3 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Format Preference44
8	Round 3 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Peers45
9	Round 3 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month.....46
10	Round 3 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Methods while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN once a Month.....47
11	Summated Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Sources of Information.....49
12	Summated Congressional Agricultural Aides' Format Preference50
13	Summated Congressional Agricultural Aides Communication Channel Preference for Communicating with Peers.....51

14	Summated Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month	52
15	Summated Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN Once a Month	53
16	Round 2 Agricultural Lobbyists' Group Preference for Sources of Information.....	58
17	Round 2 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preferred Formats of Information	59
18	Round 2 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Methods while Communicating with Peers	60
19	Round 2 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Methods while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month.....	61
20	Round 2 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Methods while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN Once a Month.....	62
21	Round 3 Agricultural Lobbyists' Group Preferences for Sources of Information.....	63
22	Round 3 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preferences for Formats of Information.....	64
23	Round 3 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Peers	65
24	Round 3 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month.....	66
25	Round 3 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN Once a Month.....	67
26	Summated Agricultural Lobbyists' Group Preferences for Information Sources	69

27	Summated Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Format.....	70
28	Summated Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Peers	71
29	Summated Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month.....	72
30	Summated Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN Once a Month.....	73

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Shannon and Weaver Communication Transmission Model	10
Figure 2 Influence Triangle Theory	11
Figure 3 Iron Triangle Theory.....	13

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the United States, American agriculturists have provided citizens with a healthy, safe, abundant, and affordable food supply. This food supply has been regulated, taxed, and affected by various agricultural policies throughout history. The history of agricultural policy can be divided into four overlapping time periods, as outlined by Effland (2000). The first period, from 1785 to 1890, included land policy and expansion efforts. The second period, from 1830 to 1914, emphasized investment in research and education. Two laws were passed that assured the US with abundant food and fiber (Effland, 2000). First, the Morrill Act established the land grant system (1862), and second, the Smith-Lever Act, established the extension system (1914). Both of these acts impacted the agricultural industry. In fact, the success was such that U.S. agriculture actually over-produced. This overproduction led to surpluses and a basis for the next set of policies (Pasour & Rucker, 2005). The third period, from 1870 to 1933, began limited market regulation. In the last period, since 1924, the government has been directly involved in providing farms with a stable income. This increase in governmental involvement in agriculture has made it vitally important for agriculturists to understand the policy formation process. Understanding policy development requires not only a clear understanding of how a bill becomes a law, but also a clear understanding of the flow of information and messages during the policy formation process. If agriculturists understand the flow of information through

communication among agricultural policy influencers during the policy formation process, they can be better prepared to impact the political arena and form policy that will be more beneficial to American agriculturists and the public.

Statement of the Problem

There is a need to understand how agricultural policy is made. In order to do that, an understanding of communication methods used by specific policy influencers such as lobbyists and Congressional agricultural aides is valuable. A clear understanding of the information that is communicated, as well as the forms of communication used, is needed for further understanding of agricultural policy development. Understanding the flow of information and where the information originates can help with the policy communication process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the flow of information among agricultural policy influencers during the policy formation process. First, this study identified where leading agricultural lobbyists and Congressional agriculture aides obtain information when considering potential agricultural policy. Second, this study examined the agricultural policy influencers' preferred format to receive information about agriculture and policy. Third, this study ascertained the preferred communication methods between and among agricultural lobbyists and Congressional agricultural aides. These three purposes provide a clearer understanding of the communication methods used by agricultural policy influencers. In addition, it

provides information that will allow policy influencers to communicate more effectively among themselves.

Objectives/Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to better understand the format and flow of information during the agricultural policy development process. To achieve the purpose of this study, two objectives guided the data collection and analysis.

Objective One: Communication Through Congressional Agricultural Aides

1. Identify and determine Congressional agricultural aides' preferred sources of information related to agricultural policy analysis and decision making.
2. Identify and determine Congressional agricultural aides' preferred formats to receive information.
3. Identify and determine Congressional agricultural aides' preferred method of communication with other Congressional agricultural aides.
4. Identify and determine Congressional agricultural aides' preferred method of communication with leading agricultural lobbyists.

Objective Two: Communication Through Leading Agricultural Lobbyists

1. Identify and determine leading agricultural lobbyists' preferred sources of information related to agricultural policy analysis and decision making.
2. Identify and determine leading agricultural lobbyists' preferred formats to receive information.
3. Identify and determine leading agricultural lobbyists' preferred method of communication with other leading agricultural lobbyists.

4. Identify and determine leading agricultural lobbyists' preferred method of communication with Congressional agricultural aides.

Definition of Terms and Concepts

Most terms in this study use the Webster's dictionary definition. However, some terms must be contextualized for both the researcher and participants of the study.

Additionally, a clear understanding of terms will aid in communication between the researcher and participants. Last but not least, the need to communicate key concepts for the study is evident. The following concepts are included in this study.

Leading agricultural states – The top three states based on reported cash receipts of the agricultural industry in the respective state in 2012. The top three states are California, Iowa, and Texas (United States Department of Agriculture – Economic Research Service, 2014a)

Top agricultural commodities – The top four commodities in each of the leading agricultural states based on cash receipts reported in the 2012 agriculture census. For California, the top four commodities are dairy products, grapes, almonds, and greenhouse/nursery. For Iowa, the top four commodities are corn, hogs, soybeans, and cattle. For Texas, the top four commodities are cattle, cotton, dairy, and broilers (USDA– Economic Research Service, 2014b).

Congressional agricultural aides – Only Congressional aides who meet one of the following requirements at the time of the study were included: (1) Congressional agricultural aides who serve Congressmen who sit on either the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture or the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry; and

represent one of the leading agricultural states. (2) Agricultural aides of the chair and ranking member of the House and Senate Committee on Agriculture. (3) Congressional staff members for the majority and minority party from both the House and Senate Committee on Agriculture. Therefore, this definition includes the following members of Congress. The list below contains the Congressman, their political party identification, and the Congressional district they represent:

California

Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R – 1
Rep. John Garamendi, D – 3
Rep. Jeff Denham, R – 10
Rep. Jim Costa, D – 16
Rep. Gloria Negrete McLeod, D – 35
Rep. Juan Vargas, D – 51

Iowa

Rep. Steve King, R – 4
Sen. Tom Harkin, D
Sen. Charles Grassley, R

Texas

Rep. K. Michael Conway, R - 11
Rep. Randy Neugebauer, R – 19
Rep. Pete P. Gallego, D – 23
Rep. Filemon Vela, D – 34

Leadership

Rep. Frank D. Lucas, R – 3, OK
Rep. Collin C. Peterson, D – 7, MN
Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D – MI
Sen. Thad Cochran, R – MS

Leading agricultural lobbyists - Lobbyists who meet one of the following criteria were included in this study: (1) lobbyists who represent the state association of one of the top agricultural commodities in leading agricultural states, or (2) lobbyists for the state Farm Bureau Federation in leading agricultural states.

While there are many factors that influence the development of policy, throughout this study “policy influencers” will be used to refer to both leading agricultural lobbyists and Congressional agricultural aides.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in both its reach and its application to a larger scale. Due to the method of study, the participants are limited to a small number of leaders who influence agricultural policy. A Delphi study cannot be generalized to a larger population as the opinions gathered are representative of only the experts included in the panel (Hasson, Sinead, & McKenna, 2000). This Delphi study determined the group opinion of experts in the agricultural policy field. In addition, this study addresses only sources of information for the policy influencers mentioned above, how they prefer to receive that information, and the preferred methods of communication between the two policy influencer groups. Therefore, the study will be limited to discussing the specific findings in those areas. The researcher acknowledges that this is not an all-inclusive study of the policy process and therefore acknowledges the limitations of the study. This study does not make predictions about future communication between agricultural policy influencers, nor does it discuss the history of communication between agricultural policy influencers.

The policy process is far reaching and has many influences, this study a descriptive study, it does not look at influence of communication. This study describes the preference for sources of information and communication methods between policy influencers. This study does not look at the amount of influence that each source of

information or method of communication has over decision makers. In addition, the researcher acknowledges that there are many ways to influence agricultural policy, this study does not look at ways to influence policy. However, it is important to acknowledge the importance of influences such as campaign support, coalitions, political action committees, public issue campaigns, and the media (Browe, 1998). This study does not look at the influence of these various entities.

Basic Assumptions

This study operates under various basic assumptions. These assumptions include, but are not limited to:

1. Agriculture lobbyists were truthful in answering questions.
2. Congressional agricultural aides were truthful in answering questions.
3. Full and reasonable responses were received from those agreeing to participate in the study.

Importance of the Study

This study is important in a variety of ways. Primarily, it is important to the world of agricultural policy development. Both agricultural lobbyists and Congressional agricultural aides impact agriculture policy. While neither of these groups actually have a direct vote on the policy itself, both groups impact the policy development process (Anderson, 2011). Knowing where these groups gather information is imperative to developing an efficient communication package. In addition, knowing how both groups prefer to receive information is essential for researchers and information providers to enable effective communication. Understanding policy influencers' preferred

information sources allows interested parties to provide that information in a clear and effective way. The last section of this study, to understand the communication that takes place between Congressional agricultural aides and leading agriculture lobbyists, is important to the future of policy development. In addition, a sufficient understanding of the flow of information between agricultural policy influencers will allow them to communicate more efficiently among themselves. This could ultimately lead to agricultural policy that is more beneficial to one segment of agriculture as opposed to the agricultural industry as a whole. If one segment of agriculture uses communication strategies which are preferred, there is the potential to influence agriculture policy. This influence may be detrimental to other segments of agriculture. Once there is a basic understanding of how agricultural policy influencers communicate, more specific studies can be produced that could lead to conclusions that will help in the formation stage of agricultural policy. Looking broader, this study is important to the future of the agricultural industry. Policy can greatly affect an industry as a whole (Anderson, 2011). Therefore, the results obtained from this study have the potential to greatly affect the future of the agricultural industry.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There has been much research on general policy development as well as the effect of agricultural policy, however; little research was found about sources of information for agricultural policy influencers and how that information flows between the two policy influencer groups. A study by Schlink (1996) suggests that there is a need for further research in this area.

Theoretical Framework

Information flows from one individual to another through communication. There are various communication theories that seek to explain how that flow of information takes place. In the Shannon and Weaver communication transition model (figure 1) information goes from the information source to the transmitter. The transmitter passes the communication through a channel where it can be impacted by noise. Noise is anything that impedes the flow of information. After passing through the channel, the message arrives at the receiver and is then passed to its destination (Stone, Singletary, & Richmond, 1999). This study focuses two aspects of this communication transition model. First, this study looks at the preferred information source for agricultural policy influencers. Second, this study looks at the preferred channel that agricultural policy influencers choose to use to communicate information to other agricultural policy influencers. While this communication model was designed in the 1940s to interpret new electronic circuits and airwaves (Stone, Singletary, & Richmond, 1999), it is still

applicable today as policy influencers are using new forms of electronic communication such as cell phones, email, and social media.

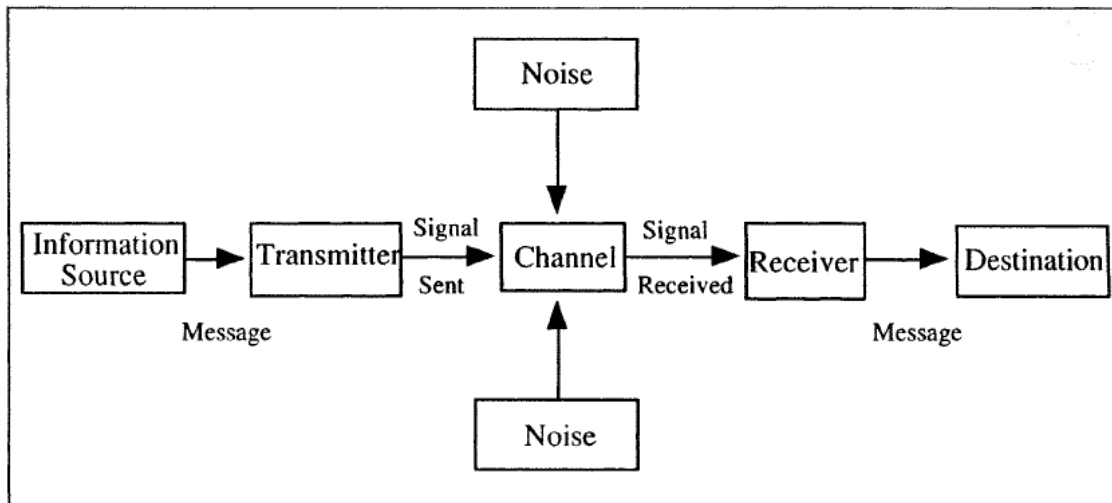


Figure 1. Shannon and Weaver Communication Transmission Model
(Stone, Singletary, & Richmond, 1999)

The Policy Process

The process by which American policy and law is formed is outlined clearly in the way the government was formed. The three branches of government work together to ensure that laws are created, implemented, and followed. However, in a modern society, there are many influences on the policy process. Constituents are often left wondering why a certain law was created or not created. A number of different theories exist that seek to explain this phenomenon.

