

# Pack 109, Item 14

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**BH2 – How to effectively manage your radio station’s farmer program**

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Note: Most of Farm Radio International’s Broadcaster how-to guides are written to help program producers and hosts improve their skills and serve their farmer-listeners better*. This guide is intended for the person who manages the team that produces the station’s farmer program.* It would also be useful, however, for producer-hosts to read this document, so that they can understand the benefits of having an active and supportive manager.

**Introduction**

Your radio station probably covers a wide rural area inhabited by small-scale farmers. One of the most important services you can provide is a regular (daily or weekly) program that serves the needs of these farmers. If you produce an attractive and useful program, an increasing number of farmers will be drawn to the program and become loyal listeners.

Managing your station’s farmer program is an important task. Farmers rely on the information it provides, and the opportunity it gives them to discuss important issues on air. For the program to be strong and constantly improve, the program team needs the support of a manager who provides leadership, oversees planning, allocates resources, supervises staff, and evaluates results.

***How can effective management help me produce better programs?***

* It provides my team with a framework that has clear goals and standards, and defines a clear role for each member of the team.
* It encourages and enables each member of the team to do his or her best work.

***How can effective management help me serve my listeners better?***

* It provides me and my team with the tools we need to consistently produce effective, informative, respectful, and relevant programs.

**Key activities in managing a farmer program.**

1) Create a program purpose statement.

2) Select, supervise, and train staff

3) Learn your audience’s needs.

4) Find organizations that can contribute content.

5) Support staff with standards and editorial cooperation.

6) Establish the program’s regular format.

7) Choose an appropriate time to broadcast.

8) Provide appropriate resources.

9) Create annual goals.

10) Monitor the program regularly and provide feedback.

11) Evaluate the program annually and set new annual goals.

**1) Create a program purpose statement**

Every radio program should have a purpose statement. The purpose statement should reflect the role the program plays for the intended audience. Here is an example of a purpose statement for a farmer program:

***Farmers Today*** *is Action 105 FM’s weekly program for small-scale farmers, both women and men, in the Ajuba Region. The program:*

*- Shares the information farmers need, when they need it.*

*- Gives farmers an opportunity to discuss important matters.*

*- Supports farmers to make changes that will improve their farming.*

*The program meets these goals in an entertaining way that draws an increasing number of farmer-listeners.*

**2) Select, supervise, and train staff**

It is best for a farmer program to have one dedicated host, though some radio stations rotate different broadcasters through this role. But rotating hosts does not serve listeners well. Radio listeners develop strong bonds with program hosts, which helps build station loyalty. If you rotate different people through that key on-air position, you can’t build that bond. Also, long-time hosts become increasingly familiar with a range of farming topics, and thus are better equipped to ask questions that draw more detailed and relevant information from the people they interview.

In addition to the producer-host, a farmer program may have the following staff:

- A production assistant (a less experienced broadcaster who does much of the preparation);

- An agricultural extension agent (a government agent who is assigned to contribute to the program); and

- A news reporter (one of the station’s news staff who covers news about farming and rural life).

Rural radio stations rarely have sufficient funds to compensate their broadcasters well; in many stations, all staff are volunteers. Regardless of financial compensation, all employees need to be supervised, supported, and appreciated in order to stay motivated and create good programs.

The main supports a manager can provide to staff are:

- Proper tools and time (*see # 8 and #6 below*).

- Positive and constructive feedback about what is going well and what needs improvement.

- Access to skills training to become an even better broadcaster *(There are some online courses, and you can find the complete series of FRI Broadcaster how-to guides at:* [*http://bit.ly/FRR-Packs*](http://bit.ly/FRR-Packs)*.)*

- Gender fairness: Encourage a positive working environment free of gender stereotypes that supports equal opportunities for men and women through training, partnerships with organizations that work on gender issues, and human resources policies.

Appreciation can come in the form of:

- Regular feedback;

- A modest reception and celebration at the station to acknowledge good work and/or long service;

- An opportunity to travel for skills training;

- An announcement on air of good work and/or long service.

**3. Learn your audience’s needs**

As the manager of the team that creates the farmer program, you should regularly reach out to your listeners to assess their needs, and then provide programming that meets those needs. Farming is tough work, and farm work is changing as the climate changes. Keep in mind that different farmers in your audience have different needs. For example, some will only need information about producing for domestic consumption, while others will be more interested in information on a range of products for both domestic and export markets.

Visit farming villages and meet with groups of farmers to find out what is important to them. You might want to have separate meetings with men and women. In a joint meeting, the men might dominate discussion and you won’t find out what is important to women farmers—half of your listening audience!

