

Web-Based Education for Kansas Agribusiness via *AgManager.info*

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April 17-18, 2007

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A screenshot of the AgManager.info website displayed in a Windows Internet Explorer browser window. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'http://www.agmanager.info/'. The website has a purple header with the 'AG MANAGER.INFO' logo and navigation links like 'About', 'Contributors', 'Useful links', 'Site map', 'Feedback', and 'Search'. A left sidebar contains a menu with categories such as 'Agribusiness', 'Crops', 'Energy', 'Farm Management', 'Human Resources', 'Income Tax & Law', 'Livestock & Meat', 'Policy', 'Ag Econ News', 'Contributors', 'Programs', 'Sponsors', and 'Upcoming Events'. The main content area features a central graphic with the website URL 'www.agmanager.info' and several promotional boxes for events like 'Keeping the Family Farming' and 'Risk and Profit Conference August 16-17, 2007'. A 'Site Updates' section on the right lists recent articles and reports with their dates and authors. At the bottom of the page, there is a contact information line for the Department of Agricultural Economics and a footer with the Internet Explorer logo and a 100% zoom level.

www.AgManager.info

Introduction

- Rapid growth in using the Internet for extension education in the last 10 years
 - Managers' need for information
 - Time and budget constraints
 - Costs of holding traditional meetings
 - Growth in broadband access in rural areas
- But, challenges exist
 - Access issues
 - High volume of information available
 - Evolving technology

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Development of *AgManager.info*

- Web delivery in Ag Econ at K-State began in the late 1990's.
- Individual faculty sites
- Organized topically
 - Risk management
 - Crop production and farm management
 - Livestock marketing and management
- Need for comprehensive, integrated approach (better for users, improves efficiency, creates a "brand")

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Development of *AgManager.info*

- 2001-2002 – *AgManager.info* developed and launched as a single, comprehensive site.
 - Used only limited department resources
 - Users of previous faculty sites were re-directed to *AgManager.info*
 - From initial focus on risk management, crops, and livestock marketing, soon expanded to also include, among others:
 - Grain basis tool/maps
 - Decision tools and updates
 - Publication of upcoming events/conferences

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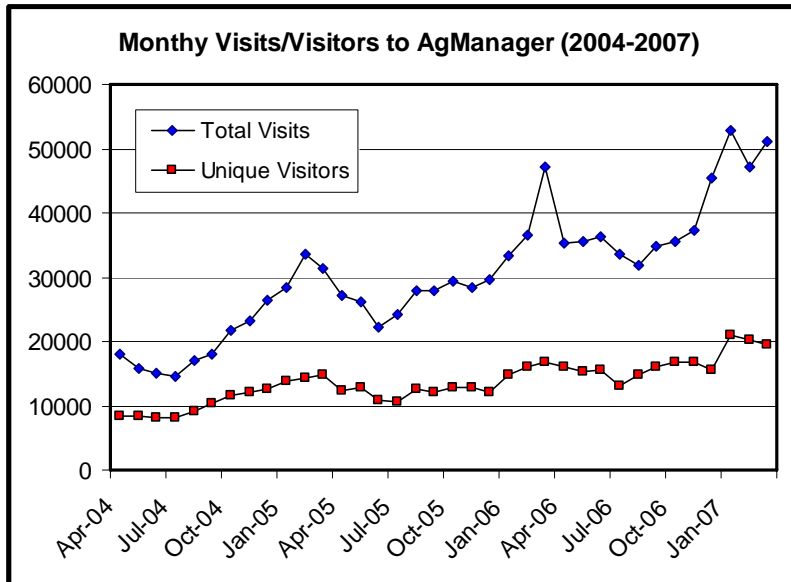
Development of *AgManager.info*

- Current usage of *AgManager.info*
 - 50,000 visits from 20,000 unique visitors per month (more than double since 2004)
 - Most popular sections:
 - Livestock
 - Crops
 - Farm management
 - Upcoming events
 - Agribusiness
 - Policy