Influence Triangle Theory

The influence triangle (Knutson, Penn, Flinchbaugh, & Outlaw, 2007) seeks to explain why some people and groups are more successful in achieving their policy goals. Figure 2 is a pictorial view of the theory. In this theory, the higher up the triangle a person or interest group is, the more power they hold in the political process.

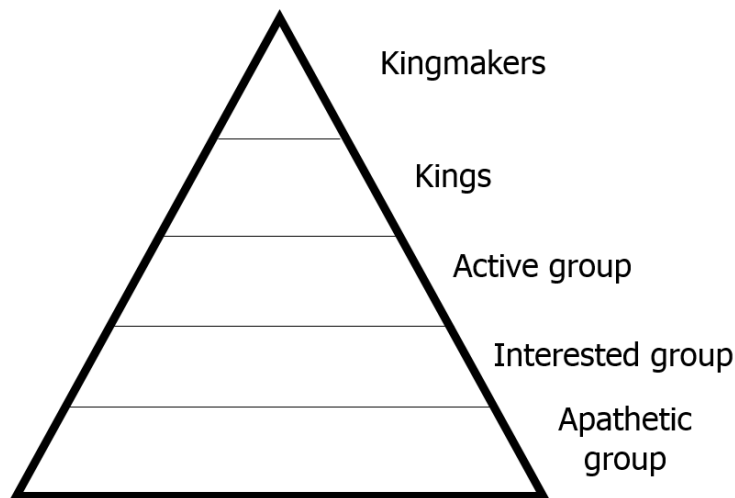


Figure 2. Influence Triangle Theory
(Knutson et al., 2007)

According to Knutson, et al. (2007), kingmakers are individuals or groups that possess knowledge and resources. They have respect from their community and have the ability to influence others. They are quick to be flexible to meet the needs of their community so that they do not lose power. Kings are those who are viewed as leadership by the community. They often hold elected positions and work with kingmakers to serve the public. Active group participants are generally people who are civic-minded and who

work to impact the kings and kingmakers. Interested individuals are those who stay informed but rarely try to impact the political process. Finally, the apathetic group has little interest and are often cynical of the political process (Knutson, et al., 2007).

Group Theory

According to group theory (Anderson, 2011), people have a desire to put themselves into groups. They form associations, organizations, political parties, and other sectors of society to help them to understand each other (Noble, 2005). Groups allow people to feel secure because they are a part of something larger than themselves, “The purpose of group organization is the security and representation of the group’s members. By their very nature, groups contain a concentration of human resources. It is primarily the grouping of these resources that allows groups to exert themselves in society” (Noble, 2005, p. 38). The creation of these groups ultimately leads to the creation of special interest groups and lobbying associations to represent a group of people whose interests are similar (Anderson, 2011).

The Iron Triangle Theory

The iron triangle theory (figure 3), not to be confused with the influence triangle theory, suggests that congressional committees and subcommittees work together with federal bureaucracies and interest groups to form policy (Browne, 2004). Interest groups are often represented by a lobbyist or multiple lobbyists who communicate their interests to Congress. According to Milbrath (1960), many studies have looked at the political power of the interest group rather than the individual lobbyist. However, the power of the interest group greatly depends on the individual lobbyist (Milbrath, 1960).

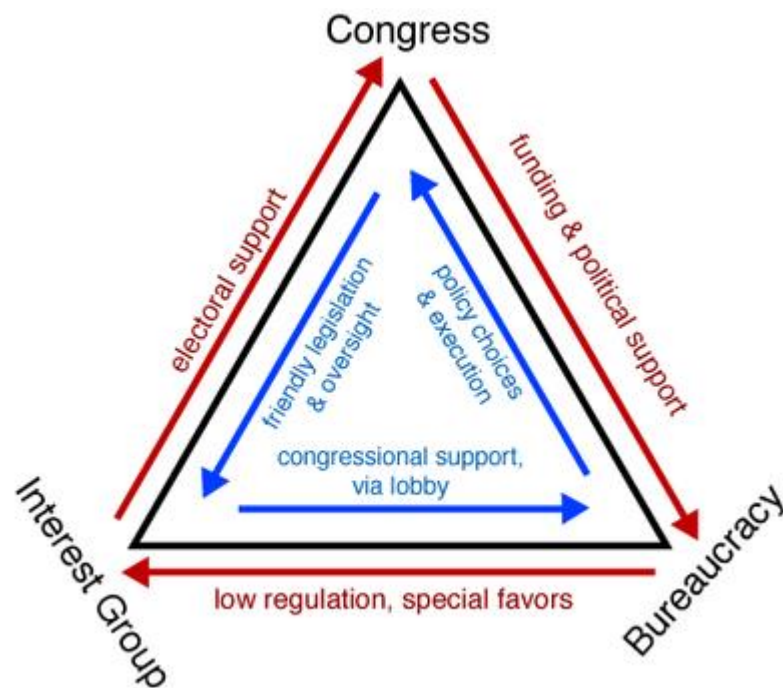


Figure 3. Iron Triangle Theory
(Siry, 2007)

The way a lobbyist conveys information to the elected official or congressional aid will influence the way it is received. Lobbying is a communication process. “Anyone wishing to influence the decision of a governmental official, then, must be concerned not only with getting the information to him but also with the problem of presenting it so that the decision maker will be receptive” (Milbrath, 1960, p. 112). Therefore, the different communication methods used by different lobbyist affect their success in achieving their policy objectives: “The lobbying process, then, is essentially a communication process, and the task of the lobbyist is to figure out how he can handle communications most effectively in order to get through to decision makers” (Milbrath,

1960, p. 112). Milbrath goes as far as to classify lobbyists as merchants of information in the communication process.

Power Cluster Theory

According to the power cluster theory (Ogden, 1971), all decisions are made based on clusters of power. At the time of his work, Ogden lists the agriculture cluster as one of the most powerful political clusters. According to Ogden (1971), to be a cluster there must be five general characteristics. All of the characteristics are of equal importance and can affect the rise or fall of the power cluster.

First, there must be relationships built between various stakeholders in an industry. These relationships must go between private citizens, elected officials, government employees, and interest groups.

The key people within each power cluster know each other on a first-name basis, communicate frequently, consult each other before reaching a decision, know the relative power of each of the component elements and the principal actors within their cluster, and sometimes swap jobs. (Ogden, 1971, p. 4)

With the production agriculture community being a close-knit industry, it is easy for these types of relationships to be built.

According to Ogden (1971), the second characteristic is that decisions about a stance on a policy are generally made by a power cluster without inputs from outside sources. However, this may not be the case if the policy stance generates conflict with another power cluster. Power clusters are expected to stay out of the business of other power clusters unless it directly affects them (Ogden, 1971).

The third characteristic (Ogden, 1971) is that the cluster maintains equilibrium in all of its components. All associations, stakeholders, and influencers must remain somewhat constant in their power and influence. When one component enters or leaves the cluster, it can create tension as the cluster seeks to reestablish equilibrium and change relationships. This new equilibrium can cause new clusters and sub clusters (Knutson et al., 2007) to arise.

The fourth characteristic, according to Ogden (1971), is that there are competing groups with conflicting interests within each cluster. Within the agriculture cluster, there are three distinct interest group sub-clusters: (1) general farm organizations, (2) commodity organizations, and (3) agribusiness organizations. These various interest groups frequently have conflicting policy positions (Anderson, Brady, Bullock, & Stewart, 1984).

The fifth and final characteristic (Ogden, 1971) is that compromises must occur within the power cluster and among power clusters. Conflicts among power clusters are generally taken care of prior to policy being proposed. However, inter-cluster conflicts are often difficult to resolve. These conflicts can often lead to debates both in committee and on the House or Senate floor. A cluster may support a piece of legislation as a whole, however, it may have disagreements about small segments of the legislation. These disagreements are often difficult to prevent because they lie in the very small details of pieces of legislation that are thousands of pages long (Ogden, 1971).

While conflicts occur, leaders who branch across power clusters often help to avoid conflict by uniting clusters together (Knutson, et al., 2007). The two power

clusters that cooperate with the agriculture and food power cluster most often are the food safety and nutrition power cluster and environmental power cluster (Knutson, 2007). According to Knutson et al. (2007), the kingmakers for these power clusters often have a stake in more than one power cluster and therefore are kingmakers in two or more power clusters.

Locating Information – Congressional Agriculture Aides

Studies have been completed that indicate where decision makers (elected officials) get their information. Schlink (1996) argued that elected officials and their aides make a team; therefore, there may be similarities of where information is gathered and how it is shared by individuals within an office. One can look at the studies on where decision-makers get their information and also apply it to aides. According to Browne (1995), the most important factor that influences what issue a Congressman cares about is their constituents. While Congressmen care about their constituents the most, many lobbying groups are composed of constituents (Noble, 2005). Many lobbying groups, such as the Farm Bureau, are a coalition of voters. These constituents can directly vote for a Congressman and therefore exert influence on that person. This is partially what gives lobbying groups credibility with Congressional aides and elected officials.

In addition to getting information from constituents and outside sources, Congress has its own research department called the Congressional Research Service. The CRS works exclusively for Congress and produces research that is not available to the public in real time. “The Congressional Research Service (CRS) works exclusively

for the United States Congress, providing policy and legal analysis to committees and Members of both the House and Senate, regardless of party affiliation” (Library of Congress, 2013).

Little research was found that identified all of the sources that Congressional agricultural aides use to locate information and to what degree they are used. However, a primary source of information for Congressional aides is lobbyists (Shipley, 2000). According to Shipley, Congressional aides are “eager to use information which, in the eyes of their members’ constituents, links them to a positive message or cause” (Shipley, 2000, p. 15). Further, Shipley wrote that Congressional aides see lobbying as a source of education on the issues.

While many say that the personal connection is the key to successful communication with Congressional aides, Shipley (2000) set up a message pyramid for lobbyists and organizations to use during communication with Congressional aides. First, communication needs to have a lead message that provides vital information. “Positioning your association as an information source is the most effective way to get your foot in the door and start cultivating relationships” (Shipley, 2000, p. 17). The second message should be a credibility message, which shows the reader how the organization or group represents citizens and gives them a voice. The third level of the pyramid is the personification message that shows how the organization’s or group’s stance will impact the community in a positive way. “It’s important to develop messages that clearly indicate the local impact of your association’s activities and their relevance to the office of the elected representative” (Shipley, 2000, p. 17). While message

formatting is important, Shipley (2000) did not look at how Congressional aides prefer to receive information. This study looks further into how aides prefer to receive information.

Locating Information – Agricultural Lobbyists

Knowing where lobbyists go for information and why they choose that information is important to formulating information and research in an efficient way so that it may be used by lobbyists (Noble, 2005). There are four factors identified by Noble (2005) that influence why agricultural lobbyists choose to use certain information. From most important to least important, they are: (1) what information they need for a current issue, (2) who their contacts and personal relationships are, (3) how much trust they put in sources, and (4) other characteristics such as brevity, readability, accessibility, quality, and graphics (Noble, 2005). Of these four factors, those who are communicating about agriculture can impact only the first and the last factor. In addition to understanding how to form the information, it is important to understand why lobbyists do research. Lobbyists conduct research to be able to lobby in an effective way. The study by Noble (2005) yielded two themes as to why lobbyists conduct research.

Lobbyists acknowledged the importance of research in their lobbying work. Specifically, two main themes developed from the interviewees' responses: 1) lobbyists gather the political and technical information needed to thoroughly understand an issue before lobbying on it, and 2) lobbyists find the appropriate information to support their organization's policy objects. (p. 6)

While the list of possible sources of information is endless, the top six sources that emerged after the two-step study conducted by Noble (2005) were “Activist or opposing groups; colleagues; commodity, trade, and other agricultural organizations; professional or scientific journals and digests; members of their organizations; and internal advisory committees” (p.81). As the study by Noble (2005) focused only on the state of California, a broader study is needed to gather results to understand these sources of information at the federal level.

Communication Among Agriculture Policy Influencers

Communication styles can differ drastically based on who is communicating and the message. Communication contains various aspects of information being sent, from key messages to written communication and nonverbal communication. Milbrath (1960) suggested that lobbyists prefer to communicate directly with Congressional agricultural aides. Milbrath (1960) states that no communication will be effective unless it is received. All communication with Congressional aides must go through a “screen of receptivity” (Milbrath, 1960, p. 35). When a lobbyist communicates with a Congressional aide, their communications contain facts, arguments, and power. The facts are to give them a base to stand on, and the argument is to convince the Congressional aide that the lobbyist’s position is the right one. The power is often more subtle and difficult to communicate. It often comes in the form of election support or the threat of supporting another candidate in the future (Milbrath, 1960). This electoral support can come in the form of campaign funding, or mobilizing a portion of the elected official’s constituency.