For questions to ask farmers, please see [How to Learn About your Audience and What Audience Members Need from your Program](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/package-95-researching-and-producing-farmer-focused-programs/how-to-learn-about-your-audience-and-what-audience-members-need-from-your-program/).

Here are some additional questions you might want to ask:

- Can your family live comfortably from your harvests and your farm sales? If not, what is the situation?

- In your opinion, what is changing about the way people farm today?

- What are the main challenges farmers face today? (Some of the main challenges we hear about are: depleted soils, crops damaged in storage, severe weather and unpredictable weather patterns, pests, and poor access to markets.)

- What do you think is needed to overcome those challenges?

Work with the farmer program team to make a list of the most important issues that farmers face, and then monitor your programs to ensure that those issues are covered during the year.

**4) Find organizations that can contribute content**

Some radio stations have few employees and little money, but they do have good links with a range of organizations. By taking advantage of these links, a station and a farmer program can reach out to a wide range of skilled people who can help farmers improve their practices, feed their families better, and have more success at the market.

You and your board of directors should actively recruit contacts from government departments, universities and colleges, international NGOs, farmers’ organizations, rural women’s organizations, national NGOs, etc. Then, link the farmer program producer with these contacts and find out how each can contribute to the farmer program.

**5) Support staff with standards and editorial cooperation**

The first kind of support you should provide is a clear statement about the purpose of the farmers’ program. (*See #1 above*.) This will provide overall direction to program staff about their most important tasks.

Here are other standards you should consider providing:

**a) Station standards**

For example:

* Gender policy
* Field work policies, for example, travel to the field and field interviews
* Standards around hate speech and other types of unacceptable on-air behaviour
* Health and safety standards in the station
* Standards related to care and operation of equipment

**b) Farmer program standards**

FRI has developed “VOICE standards for farmer programs,” which are available [***here***](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/101-getting-and-using-audience-feedback-and-evaluating-radio-programs/use-voice-standards-to-improve-your-farmer-program/)***.***

In brief, the standards are:

**V** We *value* farmers.

**O** We give farmers an *opportunity* to speak and be heard.

**I** We provide farmers with accurate *information* that they need, when they need it.

**C** We broadcast when it is *convenient* for women and men farmers to listen.

**E** Our programs are *entertaining* and memorable.

**c) Journalistic standards**

FRI has developed the [F.A.I.R. journalism standards for farmer programs](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/104-post-harvest-cow-pea/f-r-journalism-standards-farmer-programs/). The standards cover **F**airness, **A**ccuracy, **I**ntegrity, and **R**espect.

**d) Regular team meetings**

Hold a weekly meeting with the heads of all programs and the News Department to discuss what is being covered and what is coming up. Make sure the producer-host of the farmer program participates in these meetings. The farmer program producer-host can provide the News Department with ideas for rural news stories. The women’s program producer can provide story ideas for the farmer program. And the farmer program producer-host can ask the news editor to gather field interviews when a news reporter visits a specific community.

**6) Establish the program’s regular format**

Listeners tune in to a program *regularly* because the program *regularly* gives them what they want. Maintaining a consistent format will help guarantee that the program consistently serves the listeners’ needs. The comfort that regular listeners feel with a familiar format—for example, their sense of pleasant anticipation when they hear the familiar sig tune and hear the host give their customary greeting—is a big part of gaining and maintaining listeners.

Most regular farmers’ programs follow a “magazine” format. This format has recurring segments that cover the different kinds of material that farmers find useful and interesting. For example, a magazine program could include a segment that gives weather information or market prices for staple crops. Another regular segment could introduce a different community listening group each episode and highlight how they have adapted a practice so that it is more effective for them. A magazine format can include anything—but the key is consistency. Managers can help the program’s producer-host to develop a regular, consistent overall format.

Once you have a consistent program format, don’t be afraid to make occasional exceptions! For example, if your listeners’ crops are facing a sudden pest infestation, you might want to run one or more episodes that feature only phone-ins. Concerned farmers can phone in and share their concerns with an expert (expert farmer or academic or government extension agent) who can provide advice. (*See the FRI Guide* [*Radio Formats*](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/package-95-researching-and-producing-farmer-focused-programs/radio-formats/)*.)*

**7) Choose an appropriate time to broadcast**

There is no value in creating a farmers’ program if you broadcast it when farmers are too busy to listen! Ask about good listening times when you meet with farmers. Your farmer program needs to be broadcast at a time when *both women farmers and men farmers can listen*.

You might find that women farmers and men farmers prefer to listen to your farmer program at different times. One of the best ways to make sure that as many listeners as possible hear the program is to broadcast it a first time and then broadcast a repeat of the same program at another time during the week. You might pick up 50% more listeners that way. If the first broadcast is at a time more convenient to women farmers, make sure the repeat broadcast airs at a time more convenient to men farmers.