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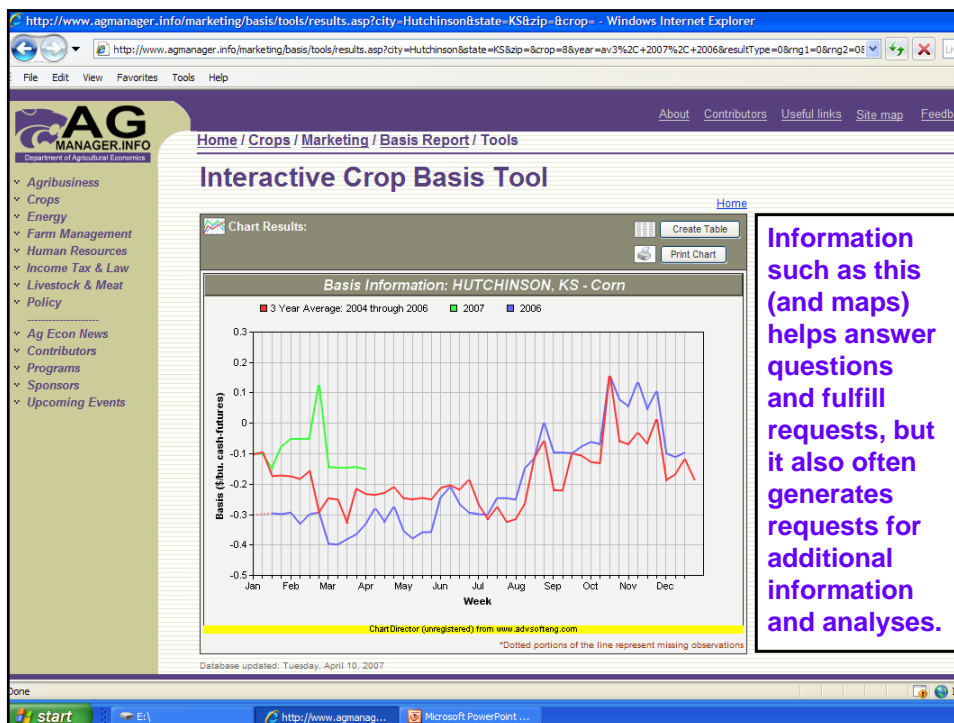
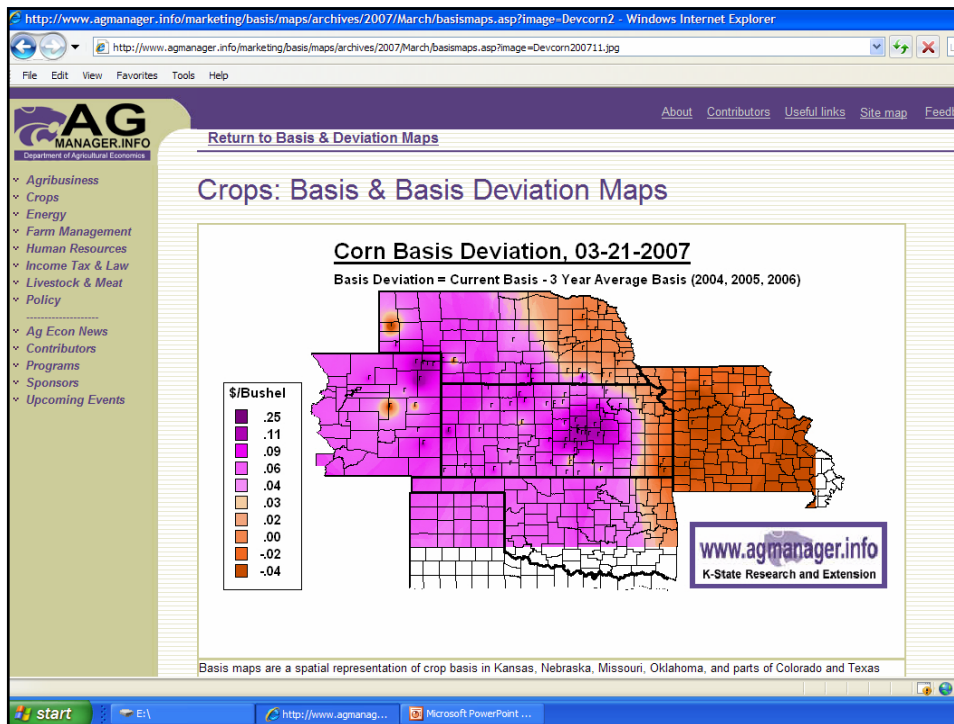
Future Development of *AgManager.info*