Milbrath (1960) argues that direct personal communication is more effective than written communication and more likely to go through the screen of receptivity and actually be received by the decision maker. While communication is shifting to different channels, lobbyists prefer to talk with elected official or their representative face-to-face (Milbrath, 1960). In addition, Milbrath suggests that most lobbyists leave a summary after their meeting to prevent the need for the official or staff member to take notes.

Sometimes when a lobbyist cannot directly meet with a Congressional aide or decision maker, they will use intermediaries to pass along a message (Milbrath, 1960). The intermediaries generally have some type of relationship with the lobbyist and with the decision maker or Congressional aide. In this way, a lobbyist can use his or her network to gain access to a decision maker or Congressional aide where they otherwise would not have access (Milbrath, 1960). This belief is affirmed by Schlink (1996) who says that lobbyists believe having an influential constituent or friend contact an elected official is the most effective way to exert influence.

The researcher found no literature that identified how Congressional agricultural aides communicated with leading agricultural lobbyists. This study identifies the means of communication between the two parties.

Exchange of Knowledge

The process of lobbying, just like communication, is an exchange of knowledge. (Contandriopoulos, Lemire, Denis, & Tremblay, 2010). Throughout the process of policy formation, there are three categories of people: producers of information, intermediaries, and users of information. (Contandriopoulos et al. 2010). Agricultural

lobbyists and agricultural aides serve all three roles depending on the policy development process. Agricultural lobbyists serve as producers when they are gathering data from their members or other sources where aides do not have access. They serve as intermediaries when they are taking information that was already produced and giving it to agricultural aides. They act as users when they use the information that was produced to achieve their goal. On the other hand, agricultural aides also fill all three roles. Aides are producers when they gather information or talk to their Congressmen's constituents. They are intermediaries when they take the information from the lobbyist or other source and give it to their Congressmen. Last, they are users when they use the information to influence their Congressman to make certain decisions or use the information to help draft legislation.

Perception of Knowledge Exchange

The research that has been conducted about the perception of knowledge exchange sheds some light on to the importance of understanding how lobbyists and agricultural aides communicate effectively. Understanding what is perceived as the most effective method of communication can help researchers to understand the preferred methods of communication. A study conducted by Schlink (1996) shows the perceptions of agricultural lobbyists, aides, and state legislators on the transfer of knowledge in animal agriculture policy. The study showed that all three parties believed that personal contacts were very important for the transfer of information (Schlink, 1996). However, there was disagreement about which way the information should be conveyed through direct contact,

When asked what approaches were believed to be the most effective for lobbyists in influencing the decision-making processes related to animal agricultural issues, legislators (representatives and senators) and legislative aides both believed personal presentation of arguments to be most effective. Lobbyists believed having an influential constituent or friend contact the legislators to be more effective. (Schlink, 1996, p. 87)

However, all three groups in the study agreed that one-on-one discussions and conversations were the most effective in conveying information and achieving results (Schlink, 1996).

Along with perceptions of information exchange, Schlink (1996), looked at the formal and informal education of lobbyists, aides, and Legislators. Lobbyists were far more likely to read newspapers and magazines than were aides. In addition, many more of the lobbyists interviewed had received formal education in agriculture than the aides.

The Schlink (1996) study was conducted on Texas legislators relating to animal agriculture issues. While the conclusions and recommendations are important, they cannot be generalized outside the state of Texas. This study goes further and looks at agricultural issues in general and will discuss the Federal Government law-making process.

Review of Literature Conclusion

The above review of the literature discusses the research and scientific studies that have been conducted on agricultural policy development. There is a gap in the literature that this study fills. Research has been conducted on how lobbying takes place,

how legislators, aides, and lobbyists perceive this exchange of information, as well as where lobbyists gain information. However, there has not been a study looking at agriculture policy communication at the federal level. This study examines the federal level of policymaking. In addition, it determines where agricultural aides obtain information to make decisions, as well as what form of communication takes place between agricultural lobbyists and agricultural aides.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Research Design

The methodology used for this study was the Delphi process as designed by the RAND Corporation and Dalkey (1968). This study developed a consensus among leaders in the field of agricultural policy development. The study consisted of two separate populations that are compared at the end of the study. The Delphi method was chosen for this study because of the lack of research found focusing on agricultural policy communication. A Delphi study is designed to gather opinion from an expert panel without having the opinion of one participant affect the opinion of the others (Dalkey, 1969).

According to Dalkey (1969), gathering opinions from an expert panel has traditionally been conducted through face-to-face discussions. Face-to-face discussions have drawbacks that a Delphi study eliminates. First, dominant individuals, through personality or position, can wield power that can influence a group. Second, a group discussion produces a lot of noise and needless thoughts. Third, there is group pressure to force conformity (Dalkey, 1969). According to Alder and Ziglio (1996), the Delphi method seeks to allow for unbiased feedback to form a collective opinion. “The Delphi Method is based on a structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge from a group of experts by means of a series of questionnaires with controlled opinion feedback” (Alder & Ziglio, 1996, p. 3).

The need for expert opinion in determining how to communicate efficiently with agricultural lobbyists and Congressional agricultural aides warrants a Delphi Study. As there has been little research which looks at the communication methods used by agricultural policy influencers, this study must create the basis for future studies. In this manner, there would be insufficient knowledge to utilize a different method. The Delphi technique is used to seek information and wisdom from experts when there is not a previous understanding of an issue (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000). It can be used for brainstorming, determining expert opinion, and gather information where there is no background (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000).

To abide with the process and regulation of academic research and to protect the participants and the soundness of the study, IRB approval was sought and attained for this study.

Population and Sample

By conducting a Delphi study with people who are successful, we can learn more because of the collective knowledge possessed by experts (Dalkey, 1968). The sample for this study was experts in their field, as is the design of the Delphi method (Dalkey, 1969). This study identifies the communication methods and information sources for two intersecting but distinct populations: Congressional agricultural aides and agricultural lobbyists. Therefore experts from each group were identified and two separate Delphi surveys were developed and administered. To be included in this study, participants must have met the definition of one of the following terms. These terms can also be found in the definition of terms section of this study.

Congressional agricultural aides – only Congressional aides who meet one of the following requirements were included in this study. (1) Congressional agricultural aides who serve Members of Congress who sit on either the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture or the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry; and represent California, Iowa, or Texas. (2) Agricultural aides of the chair and ranking member of the House and Senate Committee on Agriculture. (3) Congressional staff members for the majority and minority party from both the House and Senate Committee on Agriculture. At the time of the study, this definition includes the following members of Congress. The below list contains the Member of Congress, their political party affiliation, and the Congressional district they represent.

California

Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R – 1
Rep. John Garamendi, D – 3
Rep. Jeff Denham, R – 10
Rep. Jim Costa, D – 16
Rep. Gloria Negrete McLeod, D – 35
Rep. Juan Vargas, D – 51

Iowa

Rep. Steve King, R – 4
Sen. Tom Harkin, D
Sen. Charles Grassley, R

Texas

Rep. K. Michael Conway, R - 11
Rep. Randy Neugebauer, R – 19
Rep. Pete P. Gallego, D – 23
Rep. Filemon Vela, D – 34

Leadership

Rep. Frank D. Lucas, R – 3, OK
Rep. Collin C. Peterson, D – 7, MN
Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D – MI
Sen. Thad Cochran, R – MS

Leading agricultural lobbyists - lobbyists who meet one of the following criteria were included in this study: (1) lobbyists who represent agriculture in California, Iowa, or Texas, and who represent the state association of one of the top four agricultural commodities in that state, or (2) lobbyists for the state Farm Bureau Federation in the leading agriculture states of California, Iowa, and Texas. A more in-depth definition of the qualifications for participants can be found in the definition of terms section.

The population for each of the studies will be homogenous. Only Congressional agricultural aides will participate in the aide Delphi, and only agricultural lobbyists will participate in the lobbyist Delphi. The homogeneity of groups helps to increase validity of the answers (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

Throughout the literature, there is no consensus about the appropriate number of participants needed for an effective Delphi study (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). However, Hsu and Sandford (2007) suggest that ten to fifteen participants is enough if the groups are homogenous. The Congressional agricultural aides study was administered to 22 participants. Of the 22 potential respondents, 18 responded to the first round, 16 responded to the second round, and 14 responded to the third round. The agricultural lobbyist study was administered to 18 participants. Of the 18 potential respondents, 14 responded to the first round, 11 responded to the second round and eight responded to the third round. According to Skulmonski, Hartman, and Krahn (2007), consensus is often reached after two rounds, therefore, the data from the second round was utilized for the respondents who did not respond to the third round during the final analysis.

Consensus is reached when the agreement among experts reaches the predetermined level, in the case of this study, 70% (Green, 1982) is used for consensus.

Instrumentation

The instrument for this study was delivered in three separate phases. After the participants were identified and agreed to participate in the study, they were sent a web-based survey through Qualtrics. This survey consisted of five open-ended questions that allowed the participants in their respective area to give free thought answers. The five questions for Congressional agricultural aides in the first round were:

1. Please list where you acquire information about agriculture and agricultural policy.
2. Please list the formats in which this information is presented.
3. Please list your methods of communication used to exchange information with fellow Congressional staff.
4. Please list your methods of communication used to exchange information with agricultural lobbyists whom you interact with MORE THAN once a month.
5. Please list your methods of communication used to exchange information with agricultural lobbyists whom you interact with LESS THAN once a month.

The questions for leading agricultural lobbyists in the first round were:

1. Please list where you acquire information about agriculture and agricultural policy.
2. Please list the formats in which this information is presented.

3. Please list your methods of communication used to exchange information with fellow agricultural lobbyists.
4. Please list your methods of communication used to exchange information with Congressional agricultural staff whom you interact with MORE THAN once a month.
5. Please list your methods of communication used to exchange information with Congressional agricultural staff whom you interact with LESS THAN once a month.

These opened-ended questions generated a large list of answers. After compiling these answers and eliminating duplicates (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004), a second survey was sent that asked the participants to rate each item by preference on a five-point Likert scale (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The Likert scale consisted of the following terms: not preferred, mildly preferred, moderately preferred, highly preferred, and extremely preferred.

From the responses in round two, a cumulative group ranking was generated. The cumulative ranking was generated by determining the mode of the data. The mode was used as it is the most appropriate for a Likert scale ranking (Ludwig, 1994). The third round of the Delphi was a survey that asked each participant to review the group preference and agree with their previous preference or change their preference (Adler & Ziglio, 1996). In the third round, the potential responses were as follows: no change, not preferred, mildly preferred, moderately preferred, highly preferred, and extremely preferred.

Data Collection

For this study, all data were collected through Qualtrics. The researcher contacted each participant prior to the official invitation. The purpose of this initial contact was to secure their agreement to participate in the study. After the initial contact, the researcher contacted each participant at least five additional times, once with an official invitation, three more times with the rounds of the study, and one final time with a research summary. Additionally, some respondents were contacted more than five times with emails reminding them to complete the survey. All data were kept confidential and secure without connection to the respondents.

Data Analysis

Between each iteration of this study, the data were collected and analyzed to generate the findings listed in the findings chapter of this study. After the collection of data for the first round of the study, the data were analyzed and summarized into a reportable list (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). This list was reported to respondents with a Likert preference scale.

In the second round, the data were analyzed and the mode was determined. For this scale, the mode is the most appropriate representation of the data (Ludwig, 1994). The mode represents the group preference for each item. From this iteration, the third round of the survey was generated. Respondents to the previous round were presented with the group preference and their original preference (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Those who did not respond to the second round were eliminated from the third round (Hasson,

Keeney, & McKenna, 2000). Participants in the third round were asked to reaffirm their original preference or declare a new preference (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

The data from the third round were collected and analyzed. The mode (Ludwig, 1994) was determined for each method of communication or information source. The mode of the data represents the most popular answer and is therefore representative of the group consensus. If a respondent did not respond to the third round, their data from the second round was included in the analysis on the third round data. It is assumed that respondents who did not respond to the third round chose not to change their initial preferences. As a level of consensus can be reached after only two rounds of survey (Skulmonski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007), the removal of the second round data from the third round of analysis would not be advantageous. While the purpose of the third round is to encourage participants to conform to the group consensus (Hsu & Sandford, 2007), many did not conform. Last, a consensus is gained once a certain number of participants have agreed on the level of preference regardless of the number of rounds utilized (Skulmonski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007).

While determining the mode of the data is important because it shows which preference had the highest choice, it does not take into account the second highest ranking nor does it take into account the respondent's personal definition of the terms. Each respondent may have a different definition of the words mildly, moderately, highly, and extremely. Therefore, to eliminate this bias, the rankings were condensed to get more logical and usable data. Green (1982) suggests that a 70% consensus of respondents who ranked a 3 or higher on a 4-point Likert-type scale is adequate for

discussion. As there was only one option for not preferred, that preference was left untouched. The rankings of 'extremely preferred' and 'highly preferred' were condensed into one category of 'highly preferred.' Additionally, the rankings of 'mildly preferred' and 'moderately preferred' were condensed into one mildly preferred category. This combining of rankings gives a clearer picture of the level of preference of each item.

After the rankings were condensed, the level of consensus in each category was determined by comparing the number of respondents in agreement with each other to those not in agreement. For the purpose of this study, a consensus level of 70% (Green, 1982) is used to warrant discussion. The number of respondents is different for the two Delphi surveys and for each round in those surveys; therefore, the number of respondents required to meet the 70% threshold differs for each round and each survey. The number of respondents needed to meet that consensus is listed for each round in the findings section. In addition, items that meet consensus are clearly marked.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Findings will be reported by round for each sample group and then compared between groups in the discussion section of this study.

Congressional Agricultural Aides Delphi Study

This Delphi study revealed three primary pieces of information about how Congressional agricultural aides communicate: (1) their preferred sources of information, (2) their preferred formats to receive information, and (3) their preferred methods of communication with other agricultural policy influencers (both Congressional aides and agricultural lobbyists). In the first round, participants were asked open-ended questions to generate a list of potential answers. To generate the second round, the lists were compiled, eliminating duplicates and clarifying language (Hasson, Kenney, & McKenna, 2000). In the second round, respondents were asked to rate their preference for each item on a five-point Likert scale. After the data were collected, the mode of each item was used to determine the most popular preference for each (Ludwig, 1994). In the third round, the respondents were presented with their second round response and the group mode. They were then asked to either reaffirm their second round response or give a new level of preference for each item. Last, the data from the final round were used to determine group preferences. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used a consensus of 70% to determine a group preference for each individual item. There is no standard level of consensus for Delphi studies (Hasson,

Kenney, & McKenna, 2000). However, Green (1982) suggests that 70% consensus level is appropriate for a Likert scale.

Round 1 – Open-ended Questions

In round one of the study, participants were asked five open-ended questions. At the conclusion of the first round, the lists were consolidated into a single list for each question. The first round was sent to 22 potential respondents. After the initial email was sent, one email was returned indicating the Congressional aide had changed jobs leaving 21 potential participants. 18 participants responded to the first round of the survey. The questions, as well as the compiled lists are below.

Question 1: Please list where you acquire information about agriculture and agricultural policy?

Educational Seminars

Briefings

Agricultural groups or meetings with their representatives. (including ag lobbying groups, commodity/trade groups, and ag coalition groups)

Social Media

Daily Agricultural Periodicals

Agricultural Newsletters

Agricultural Websites

Constituents/Producers

Fellow Congressional Staff

Academic research studies and publications

Government Agencies and Publications (including CRS reports)

Agricultural Radio

Question 2: Please list the formats in which this information is presented.

Video

Print/Hard copies

Digital (web based sources of information including email)

In-person (seminars, briefings, field trips, conferences)

In-person (one-on-one meetings)

One page hand-outs (digital or print)

Graphs, pictures, and charts used as illustration to something written (digital or
print)

Formal report (digital or print)

Formal letter (digital or print)

**Question 3: Please list your methods of communication used to exchange
information with fellow Congressional agricultural staff members.**

Phone (voice)

Phone (text message)

Email

Memos

Face-to-Face (planned meetings)

Face-to-Face (Informal meetings – at an event, in the hallway, etc.)

Question 4: Please list your methods of communication used to exchange information with lobbyists whom you interact with MORE THAN once a month.

Phone (unscheduled phone call)

Phone (regularly scheduled phone call)

Phone (text message)

Email

Face-to-Face (planned meetings)

Face-to-Face (Informal meetings – at an event, in the hallway, etc.)

Question 5: Please list your methods of communication used to exchange information with agricultural lobbyists whom you interact with LESS THAN once a month.

Phone (call)

Phone (text)

Face-to-Face (planned meetings)

Face-to-Face (Informal Meetings – at an event/reception, in the hallway, etc.)

Email

Round 2 – Gathering Opinion

In round two, the respondents were asked to rank their level of preference for each item. The level of group preference was determined for each item on the list based on the most popular preference level chosen. To determine this, the researcher determined the mode of each item on the list (Ludwig, 1994). The median or mean could be misleading of the data (Ludwig, 1994). The items, along with their group preference,

and number of respondents in agreement are listed below. As there were 16 respondents to the second round of the study, a consensus would be reached with 12 respondents in agreement.

Table 1 ($N=16$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' group preference and levels of consensus for sources of information. While consensus was not reached for any preference level, government agencies and publications was the most preferred source of information. The two least preferred sources of information were social media and agricultural radio.

Table 1

Round 2 Congressional Agricultural Aides Group Preferences for Sources of Information

Source	Mode	(<i>n</i>)
Government Agencies and Publications	Extremely Preferred	10
Constituents & Producers	Extremely Preferred	9
Briefings	Highly Preferred	10
Fellow Congressional Staff	Highly Preferred	8
Agriculture groups or meetings with their representatives.	Highly Preferred	8
Educational Seminars	Highly Preferred	5
Daily Ag Periodicals	Moderately Preferred	8
Ag Websites	Moderately Preferred	8
Ag Newsletters	Moderately Preferred	8
Academic Research	Moderately Preferred	8
Social Media	Not Preferred	7
Agricultural Radio	Not Preferred	7

Note. $N = 16$. Sources designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (*n*) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 2 ($N=16$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' group preference and level of consensus for formats of information. While consensus was not reached for any preference level, in-person meetings were the most preferred format to receive information. In addition, it is important that there were no formats that were determined to be not preferred.

Table 2

Round 2 Congressional Agricultural Aides Format Preferences

Format	Mode	(<i>n</i>)
In-person (seminars, briefings, field trips, conferences)	Extremely Preferred	7
In person (one-on-one meeting)	Highly Preferred	8
Graphs, pictures, and charts used to illustrate something written	Highly Preferred	7
Formal Report	Highly Preferred	7
Digital (web based sources of information including email)	Highly Preferred	7
One page hand-outs	Moderately Preferred	7
Video	Moderately Preferred	6
Print/Hard Copies	Moderately Preferred	6
Formal Letter	Mildly Preferred	7

Note. $N = 16$. Formats designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (*n*) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 3 ($N=15$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' group preference and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with fellow Congressional agricultural aides. While consensus was not reached for any preference level, email was the most preferred method of communication with fellow Congressional agricultural aides. The least preferred method of communication was text message.

Table 3

Round 2 Congressional Agricultural Aides Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Peers

Method	Mode	(n)
Email	Extremely Preferred	7
Face-to-Face (Informal meetings - at an event, in the hallway, etc.)	Extremely Preferred	6
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	Highly Preferred	7
Phone (voice)	Highly Preferred	6
Memos	Moderately Preferred	5
Phone (text)	Not Preferred	8

Note. $N = 15$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

During the second round of the study, one respondent did not respond to questions 3, 4, and 5. For the remaining questions in this round, the total respondents was 15; therefore, 11 respondents are needed to constitute a consensus. Table 4 ($N=15$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' group preference and level of consensus for

methods of communication when communicating with agricultural lobbyists whom they communicate with more than once per month. While consensus was not reached for any preference level, the most preferred methods of communication were email and face-to-face meetings. The least preferred method of communication was text message.

Table 4

Round 2 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month

Method	Mode	(n)
Email	Extremely Preferred	7
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	Extremely Preferred	7
Face-to-Face (Informal meetings - at an event, in the hallway, etc.)	Extremely Preferred	6
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	Highly Preferred	7
Phone (regularly scheduled phone call)	Highly Preferred	5
Phone (text)	Not Preferred	9

Note. $N = 15$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 5 (n=15) displays Congressional agricultural aides' group preference and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with agricultural lobbyists whom they communicate with less than once per month. Consensus was reached at this point in the study. With a consensus level of 12 respondents, text messages were ranked as a method of communication that is not

preferred. While consensus was not reached on a preferred method, the most preferred method of communication was a planned face-to-face meetings.

Table 5

Round 2 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Methods while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN once a Month

Method	Mode	(n)
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	Extremely Preferred	8
Email	Extremely Preferred	6
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	Moderately Preferred	4
Face-to-Face (Informal meetings - at an event, in the hallway, etc.)	Mildly Preferred	4
Phone (text)	Not Preferred	*12

Note. N = 15. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Round 3 – Developing Group Opinion

In the final round of the study, participants were presented with the same items they had previously received. Participants were also presented with the group preference along with their previous preference. They were asked to either reaffirm their previous preference by selecting 'no change' or selected a new preference level. The data were collected and new preference levels and levels of consensus were generated using the mode of the data (Ludwig, 1994). For data calculation purposes, it is assumed that

respondents who chose not to respond to round three were choosing to not change any of their answers. Therefore, data from respondents who responded to round two, but not round three were included in data analysis. For the first two questions, data from 16 respondents were used determine consensus. For consensus to be attained, 12 respondents must be in agreement.

Table 6 ($N=16$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' group preferences and level of consensus for information sources. While consensus was not reached at any level, constituents and producers garnered more support from the previous round to join government agencies and publications as the most preferred source of information. The least preferred source of information was agricultural radio.

Table 6

Round 3 Congressional Agricultural Aides Preference for Locating Information

Source	Mode	(n)
Government Agencies and Publications	Extremely Preferred	10
Constituents & Producers	Extremely Preferred	9
Briefings	Highly Preferred	10
Agriculture groups or meetings with their representatives.	Highly Preferred	8
Fellow Congressional Staff	Highly Preferred	8
Educational Seminars	Highly Preferred	5
Ag Websites	Moderately Preferred	8
Ag Newsletters	Moderately Preferred	8
Daily Ag Periodicals	Moderately Preferred	8
Academic Research	Moderately Preferred	8
Agricultural Radio	Not Preferred	7
Social Media	Not Preferred	7

Note. $N = 16$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 7 ($N=16$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' group preference for formats of information. While consensus was not reached for any preference level, the most preferred format to receive information was in-person. The least preferred method was a formal letter.

Table 7

Round 3 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Format Preference

Source	Mode	(n)
In person (one-on-one meeting)	Extremely Preferred	8
In-person (seminars, briefings, field trips, conferences)	Extremely Preferred	7
Formal Report	Highly Preferred	7
Digital (web based sources of information including email)	Highly Preferred	7
Graphs, pictures, and charts used to illustrate something written	Highly Preferred	7
One page hand-outs	Moderately Preferred	8
Print/Hard Copies	Moderately Preferred	6
Video	Moderately Preferred	6
Formal Letter	Mildly Preferred	7

Note. $N = 16$. Sources designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Since one respondent did not respond to question three, four, and five in round two, the respondent number goes down to 15 in these questions; therefore, 11 respondents must be in agreement for a consensus of 70%. Table 8 ($N=15$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' group preference and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with fellow Congressional agricultural aides. While consensus was not reached at any preference level, the most preferred method of communication with peers was email. The least preferred method of communication was text message.

Table 8

Round 3 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Peers

Format	Mode	(n)
Email	Extremely Preferred	7
Face-to-Face (Informal meetings - at an event, in the hallway, etc.)	Extremely Preferred	6
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	Highly Preferred	7
Phone (voice)	Highly Preferred	6
Phone (text)	Not Preferred	8
Memos	Not Preferred	5

Note. $N = 15$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 9 ($N=15$) displays Congressional Agricultural Aides' group preference for methods of communication when communicating with agricultural lobbyists whom they communicate with at least once per month. While consensus was not reached at any preference level, the most preferred methods of communication were email and face-to-face planned meetings. The least preferred method of communication was text message.

Table 9

Round 3 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month

Method	Mode	(n)
Email	Extremely Preferred	7
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	Extremely Preferred	7
Face-to-Face (Informal meetings - at an event, in the hallway, etc.)	Extremely Preferred	6
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	Highly Preferred	7
Phone (regularly scheduled phone call)	Moderately Preferred	5
Phone (text)	Not Preferred	9

Note. $N = 15$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the Table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 10 ($N=15$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' group preference for channels of communication when communicating with agricultural lobbyists whom they communicate with less than once per month. At this point in the study, consensus was reached on the least preferred method of communication. Congressional agricultural aides do not prefer to communicate via text message. Consensus was not reached on a preferred method of communication, however, the most preferred method was face-to-face planned meetings.