- Notification of changes and updates using RSS feeds (currently uses listserv to send emails)
- Development of the grain basis tool and maps to allow easier use and to expand the scope.
- Further develop content using comparative advantage in the crop and livestock risk management areas ["Content is king" (Schmitz, 2005)]

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Current Trends

- Rapid information obsolescence – requires frequent updates/revisions.
- Mobile users: laptop computers, PDA's and cell phones – want real-time information.
- Greater interactivity: blogs, wikis, “YouTube” – requires moderator and other resources.

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Current Trends

- Visual media – video, graphics, GIS. Still rather limited extension use, but increasing and many options.
- Complex, web-based decision tools – instead of spreadsheets. Allows easier access by users unfamiliar with spreadsheets and faster for slow connections.

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Challenges and Opportunities

- Extension education via the internet is NOT cost-free → choices, regarding:
 - Appearance
 - Frequency of updates/revision
 - Need for new items such as a blog
- Personnel issues: technology skills
 - Rapid changes involve high learning
 - Some may lack skills due to lack of interest or incentive, or simply lack of time

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Challenges and Opportunities

- Difficulty in creating/posting relevant materials in an appropriate way due to:
 - Technology gaps
 - Examples: HTML updates that can't be read by some users' email programs, large files that can't be downloaded by user's connection.
 - Knowledge gaps
 - Between faculty and users in how to use a program or software that is available to the user. Example: RSS feeds.
 - Literacy gaps:
 - Some users have difficulty understanding instructions or what to do.

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Challenges and Opportunities

- Dealing with technology/knowledge gaps
 - Make necessary technology available- downloads for necessary software (Adobe Reader, RealPlayer, etc).
 - Computer education: how to download necessary software, basic navigational/search techniques, using tools on the site.

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Challenges and Opportunities

- Explosion of information available
 - More choices for users
 - Many users have set pattern of use (51% visit less than 6 sites regularly and 90% go online to visit a specific destination (Reade, 2006).
 - Extension offerings have historically been passive in nature.
 - Need for self-promotion of the website
 - Keep the site as simple as possible with easy menus, site maps, cross-indexing by author and topic.
 - Search function needed

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Challenges and Opportunities

- Ability of users to determine relevancy and reliability
 - Trusted source: AgManager from K-State (but doesn't use K-State url)
 - May need to build legitimacy for website through traditional meetings
- “Life-long learning” market 25 and older:
 - Providing appropriate content to connected managers/entrepreneurs.
 - Timely, relevant topics
 - Complemented by departmental conferences and programs (MAST, Risk and Profit).

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Challenges and Opportunities

- Gaining greater acceptance by extension stakeholders for web delivery
 - County agents
 - Funding agencies such as RMA
 - Web use sometimes more difficult to measure than “butt-in-the seats” of traditional meetings.
- Need for collaboration
 - Comparative advantages should be exploited.
 - Avoid duplication (sometimes occurs on departmental level even)
 - Often avoided due to competition for funding and recognition.

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Challenges and Opportunities

- Funding to enhance internet extension education
 - Encourage collaboration
 - Coordination between funding agencies to avoid duplication
 - Speeding adoption of broadband access in rural areas (Riley Co: 1999=dial-up; 2007 = broadband).
- Archiving of extension materials
 - Necessary, but not usually done
 - Different than archiving print media.

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Summary

- AgManager.info for extension education has grown rapidly.
- Trends: rapid information obsolescence, mobile users, increased interactivity, visual, complex web-based tools.
- Challenges: cost, gaps between provider and users, large amounts of available information, lack of acceptance by some, lack of collaboration, archiving past materials.

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The Final Word

- The Internet will play a major role in the future of extension education
- Content is very important.
- So is the need to reduce the gaps between providers and users.
- Getting the right people is crucial.
- Working together is increasingly important.



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