Table 10

Round 3 Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Methods while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN once a Month

Method	Mode	(n)
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	Extremely Preferred	8
Email	Highly Preferred	6
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	Moderately Preferred	4
Face-to-Face (Informal meetings - at an event, in the hallway, etc.)	Mildly Preferred	4
Phone (text)	Not Preferred	*12

Note. $N = 15$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Summated Group Opinion

While determining the mode of the data is important because it shows which preference had the highest choice, it does not take into account the second highest ranking nor does it take into account the respondent's definition of the terms. Each respondent may have a different definition of the words mildly, moderately, highly, and extremely. Therefore, to eliminate this bias, the rankings were condensed to get more practically useful data. Green (1982) suggests that a 70% consensus of respondents who ranked a 3 or higher on a 4-point Likert-type scale is adequate for discussion and that like columns can be condensed. As there was only one option for not preferred, that preference was left untouched. The rankings of 'extremely preferred' and 'highly preferred' were condensed into one category of 'highly preferred.' In addition, the

rankings of ‘mildly preferred’ and ‘moderately preferred’ were condensed into one mildly preferred category. This combining of rankings gives a clearer picture of what is most preferred.

Not all respondents from round two responded to round three of the study, data from round two was included in the analysis of round three. Since respondents were given the option to not change their answers, it is assumed that by not responding to round three, they are choosing to not change any of their previous preferences, therefore, data from round two was included for respondents who did not respond to round three.

Table 11 ($N=16$) displays Congressional agricultural aides’ summated group preferences and level of consensus for information sources. A consensus of highly preferred at 70% or above was reached for three items: constituents and producers, government agencies and publications, and agriculture groups or meetings with their representatives. Two items reached consensus in the mildly preferred category, agriculture websites and agriculture newsletters. There was no consensus reached for the not preferred category. As there were 16 respondents to the first two question of the third round of the study, 12 respondents are needed for a consensus level of 70%.

Table 11

Summated Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Sources of Information

Source	(n) Highly Preferred	(n) Mildly Preferred	(n) Not Preferred
Constituents & Producers	*14	2	0
Government Agencies and Publications	*14	2	0
Agriculture groups or meetings with their representatives	*13	3	0
Briefings	11	5	0
Fellow Congressional Staff	9	7	0
Educational Seminars	7	6	3
Daily Ag Periodicals	6	10	0
Academic Research	6	10	0
Ag Websites	4	*12	0
Ag Newsletters	3	*12	1
Social Media	0	8	8
Agricultural Radio	0	6	10

Note. $N = 16$. Sources designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the given preference.

Table 12 ($N=16$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' summated group preference and levels of consensus for formats of information. In the highly preferred category, consensus was reached by the in-person format. Both a one-on-one meeting and seminars, briefings, field trips, and conferences reached the level of consensus. Consensus was not reached in any other categories.

Table 12

Summated Congressional Agricultural Aides' Format Preference

Format	(n) Highly Preferred	(n) Mildly Preferred	(n) Not Preferred
In-person (one-on-one meeting)	*14	2	0
In-person (seminars, briefings, field trips, conferences)	*13	3	0
Digital (web based sources of information including email)	11	5	0
Graphs, pictures, and charts used to illustrate something written	9	7	0
One page hand-outs	8	8	0
Formal Report	7	9	0
Print/Hard Copies	6	9	0
Formal Letter	5	11	0
Video	0	11	5

Note. $N = 16$. Formats designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the given preference.

As with the previous round, one respondent did not answer questions three, four, and five; therefore, the total respondents went down to 15. For a consensus level of 70%, 11 respondents must be in agreement. Table 13 ($N=15$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' summated group preference for methods of communication when communicating with their peers. All 16 respondents rated email in the highly preferred category. In addition, a consensus of highly preferred was also reached for face-to-face planned meetings, phone calls, and face-to-face informal meetings. Consensus was also reached that text message was not preferred.

Table 13

Summated Congressional Agricultural Aides Communication Channel Preference for Communicating with Peers

Method	(n) Highly Preferred	(n) Mildly Preferred	(n) Not Preferred
Email	*15	0	0
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	*13	2	0
Phone (voice)	*12	3	0
Face-to-Face (Informal meetings - at an event, in the hallway, etc.)	*12	3	0
Memos	4	7	4
Phone (text)	2	2	*11

Note. $N = 15$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the given preference.

Table 14 ($N=15$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' summated group preference for methods of communication when communicating with agricultural lobbyists whom they communicate with more than once per month. In the highly preferred category, a level of consensus was reached by email and face-to-face planned meetings. Consensus was not reached in any of the other categories.

Table 14

Summated Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month

Method	(n) Highly Preferred	(n) Mildly Preferred	(n) Not Preferred
Email	*14	1	0
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	*14	1	0
Face-to-Face (Informal meetings - at an event, in the hallway, etc.)	10	5	0
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	9	6	0
Phone (regularly scheduled phone call)	6	7	2
Phone (text)	3	2	10

Note. $N = 15$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the given preference.

Table 15 ($N=15$) displays Congressional agricultural aides' summated group preference for methods of communication when communicating with agricultural lobbyists whom they communicate with less than once per month. In the highly preferred category, consensus was reached by face-to-face planned meetings and email. In the not preferred category, consensus was reached by text message.

Table 15

Summated Congressional Agricultural Aides' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Agricultural Lobbyists Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN Once a Month

Method	(n) Highly Preferred	(n) Mildly Preferred	(n) Not Preferred
Email	*14	1	0
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	*13	2	0
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	6	8	1
Face-to-Face (Informal meetings - at an event, in the hallway, etc.)	5	8	2
Phone (text)	0	3	*12

Note. $N = 15$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the given preference.

Agricultural Lobbyists Delphi Study

This Delphi study revealed three primary pieces of information about how agricultural lobbyists communicate: (1) their preferred sources of information, (2) their preferred formats to receive information, and (3) their preferred methods of communication with other agricultural policy influencers (both Congressional aides and agricultural lobbyists). In the first round, participants were asked open-ended questions to generate a list of potential answers. To generate the second round, the lists were compiled, eliminating duplicates and clarifying language (Hasson, Kenney, & McKenna, 2000). In the second round, respondents were asked to rate their preference for each item on a five-point Likert scale. After the data were collected, the mode (Ludwig, 1994) of each item was used to determine the most popular preference for each. In the third

round, the respondents were presented with their original response and the group mode. They were then asked to either reaffirm their previous response or give a new level of preference for each item. Last, the data from the final round were used to determine group preferences. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used a consensus of 70% to determine a group preference for each individual item. There is no standard level of consensus for Delphi studies (Hasson, Kenney, & McKenna, 2000). However, Green (1982) suggests that 70% consensus level is appropriate for a Likert scale.

Round 1 – Open-ended Questions

In the first round of the study, participants were asked five open ended questions. At the conclusion of the first round, the lists were consolidated into one list for each question. The first round was sent to 18 potential respondents. There were 14 participants who responded to the first round of the survey. The questions, as well as the compiled lists are below.

Question 1: Please list where you acquire information about agriculture and agricultural policy?

Agricultural Organizations and Associations

Social Media

Daily Agricultural Periodicals/Newsletters

Agricultural Websites

Academic research studies and publications

Government Agencies, Publications, and Employees (House, Senate,

Committees, USDA, etc.)

Political Websites

Agricultural Policy Listservs – Email

Previous Experience

Google Alerts

Colleagues

Conventions and Professional Events

Agricultural Experts/Producers

Question 2: Please list the formats in which this information is presented.

News Articles

Print/Hard Copies

Digital (web based sources of information including email)

Verbal – Conversations

Databases

Graphs, pictures, and charts used as illustration to something written (digital or
print)

Searchable Documents

Webinars

**Question 3: Please list your methods of communication used to exchange
information with fellow Congressional agricultural staff members.**

Phone (voice)

Phone (text message)

Email

Print Materials (memos, handouts, newsletters, etc.)

Face-to-Face (planned meetings)

Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)

Social Media

Question 4: Please list your methods of communication used to exchange information with lobbyists whom you interact with MORE THAN once a month.

Phone (unscheduled phone call)

Phone (regularly scheduled phone call)

Phone (text message)

Email

Face-to-Face (planned meetings)

Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)

Formal Letters

Messages Delivered via Colleagues

Question 5: Please list your methods of communication used to exchange information with agricultural lobbyists whom you interact with LESS THAN once a month.

Phone (call)

Phone (text)

Face-to-Face (planned meetings)

Face-to-Face (Informal Meetings – at an event/reception, in the hallway, etc.)

Email

Formal Letter

Round 2 – Gathering Opinion

In round two, the respondents were asked to rate a level of preference for each item. A level of preference was determined for each item on the list based on the most popular preference level chosen. To determine this, the researcher determined the mode of each item on the list (Ludwig, 1994). The median or mean could be misleading of the data (Ludwig, 1994). The items, along with their group preference, and level of consensus are listed below. As there are 12 respondents to this round of the survey, 9 respondents must be in agreement to constitute a 70% consensus.

Table 16 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' group preference and levels of consensus for sources of information. While consensus was not reached, the most preferred sources of information were daily agricultural periodicals and newsletters, agricultural websites, previous experience, and colleagues, however, none of these sources had a mode of extremely preferred. The least preferred source of information was political websites. It is also important to note that no source of information had a mode of not preferred.

Table 16

Round 2 Agricultural Lobbyists' Group Preference for Sources of Information.

Source	Mode	(n)
Daily Agricultural Periodicals/Newsletters	Highly Preferred	7
Agricultural Websites	Highly Preferred	7
Previous Experience	Highly Preferred	7
Colleagues	Highly Preferred	7
Agricultural Organizations and Associations	Highly Preferred	5
Academic research studies and publications	Highly Preferred	5
Government Agencies, Publications and Employees	Highly Preferred	5
Agriculture Policy Listservs - Email	Highly Preferred	5
Conventions and Professional Events	Highly Preferred	5
Agricultural Experts/Producers	Highly Preferred	5
Social Media	Moderately Preferred	4
Google Alerts	Moderately Preferred	4
Political Websites	Mildly Preferred	5

Note. $N = 12$. Sources designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 18 (N=12) displays agricultural lobbyists' group preference and level of consensus for formats of information. While consensus was not reached for any format of information, the most preferred formats of information were news articles, graphs, pictures, and charts used to illustrate something written. The least preferred format of information was print and hard copies.

Table 17

Round 2 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preferred Formats of Information

Format	Mode	(<i>n</i>)
News Articles	Highly Preferred	7
Graphs, pictures, and charts used to illustrate something written	Highly Preferred	7
Verbal - Conversations	Highly Preferred	6
Searchable Documents	Highly Preferred	6
Digital (web based sources of information including email)	Highly Preferred	5
Databases	Moderately Preferred	7
Webinars	Moderately Preferred	7
Print/Hard Copies	Not Preferred	3

Note. *N* = 12. Formats designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (*n*) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 18 (*N*=12) displays agricultural lobbyists' group preference and levels of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with fellow agricultural lobbyists. While consensus was not reached, the most preferred method of communication was face-to-face planned meetings. The least preferred methods of communication were face-to-face unplanned meetings and social media. It is important to note that no item had a mode of not preferred.

Table 19

Round 2 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Methods while Communicating with Peers

Method	Mode	(<i>n</i>)
Face-to-Face (planned meeting)	Extremely Preferred	6
Phone (voice)	Highly Preferred	7
Email	Highly Preferred	7
Print Materials (memos, handouts, newsletters, etc.)	Highly Preferred	6
Phone (text)	Highly Preferred	5
Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)	Moderately Preferred	5
Social Media	Moderately Preferred	5

Note. *N* = 12. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (*n*) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 19 (*N*=12) displays agricultural lobbyists' group preference and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with Congressional agricultural aides whom they communicate with more than once per month. At this point in the study, consensus was reached that face-to-face, unplanned meetings were highly preferred. While consensus was not reached, the least preferred method of communication was formal letters.

Table 19

Round 2 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Methods while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month

Method	Mode	(n)
Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)	Highly Preferred	*9
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	Highly Preferred	6
Phone (regularly scheduled phone call)	Highly Preferred	6
Email	Highly Preferred	6
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	Highly Preferred	6
Phone (text)	Highly Preferred	4
Messages Delivered via Colleagues	Moderately Preferred	5
Formal Letters	Mildly Preferred	4

Note. $N = 12$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 20 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' group preference and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with Congressional agricultural aides whom they communicate with less than once per month. While consensus was not reached, the most preferred method of communication is face-to-face planned meetings. The least preferred method of communication is formal letter. It is also important to note that no method of communication had a mode of not preferred.

Table 20

Round 2 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Methods while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN Once a Month

Method	Mode	(n)
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	Extremely Preferred	5
Email	Highly Preferred	6
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	Highly Preferred	5
Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)	Moderately Preferred	6
Phone (text)	Moderately Preferred	4
Formal Letter	Mildly Preferred	6

Note. $N = 12$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Round 3 – Developing Group Opinion

In the final round of the study, participants were presented with the same list they had previously received. Participants were also presented with the group preference along with their previous preference. They were asked to either reaffirm their previous preference by selecting ‘no change’ or selected a new preference level. The data were collected and new preference levels and levels of consensus were generated using the mode of the data (Ludwig, 1994). As there were 12 respondents’ data included in the third round analysis, 9 respondents must be in agreement to form a consensus.

Table 21 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' group preference and levels of consensus for sources of information. While consensus was not reached, the most preferred source of information was colleagues, the least preferred source was political websites. It is also important to note that no source of information received a mode of extremely preferred or not preferred.

Table 21

Round 3 Agricultural Lobbyists' Group Preferences for Sources of Information

Source	Mode	(<i>n</i>)
Colleagues	Highly Preferred	8
Daily Agricultural Periodicals/Newsletters	Highly Preferred	7
Agricultural Websites	Highly Preferred	7
Previous Experience	Highly Preferred	6
Agricultural Organizations and Associations	Highly Preferred	5
Academic research studies and publications	Highly Preferred	5
Government Agencies, Publications and Employees	Highly Preferred	5
Agriculture Policy Listservs - Email	Highly Preferred	5
Conventions and Professional Events	Highly Preferred	5
Agricultural Experts/Producers	Highly Preferred	5
Social Media	Moderately Preferred	4
Google Alerts	Moderately Preferred	4
Political Websites	Mildly Preferred	5

Note. $N = 12$. Sources designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (*n*) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 22 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' group preference and level of consensus for formats of information. While consensus was not reached, the most preferred formats of information were news articles, and graphs, pictures, and charts used to illustrate something written. The least preferred format of information was print and hard copies.

Table 22

Round 3 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preferences for Formats of Information

Format	Mode	(<i>n</i>)
News Articles	Highly Preferred	7
Graphs, pictures, and charts used to illustrate something written	Highly Preferred	7
Digital (web based sources of information including email)	Highly Preferred	6
Verbal - Conversations	Highly Preferred	6
Searchable Documents	Highly Preferred	6
Databases	Moderately Preferred	7
Webinars	Moderately Preferred	7
Print/Hard Copies	Not Preferred	3

Note. $N = 12$. Formats designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (*n*) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 23 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' group preference and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with fellow agricultural lobbyists. While consensus was not reached, the most preferred method of communication was face-to-face planned meetings. The least preferred methods of

communication were face-to-face unplanned meetings and social media; however, it is important to note that they were still moderately preferred. There were no methods of communication that received a mode of mildly preferred or not preferred.

Table 23

Round 3 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Peers

Method	Mode	(n)
Face-to-Face (planned meeting)	Extremely Preferred	6
Phone (voice)	Highly Preferred	7
Email	Highly Preferred	7
Print Materials (memos, handouts, newsletters, etc.)	Highly Preferred	7
Phone (text)	Highly Preferred	5
Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)	Moderately Preferred	6
Social Media	Moderately Preferred	6

Note. $N = 12$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 24 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' group preference and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with Congressional agricultural aides whom they communicate with more than once per month. While consensus was not reached the most preferred method of communication was face-to-face unplanned meetings. The least preferred method was formal letters. It is important

to note that none of the methods of communication received a mode of extremely preferred or not preferred.

Table 24

Round 3 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month

Method	Mode	(n)
Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)	Highly Preferred	8
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	Highly Preferred	7
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	Highly Preferred	6
Phone (regularly scheduled phone call)	Highly Preferred	6
Email	Highly Preferred	6
Phone (text)	Highly Preferred	4
Messages Delivered via Colleagues	Moderately Preferred	5
Formal Letters	Mildly Preferred	4

Note. $N = 12$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Table 25 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' group preference and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with Congressional agricultural aides whom they communicate with less than once per month. While consensus was not met for any preference level, face-to-face planned meetings was the most preferred method of communication. The least preferred method of communication was formal letters.

Table 25

Round 3 Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN Once a Month

Method	Mode	(n)
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	Extremely Preferred	5
Email	Highly Preferred	6
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	Highly Preferred	5
Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)	Moderately Preferred	6
Phone (text)	Moderately Preferred	4
Formal Letter	Mildly Preferred	6

Note. $N = 12$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the mode.

Summated Group Opinion

While determining the mode of the data is important because it shows which preference had the highest choice, it does not take into account the second highest ranking nor does it take into account the respondent's definition of the terms. Each respondent may have a different definition of the words mildly, moderately, highly, and extremely. Therefore, to eliminate this bias, the rankings were condensed to get more practically useful data. Green (1982) suggests that a 70% consensus of respondents who ranked a 3 or 4 on a 4-point Likert-type scale is adequate for discussion and that like columns can be condensed. As there was only one option for not preferred, that preference was left untouched. The rankings of 'extremely preferred' and 'highly

preferred' were condensed into one category of 'highly preferred.' In addition, the rankings of 'mildly preferred' and 'moderately preferred' were condensed into one mildly preferred category. This combining of rankings gives a clearer picture of what is most preferred.

Not all respondents from round two responded to round three of the study, data from round two was included in the analysis of round three. Since respondents were given the option to not change their answers, it is assumed that by not responding to round three, they are choosing to not change any of their previous preferences, therefore, data from round two was included for respondents who did not respond to round three.

Table 26 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' summated group preference and level of consensus for information sources. At this point, a level of consensus was determined for many information sources. These can be seen in Table 26. The two most preferred sources of information was colleagues. While there was no consensus reached for an information source that was not preferred, the least preferred source of information was social media.

Table 26

Summated Agricultural Lobbyists' Group Preferences for Information Sources

Source	(n) Highly Preferred	(n) Mildly Preferred	(n) Not Preferred
Colleagues	*12	0	0
Agricultural Experts/Producers	*11	1	0
Agricultural Organizations and Associations	*10	2	0
Academic research studies and publications	*10	2	0
Daily Agricultural Periodicals/Newsletters	*9	3	0
Agricultural Websites	*9	3	0
Government Agencies, Publications and Employees	*9	3	0
Previous Experience	*9	3	0
Agriculture Policy Listservs - Email	6	6	0
Conventions and Professional Events	6	6	0
Google Alerts	3	7	2
Political Websites	2	8	2
Social Media	1	8	3

Note. $N = 12$. Sources designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the given preference.

Table 27 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' summated group preference and level of consensus for formats of information. Digital, graphs, pictures, and charts, and searchable documents all reached consensus in the highly preferred category. There was no consensus reached in the not preferred category.

Table 27

Summated Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Format

Format	(n) Highly Preferred	(n) Mildly Preferred	(n) Not Preferred
Digital (web based sources of information including email)	*10	2	0
Graphs, pictures, and charts used to illustrate something written	*10	2	0
Searchable Documents	*10	2	0
News Articles	8	4	0
Verbal - Conversations	8	4	0
Databases	3	*9	0
Print/Hard Copies	3	5	4
Webinars	2	*10	0

Note. $N = 12$. Formats designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the given preference.

Table 28 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' summated group preference and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with fellow agricultural lobbyists. Phone calls, email, and face-to-face planned meetings reached a consensus level in the highly preferred category. No consensus level was reached in the not preferred category.

Table 28

Summated Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Peers

Method	(n) Highly Preferred	(n) Mildly Preferred	(n) Not Preferred
Phone (voice)	*11	1	0
Email	*11	1	0
Face-to-Face (planned meeting)	*9	3	0
Print Materials (memos, handouts, newsletters, etc.)	8	4	0
Phone (text)	6	5	1
Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)	5	7	0
Social Media	0	*10	2

Note. $N = 12$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the given preference.

Table 29 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' summated group preferences and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with Congressional agricultural aides whom they communicate with more than once per month. In the highly preferred category, consensus was reached for the following methods of communication: face-to-face planned meetings, email, face-to-face unplanned meetings, and unscheduled phone calls. There was no consensus reached in the not preferred category.

Table 29

Summated Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with MORE THAN Once a Month

Method	(n) Highly Preferred	(n) Mildly Preferred	(n) Not Preferred
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	*11	1	0
Email	*11	1	0
Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)	*11	1	0
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	*9	2	1
Phone (regularly scheduled phone call)	7	5	0
Phone (text)	5	6	1
Formal Letters	2	8	2
Messages Delivered via Colleagues	2	8	2

Note. $N = 12$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the Table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the given preference.

Table 30 ($N=12$) displays agricultural lobbyists' summated group preference and level of consensus for methods of communication when communicating with Congressional agricultural aides whom they communicate with less than once per month. A consensus was reached in the highly preferred category by email and face-to-face planned meetings. No consensus was reached in the not preferred category.

Table 30

Summated Agricultural Lobbyists' Preference for Communication Method while Communicating with Congressional Agricultural Aides Whom They Communicate with LESS THAN Once a Month

Method	(n) Highly Preferred	(n) Mildly Preferred	(n) Not Preferred
Email	*11	1	0
Face-to-Face (planned meetings)	*9	3	0
Phone (unscheduled phone call)	7	5	0
Face-to-Face (unplanned/informal meetings)	4	8	0
Formal Letter	3	8	1
Phone (text)	3	6	3

Note. $N = 12$. Methods designated with * have reached a consensus level of 70%. In the Table, (n) represents the number of respondents who chose the given preference.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The method used for this study does not allow the results to be generalized to a larger audience. However, the results provide insight into the preferences of the specific group of identified agricultural policy experts. As noted by Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna (2000), the existence of a consensus by experts does not necessarily mean that it is the correct answer. Instead, a consensus points to the importance that the experts put on the given topic.

This is a descriptive study that was conducted to fill the gap in the literature about sources used by agricultural policy influencers to acquire information about agriculture and agricultural policy. In addition, how agricultural policy influencers prefer to communicate with each other was addressed. Therefore, this study did not seek to prove or disprove any previous studies or studies that were discussed in the literature review. This study comments on how the data support or do not support the studies discussed in the literature review.

Discussion of Findings

As this study was conducted in two parts, the discussion of the findings will be broken into two parts for clarity. The conclusions, however, will combine the two Delphi studies into one picture of the communication that flows between agricultural lobbyists and Congressional agricultural aides.

Communication through Congressional Agricultural Aides

1: Identify and determine Congressional agricultural aides' preference for information sources related to agricultural policy analysis and decision making.

There were twelve information sources identified by Congressional agricultural aides. However, not all sources were preferred. Only the sources that yielded a consensus level of 70% or above will be discussed (Green, 1982). For questions one and two a consensus is created by an agreement of 12 respondents. In questions three, four, and five a consensus is created by an agreement of 11 respondents. The difference is due to one respondent not completing the entire survey. The data suggests that Congressional agricultural aides look both to nongovernmental agricultural organizations and governmental organizations for information. Congressional agricultural staff highly prefer to get information from government agencies (14) and agricultural groups (13). This supports the theory that information flows among lobbying groups and the federal Bureaucracy as indicated with the iron triangle theory (Browne, 2004). However, it is interesting to note that respondents also highly preferred to receive information from constituents and producers with an agreement rate of 14 respondents, equal to that of government agencies. This final highly preferred source of information eludes to the validity of the power cluster theory of policy development (Ogden, 1971). While this suggests that constituents would have an opportunity to influence policy, more research is needed determine the types of information that are exchanged and how much of an impact it has on the policy process.

While agricultural groups, constituents and producers, and governmental agencies and publications are the most preferred sources of information for Congressional aides, not all sources are preferred. While none of the sources of information reached a consensus level of 70% (12 respondents) in the ‘not preferred’ category, there are two information sources that are worth noting. Agricultural radio and social media were not preferred with a consensus level of 10 respondents and 8 respondents, respectively. While the consensus level of 70% was not reached, neither of these sources of information received a single highly preferred ranking. Even though consensus was not reached, it is safe to say that these are not the most preferred sources of information.

2: Identify and determine Congressional agricultural aides’ preferred format to receive information.

As stated previously, lobbying and influencing policy is an exchange of knowledge. It can be identified as communication (Contandriopoulos et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to know Congressional agricultural aides preferred format for receiving information. Overwhelmingly, the respondents reported that they prefer to have the information presented in-person. The most preferred format, with a consensus level of 14 respondents, was an individual one-on-one meeting. The second most preferred format was in-person via seminars, briefings, field trips and conferences, with a consensus level of 13 respondents. This is consistent with previous literature. Stone, Singletary, & Richmond (1999) state that people selectively expose themselves to certain types of communication. One of the five tenets to selecting a source of information is proximity, “information that is immediately available or close to a person

is most likely to be selected for exposure” (Stone, Singletary, & Richmond, 1999, p. 95). In addition, Noble (2005) suggests that people choose sources of information based on personal relationships, brevity, and accessibility. Speaking to an agriculture lobbyist directly, in-person would be the easiest, quickest, and most readily available option for Congressional agricultural aides to receive information.

3: Identify and determine Congressional agricultural aides’ preferred method of communication with other Congressional agricultural aides.

Once the location and format of the information is understood, to completely understand the communication picture during the agricultural policy process, it is also important to understand how Congressional agricultural aides communicate with each other. The channels of information affect how the message is communicated and how it is received (Stone, Singletary, & Richmond, 1999).

The most striking finding in the preferred methods of communication among Congressional agricultural aides is that with a consensus of all 15 respondents, email is the most preferred method of communication. Other highly preferred methods of communication were planned face-to-face meetings (13), informal face-to-face meetings (12), and phone conversations (12). It was surprising however that text messages were ranked as not preferred with a consensus of 11 respondents. It is interesting to note that the most preferred method and the most not preferred method of communication are both written forms of communication. Perhaps this is not because of the type of communication, but the channel that it is traveling through. Studies suggest that 53% of

American cell phone users prefer phone calls to text messages (Smith, 2011). This pattern is also evident in the data of Congressional agricultural aides.

4: Identify and determine Congressional agricultural aides preferred method of communication with leading agricultural lobbyists.

Communicating with outside influencers of agricultural policy looks somewhat different than internal communication. Throughout the study, the distinction was made between agricultural lobbyists with whom the staffer communicates at more than once a month and less than once a month. Communication is based on how well the communicator knows the receiver of the message. A person's perception of the person with whom they are communicating will affect how they communicate (Stone, Singletary, & Richmond, 1999).

Some organizations employ full-time lobbyists who live and work in Washington D.C. These lobbyists come in contact with Congressional agricultural aides on a regular basis. This is shown in their communication methods. The most preferred method of communication with these lobbyists was email and face-to-face planned meetings; both earning a highly preferred consensus of 14 respondents. As with communication among Congressional agricultural aides, text message was not preferred, although only with a consensus of 10, less than the previous consensus among Congressional agricultural aides.

Not all organizations can afford the luxury of employing a full-time lobbyist who lives in D.C., therefore, Congressional agricultural aides only speak with some lobbyists a couple of times per year. Their communication is infrequent and often more formal because of the lack of a personal relationship (Browne, 1998). The preferred methods of

communication with this group of lobbyists was not vastly different from the preferred methods of communication with lobbyist with whom there is a relationship. The most preferred methods of communication were face-to-face planned meetings with 14 respondents agreeing and email with a level of consensus of 13 respondents. The least preferred method of communication was text messaging with consensus level of 12 respondents. The main difference between the two lobbying groups is that face-to-face informal meetings were not as highly preferred with this group of lobbyists. This could be because of the lack of a personal relationship between the lobbyist and the Congressional aide. Noble (2005) points to the importance of interpersonal relationships in the lobbying process. If there is a lack of a relationship between a Congressional aide and a lobbyist, an informal meeting in the hallway would be less productive than a planned meeting. Browne (1998) speaks about the four stages of lobbying. The first stage is getting attention, the second stage is interacting with decision makers or influencers, the third stage is to gain a personal connection, and the fourth stage, sharing information. If a lobbyist does not have a previously developed relationship with a Congressional aide, an informal meeting in the hall or at a meeting would not be preferred because the lobbyist would still be in the attention getting stage. It could be awkward or uncomfortable for both the lobbyist and the Congressional aide.

Communication Through Leading Agricultural Lobbyists

1: Identify and determine leading agricultural lobbyists' preferred sources of information related to agricultural policy analysis and decision making.

Through the research, 13 sources of information were identified by agricultural

lobbyists as potential sources of information. In addition, there were many sources that were identified as highly preferred sources of information. As there were 12 respondents to this survey, a 70% consensus is constituted by 9 respondents agreeing. Agricultural lobbyists highly preferred to receive information from the following sources: (1) colleagues (12), (2) agricultural experts and producers (11), (3) agricultural organizations and associations (10), (4) academic research studies and publications (10), (5) daily agricultural periodicals and newsletters (9), (6) agricultural websites (9), (7) government agencies, publications, and employees (9), and (8) previous experience (9). The data suggests that lobbyists like to receive a lot of information from various sources. This could be the lobbyists serving as part of the screen of receptivity (Milbrath, 1960). Lobbyists take a lot of information about their area and condense it into the need to know information to give to Congressional agricultural aides.

2: Identify and determine leading agricultural lobbyists' preferred formats to receive information.

According to this study, lobbyists prefer to receive information in a somewhat different formats than Congressional agricultural aides. According to this study, agricultural lobbyists highly prefer to receive information in a digital format, utilizing graphs, pictures charts or searchable documents, all with a consensus level of 10 respondents. Noble (2005) indicated that there are a number of reasons why a lobbyist decides to utilize one source of information over another. Of the reasons, accessibility, accuracy, and brevity are supported by this study. Using digital formats with graphs,

pictures, and charts, and making documents searchable allow lobbyists to quickly access the information that they need to make their case to Congressional agricultural aides.

3: Identify and determine leading agricultural lobbyists' preferred method of communication with other leading agricultural lobbyists.

As lobbyists prepare to communicate their messages to Congressional agricultural aides, it is often important for them to communicate with each other and often work together as is supported by the power cluster theory (Ogden, 1971). This study identified three ways that agricultural lobbyists highly prefer to communicate with each other. First, agricultural lobbyists prefer to communicate via a phone call and email both with a consensus level 11 respondents. In addition, they highly preferred to communicate with each other via face-to-face planned meetings with a consensus level of 9 respondents. There was no consensus level reached in the not preferred category for communication among agricultural lobbyists. This would imply that lobbyists can contact each other in various capacities. There is not necessarily a bad way for them to contact each other.

4: Identify and determine leading agricultural lobbyists' preferred method of communication with Congressional agricultural aides.

As is previously noted, some lobbyists have closer relationships with Congressional agricultural aides than do others. Since the relationship two people have affects their communication (Stone, Singletary, & Richmond, 1999), the researcher looked at agricultural lobbyists' communication with Congressional agricultural aides whom they have a close relationship with and those whom they do not.

Lobbyists identified four methods of communication that they highly prefer to use when communicating with Congressional agricultural aides whom they communicate with at least once a month. With a consensus level of 11 respondents, agricultural lobbyists highly prefer to use planned face-to-face meetings, unplanned face-to-face meetings and email to communicate their message. With a consensus level of 9 respondents, lobbyists prefer to use unscheduled phone calls. While a consensus level was not reached, it is interesting to note that lobbyists consider text message as a method of communication for Congressional agricultural aides whom they communicate with at least once a month. The consensus level of 'not preferred' for text message was only 1 respondent leaving the remaining 11 respondents between the highly and mildly preferred levels.

Lobbyists identified two methods of communication that they highly prefer to use when communicating with Congressional agricultural aides whom they communicate with less than once per month. Their most preferred method of communication was email with a consensus level of 11 respondents. In addition, they also highly preferred to communicate with face-to-face planned meetings with a consensus level of 9 respondents. One striking difference was that there was no level of consensus reached for unplanned face-to-face meetings. Again, this is supportive of Browne's (1998) four stages of lobbying. Having not built a relationship with the Congressional agricultural aide prior to the informal meeting, the lobbyist would be in the first stage of the lobbying process.

Implications

There are many implications that can be taken from this study. In looking at the theoretical framework of communication used in this study, the specific channels that are being used to convey information between Congressional agricultural aides and agricultural lobbyists are changing. While face-to-face interactions remain the most popular method of communication from both points of view, some channels of communication are disappearing and others are emerging. The use of formal letters and print communication is disappearing in lieu of a more fast-paced, technologically advanced, communication process. Not surprisingly, the preference to use email is quite high from both sides of the study.

While there are various theories about how policy is formed, this research seems to point away from the iron triangle theory and toward the power cluster theory. If the iron triangle theory were completely true, neither Congressional aides nor lobbyists would prefer to receive information from producers and constituents. However, both groups highly preferred to receive information from these sources which are outside of the three sided iron triangle of Congress, the federal bureaucracy, and interest groups. While the data suggests that some form of the iron triangle exists, as both Congressional agricultural aides and agricultural lobbyists prefer to receive information from each other and from government agencies, the data suggests that there is more at play.

Instead of the iron triangle theory, the data supports the power cluster theory (Ogden, 1971). In order to be a power cluster, a group must meet five qualifications as outlined by Ogden. First there must be close personal relationships among the members.

The data points to the importance of interpersonal relationships in the communication methods and sources of information that are being used both by Congressional agricultural aides and agricultural lobbyists. Second, decisions are made within a cluster without inputs from outside sources. The data suggests that for Congressional agricultural aides, the main sources of information used would fall within the power cluster. With that being said, agricultural lobbyists prefer to receive information from a number of different sources that would fall outside of the power cluster. However, as lobbyists, part of their job is to educate those within the power cluster. They serve as disseminators of information to elected officials (Berg, 2009). While this study did not seek to investigate the third characteristic of a cluster, a cluster must maintain equilibrium (Ogden, 1971). Knutson et al., (2007) speaks of the agriculture power cluster and its power, implying that there must be an equilibrium. Fourth, a cluster will have competing interests from within (Ogden, 1971). The agricultural industry is very diverse and sectioned. This internal competing interest can be seen almost everywhere. A very simple example is the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill. One of the main disagreements within the committee was over dairy policy. The cluster supported the bill as a whole, but competing interests within the cluster did not like small segments of the bill. The fifth and final characteristic is that the power cluster must have compromises both within and with other power clusters (Ogden, 1971). While dairy policy did stall the 2014 Farm Bill, a compromise was eventually met and the bill became law.

The researcher acknowledges the importance of the influence triangle (Knutson et al., 2007). The researcher would suggest that the constituents and experts that are

included in the cluster are most likely kingmakers, and kings. The theory of the influence triangle suggests that people who are kings and kingmakers are those who have influence within their community. This community can be large or small. As an example, someone who would be included within the agriculture power cluster would be the presidents of state farm bureaus, they are kings in their own community. While the data suggests 'constituents' are a very important source of information for Congressional agricultural aides, Ogden (1971) would suggest that the constituents who are looked to most for information are opinion leaders (Rogers, 2003) and kings and kingmakers (Knutson et al., 2007) in the agricultural industry.

This study affirms the study by Noble (2005) that says constituents are one of the most important factors in influencing what is relevant to a Congressman. The data suggests that constituents and producers are a preferred source of information for both Congressional agricultural aides and agricultural lobbyists. In addition, this study supports the work by Shipley (2000) that says that lobbyists are a primary source of information for Congressional aides. In addition, the data points to the fact that relationships are important as does Shipley's research. Last but not least, this study agrees with Noble's (2005) identification of sources of information.

Milbrath (1960) argues that lobbyists prefer to have direct communication with Congressional aides in a personal way. The data in this study support Milbrath's arguments as many of the preferred methods of communication are direct face-to-face communication. However, Milbrath (1960) also argued that written communication is not as effective because it goes through the screen of receptivity. The data suggest that

both Congressional agricultural aides and agricultural lobbyists highly prefer to receive communication via email which is a written communication. It appears as though the invention of modern technology and instant written communication has impacted the screen of receptivity. In addition, the data suggest that lobbyists do not highly prefer to communicate through their colleagues. This is contrary to Milbrath (1960) and his suggestion to utilize colleagues to achieve more policy objectives.

Recommendations for Further Research

This descriptive study can serve as a basis for many studies to come in the future. There are many questions that are left unanswered and many data points that need to be explained from this research study. Studies that are completed can build on this study and further help to clarify what communication looks like during the agricultural lobbying process.

The first recommendation for further research is to add a quantitative aspect to this study. This study only puts a preference on information sources, formats of information, and methods of communication. For further clarification, it would be useful to know how often Congressional agricultural aides and agricultural lobbyists use each source of information. Knowing how often the sources of information are used could point to the value that is put on that source of information. While this study found that policy influencers prefer to receive information in a face-to-face format and formats that take little time to consume, it would be beneficial to quantify what these influencers are currently receiving in terms of formatting. Also, it would be beneficial to know which

format is actually the most effective as opposed to which is perceived to be most effective.

In terms of methods of communication, it would also be advantageous to quantify the different types of communication received. To know how many emails, phone calls, text messages, or letters an agricultural policy influencer receives in one day could help the communication process. If an influencer is specifically seeking to garner extra attention, a less used method of communication may gain more attention. As agricultural policy influencers receive hundreds of communications within a single day, garnering attention is vitally important to communicate a message. The theory of selective attention (Treisman, 1969) says that when receivers cannot control the amount of messages received, as would be the case with agricultural policy influencers, they selectively pay attention to some messages and not others. One of the ways that attention can be received is through novelty (Treisman, 1969). If there was a quantitative understanding of the types of communication received, someone who wanted to get special attention would know how to be novel in their communication method.

The second recommendation for further research is to look at how much influence each type of communication has on the intended audience. While this study addresses preferences, it does not address the influence of each communication method. To improve the agricultural policy process, further research might be conducted that would indicate which methods of communication are most influential. One might argue that since face-to-face communication is highly preferred by both Congressional agricultural aides and agricultural lobbyists, then it would be the most influential.

However, email is also highly preferred by both groups. A future study could investigate the influence of each type of communication and how that influence changes with the various types of messages received. As an example, email may be more influential for education since the sender can provide attachments and links to further information, while in-person meetings might be more influential for persuasive communication because the sender of messages can receive immediate feedback and alter their message. Further research is needed in this area.

When considering influence, the researcher would be remiss if the influence of election support was not acknowledged. The influence of the almighty dollar is one which cannot be ignored. Although, campaign finance reform has limited some of the influence that money plays, campaign donations and election support are still a large factor in the game. According to Milbrath (1960), campaign support and monetary donations help lobbyists to gain access to politicians and political offices to sell their ideas and persuade officials to vote in their favor. A further study could look at the influence of various communication techniques when compared to the political and monetary support which the communicator is offering. In this way, a future study could determine if it is the communication method or the other support that is truly garnering support from the elected official.

Third, future studies might look at the demographics of Congressional agricultural aides and agricultural lobbyists to determine if the demographics affect their preferences for information, formatting, and method of communication. In this study, the researcher made every effort to have a diverse expert group so that the data would not be

biased. However, this study did not collect any demographic information from the respondents and therefore cannot break down the results based on demographic information. A future study may be broader and seek to determine if there are different preferences based on various demographics. The research suggests that there would be different preferences based on different generations (Glass, 2007) represented in the policy process.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for Congressional Agricultural Aides

Congressional agricultural aides have a very important job. Their main job is to secure information for their employer—a Congressman (Noble, 2005). They must work to find information, consume it, evaluate it, and then develop an opinion on the information presented. While working to find that information, many Congressional agricultural aides look to agricultural lobbyists to be sources of information for them. The researcher has developed the following recommendations:

- 1.) When asking a lobbyist for information, ask specifically for information that you need. Lobbyists are inundated with information from various places in various forms. If you ask for a specific piece of information along with a specific format in which you prefer to receive that information, you will save time for yourself and the lobbyist.
- 2.) If you have a close relationship with the lobbyist, communicate with them via email, face-to-face meeting, or a telephone call. Depending on the type of communication, choose your method appropriately. As the preference for

telephone calls is decreasing, if you need something immediately, a telephone call will be novel enough that it will get attention and get you a quicker response. If you need to have a lengthy discussion or exchange materials, a face-to-face meeting is probably best. If you are just exchanging small amounts of information, an email might be appropriate. As we know that communication is relational, use your best judgment to determine the best method of communication.

- 3.) If you are communicating with a lobbyist with whom you do not have a very close relationship, your best form of communication would be via email.

Through email, you could set up a time in which you could meet in person. I would advise against calling the person directly at first as you might catch them off guard and they might not be able to answer your question. In addition, if you do not have a close relationship with that person, they may not answer your call.

In a world where communication and 24-hour news never stops, utilizing the method of communication most preferred by your audience will help you to achieve your goal. By communicating with lobbyists in the way they prefer, you will help them educate you and enable you to better serve your boss, agriculture, and ultimately your country.

Recommendations for Agricultural Lobbyists

Lobbyists play a vital role in the policy process. Lobbyists are the educators of our government. Lobbyists work to unite a group of people toward a common goal. Agricultural lobbyists represent agriculturists, farmers, ranchers, and producers to the government so that they can have a voice and so that their interests are met by the

government. In order that communication may flow smoothly, the researcher has generated the following recommendations for lobbyists:

- 1.) When you are providing a Congressional agricultural aide with information on an issue, present it to them in person. This is their most preferred way to receive information. This also gives them the opportunity to ask questions. In addition, provide them with a digital copy so that they can look back at it later. Paper copies are not as preferred as digital copies because they take up room. Digital copies can be accessed from almost anywhere. Make the message as clear and concise as possible; be sure to use your time and their time well.
- 2.) When communicating with fellow agricultural organization representatives, email and telephone calls are most preferred. A face-to-face planned meeting may also be necessary. However, the quicker and more concise the communication, the better.
- 3.) When communicating with a Congressional agricultural aide with whom you have a close relationship, communicate with them via a planned face-to-face meeting or email. This gives them the opportunity to prepare for your discussion or prepare their answer to you. Unplanned meetings can also be useful, but not for high impact issue discussion; these meetings can be used for relationship building. Do not attempt to text the Congressional aide as that method of communication is not preferred by Congressional agricultural aides. As we know communication is relational; use your knowledge of the aide to best gauge how you should communicate with them.

4.) When communicating with a Congressional agricultural aide with whom you do not have a close relationship, email and a face-to-face meetings are again preferred the most. As before, texting is not preferred by Congressional agricultural aides. However, the major difference with this group is that they prefer to communicate via informal one-on-one meetings less than the previous group. If you happen to run into a Congressional aide with whom you need to speak, use that time to build a relationship so that you can gain access and have a meeting with them at a later time.

In a world where communication and 24-hour news never stops, utilizing the method of communication most preferred by your audience will help you to achieve your goal. By communicating with Congressional agricultural aides in the way they prefer, you will help to educate them and be a better resource for them. In this way, you will have a greater influence and will be able to achieve more for your organization and ultimately achieve more for agriculture.

Recommendations for Researchers, Educators, and the Public

Researchers, educators, and the public all provide information to elected officials and to lobbyists. When presenting information to them, it is important to be cognizant of how it is presented. Researchers, educators, and the public should present information in a way that is most useful to the aide or lobbyist. In this way, the person providing the information can also provide a service and hopefully help advance their own personal agenda. The researcher has developed the following recommendations;

- 1.) Researchers – After completing research, if a Congressional agricultural aide wishes to use the research, first, generate some type of visual representation of your study as graphs, pictures, and charts are preferred to illustrate the verbiage that you use. Infographics and white papers can also be used to help clarify understanding. After you have created the content, send them a digital copy. Congressional agricultural aides prefer to receive information in a digital way. If you can meet with them to discuss the study, that would also be very beneficial. When you are providing information to a lobbyist, your method should be similar. Lobbyists also prefer to receive graphs, charts, and tables to illustrate wording. In addition, they highly prefer to receive digital copies of your presentation. However, the main difference between Congressional agricultural aides and agricultural lobbyists is that lobbyists do not prefer to meet with you quite as much, but would prefer to have a searchable document. I would suggest sending your searchable manuscript to them.
- 2.) Educators – Educators at the college level will be educating future Congressional agricultural aides, future agricultural lobbyists, and future agricultural policy stakeholders. Educators need to teach about the types of communication that happen on the Hill in Washington, D.C. They should also teach about relationship building and networking. The millennial generation that has been raised with smart phones in their hands needs to know how to network and develop the interpersonal relationships that are essential for the communication and policy process.

3.) The Public – The likelihood of a single person impacting policy on the Hill in Washington, D.C. is very small. Instead, if a private citizen wants to impact policy, their best solution would be to somehow become involved in the agricultural power cluster. The best way to influence the power cluster is to either join an organization that is a part of the cluster, such as Farm Bureau, or to influence a Kingmaker that your opinion needs to be heard at the national level.

Conclusion

Agricultural policy affects various aspects of agriculture, the economy, and the food that we consume. As agriculturists, students, researchers, and U.S. citizens, we know that agricultural policy is something that matters to us. This study developed a clearer understanding of the flow of knowledge among agricultural policy influencers, primarily Congressional agricultural aides and leading agricultural lobbyists. This more complete picture of the policy process can aid in the efficient development of sound agricultural policy that can have a more positive impact on the American producer.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPATION INVITATION

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
AND LIFE SCIENCES

Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications



«GreetingLine»

June 27, 2014

This letter serves as your official invitation to participate in Victor K. Salazar's study titled "Communication among agricultural policy influencers: a Delphi study." This study is being completed as part of a Master's thesis and will serve as the major capstone for Victor's degree.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to determine the preferred methods of communication between Congressional agricultural staff members and policy influencers for agricultural organizations.

Why am I being invited: Your experience in agricultural policy and your current position, make you an expert in the field of agricultural policy development. People who have these skills are very limited. You are one of only 20 people on Capitol Hill invited to participate in this study. Your expertise will help clarify communication during agricultural policy development.

Timeline: This study will begin next week, it will consist of 3 rounds of surveys which will build upon each other to form an opinion from the group of experts. Each round will take approximately 5-10 minutes with at least 1 week in-between rounds.

What is a Delphi Study: A Delphi study is a way to develop expert opinion without holding a panel discussion. The study allows for the expert to participate on their own time schedule. The 3 rounds of surveys are vital to narrow the raw data and facts into the group consensus of the experts.

Your participation: 3 survey rounds between July 1 and August 15

Round 1: Survey consists of 5 open ended questions about communication styles – list answers preferred

Round 2: Survey presents a list of communication methods gathered in round 1 and asks you to rank them from most important to least important

Round 3: Survey asks you to agree or disagree with the rankings that were gathered in round 2.

Benefits to you: At the conclusion of the study, you will receive a one page summary report of the findings from both Congressional agricultural staff and agricultural lobbyists. These results will provide you with a clearer picture of the flow of communication on the Hill

Concerns: All data will be kept completely anonymous. Your answers will be collected with qualtrics, a secure, online, university-sponsored survey tool. Answers will be stored on secure servers in password protected files. In addition, all identifiable information will be coded and stored in password protected documents separate from the code.

Finally: *Thank you* for assisting with this project! Your participation in this study is vital to the completion of Victor's Master's degree. The limited number of experts makes your participation through all 3 rounds necessary to the successful completion of the study. By participating in this study, you are improving the field of agricultural policy for future generations. Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victor K. Salazar".

Victor K. Salazar
Graduate Student
Texas A&M University

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracy Rutherford".

Tracy Rutherford, Ph.D.
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APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM CONSENT FORM

Communication among agriculture policy influencers: A Delphi study

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Victor K. Salazar, a graduate student researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to agree to this consent form. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the communication processes which take place between Congressional agricultural staff and agricultural lobbyists.

Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?

You are being asked to participate in this study because of the expertise you have gained through your current and previous positions. You specifically are being asked because of your close interaction with agricultural policy development.

Are the Alternatives to being in this study?

No, the alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?

First you will be asked to answer 5 open ended questions about your information gathering and communication with other agriculture policy influencers in list form. Second, you will be asked to rank your preference of each item on the group list. Third, you shown the group preference and then be asked to reevaluate your preference. Your participation in this study will last up to 60 minutes for the entire 3 rounds of the study over a 6 week period. Each round should take 5 – 20 minutes.

Are There Any Risks To Me?

You will experience no more risks than you would come across in everyday life. All answers will be kept confidential and coded so that no one other than the researcher will have access to your personal information. The only risks that you would face in this study are the same risks that you face working at your current position.

Are There Any Benefits To Me?

The direct benefit to being in this study is that you will receive a summary sheet of the results of the study. In this way, you will see a clearer picture of the preferred communication that takes place between yourself and other agricultural policy influencers. You may use this information as you use see fit. However, there may be potential to improve your communication with other agriculture policy influencers.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me?

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM
CONSENT FORM**

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?

You will not be paid for being in this study

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be coded and stored securely. Only Victor K. Salazar will have access to the records.

Any information about you will be stored in computer files protected with a password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

People who may have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

Information about you and related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

Who may I Contact for More Information?

You may contact the protocol director, Victor K. Salazar – Master’s Student, to tell him about a concern or complaint with this research at 860-307-1387 or vsalaza@neo.tamu.edu. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Tracy Rutherford, Ph.D. at 979-862-3001 or Rutherford@tamu.edu

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu

What if I Change My Mind About Participating?

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on you. Any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could affect your willingness to continue your participation.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE COMMUNICATION

Introductory Email

Good Morning “participant”,

My name is Victor Salazar, I am a Master’s student at Texas A&M University in Agricultural Communications. I am writing to you because of your experience in agricultural policy. I am doing my thesis research on agriculture policy communication. I am researching the communication methods between Congressional Staff members who work with agriculture and agricultural organizations. Because of your expertise in this area, I would like to discuss my study with you. Would you be available for 5-10 minutes on “DATE” for a phone call or meeting?

Thank you, I look forward to your response!
Victor Salazar

Survey Distribution

Good Morning!

Thank you for your willingness to help with my thesis project on the communication methods used among agricultural policy influencers. This round will close on **DATE & TIME**. If I can assist you or answer questions please do not hesitate to contact me at victor.salazar@ag.tamu.edu or [860-307-1387](tel:860-307-1387).

Thank you again, your knowledge and expertise are greatly appreciated!
Victor K. Salazar

Reminder

Good Morning “Participant”

I just wanted to reach out to you about the study that I sent on “date”. I value your response and believe your expertise will make a strong contribution to the study. Your skills and background are very unique, and without them, my thesis study will not be as strong. I hope to close the first round of the study Sunday evening. **Please refer to the link in the first email to complete the study.**

As we discussed during our conversation on “date”, the results of this study have the potential to influence agricultural policy for years to come. Therefore, your participation will have an impact on useful agricultural policy and will benefit future generations.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.
I appreciate your time!

Victor K. Salazar

Thank you

Mr. -----

I just wanted to take a minute to say thank you for your contributions to the “number” round of the study. Your answers have helped to deepen the understanding of agricultural policy communication.

I anticipate sending the next round “date”. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your continued support, I truly value your input!
Victor