You can build your audience by running program promos throughout the week in different time slots. These are usually 30 or 60 seconds long. This is a good and inexpensive way to attract different listeners to your farmer program. *(See the FRI Guide* [*How to create ear-catching promos, intros, and extros*](http://www.farmradio.org/radio-resource-packs/package-98-groundnuts-the-post-harvest-value-chain/broadcaster-how-to-guide-how-to-create-ear-catching-promos-intros-and-extros/)*. An audio version of* How to create promos *is available in English* [here](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/106-farm-radio-resource-pack/audio-bh2-promos/)*, in Swahili* [*here*](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/sw/radio-resource-packs/kifurushi-namba-106/abh2-promos-kiswahili/)*, and in Amharic* [*here*](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/am/radio-resource-packs/106-farm-radio-resource-pack/audio-bh2-promos/)*.)*

**8) Provide appropriate resources**

No radio station has all the resources it needs to do all the kinds of programming it wants to do. However, if you want to attract and build your audience, you need to provide your producer-hosts with at least basic resources, and some specialized resources for specialized programs.

Here are examples of basic resources:

- Studio facilities for interviews and panel discussions.

- A computer for editing interviews, logging programs, and assembling whole episodes.

- Internet access for program research and other tasks.

Here are some specialized resources that will improve a farmer program:

- Increased mobile phone airtime to interview farmers who live far from the studio.

- Transportation and travel funds so the producer-host or another broadcaster (perhaps a reporter) can do interviews with farmers in their villages and fields.

- A “women only” mobile line for phone-in programs, to ensure that at least 50% of aired calls are from women listeners.

Here are some “optional” resources that will improve the farmer program—and perhaps other programs.

- Phone polling software, for example, an interactive voice system (IVR), to run listener polls on important topics. (An IVR system is a technology that allows a computer to interact with people via the keypad on their mobile phones. When a listener calls a designated number, they hear a recording that asks them questions and offers them a list of responses that they can choose by punching in the appropriate number on their keypad.)

- Program delay software that blocks offensive comments before they can get to air.

There are many sources of revenue that can help you build the resources you need for an effective farmer program. Here are some of them:

- Spot ads

- Government messages

- Government grants for agricultural or development programming

- Grants from farmer co-ops and local government

- Funds from your diaspora (local people who now live in other countries)

*For more information on generating revenue for your farmer program, see FRI’s guide* [*How to generate revenue to support a regular farmer program*](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/108-farm-radio-resource-pack/bh2-generate-revenue-support-regular-farmer-program/)

**9) Create annual goals**

Your farmer program has a purpose statement, you have learned what is important to your farmer-listeners, and the program has standards to follow. In addition, it is important for the program—and its staff—to have goals to attain during the following year. Here are some possibilities:

- Increase the number of visits to villages from 10 to 20.

- Increase women’s share of the phone-in calls that get to air to 50%.

- Tackle the serious problem of post-harvest wastage of crops.

- Find an extension agent who speaks effectively on air and is willing to regularly appear on the program.

For goals to be helpful, they should be “SMART.” Here is how you could make the first goal mentioned above SMART:

Specific: The goal refers specifically to physical visits, not phone calls or texts.

Measurable: Staff can use the program log and the transportation log to show how many village visits actually occurred.

Achievable: The station has the financial and human resources to achieve this goal within the time frame, but it may require more than one person to make these visits.

Relevant: We know that farmers like to hear other farmers’ voices on air, we know that farmer visits are a good way to keep up-to-date on farmers’ concerns, and we know that both of these are relevant to our program purpose.

Time-bound: The increase in visits is to be achieved over the next twelve months.

**10) Monitor the program regularly and provide feedback**

You are undoubtedly a very busy manager, with lots to do beyond supporting your station’s farmer program. However, it is important that you provide feedback on the program throughout the year. This will improve morale and help you to see that the program is “staying its course” and not straying significantly from its purpose and annual goals.

Listen to the program at least once a month, and listen to any special programs. Then have a brief word with the producer-host. You might, for example, explain your observation that the programming appears to be going well, and that you see that the annual goals are being attained.

Of course you might also find, by listening regularly, that something is amiss. Perhaps the program is dealing only with women’s crops and women’s health. Perhaps the producer-host is going on endlessly about one part of the region and ignoring the rest of the listening area. By monitoring the program on a regular basis, you can catch little problems before they become big ones.

**11) Evaluate the program annually and set new annual goals**

At least once a year, sit down with the producer-host and do a full review of the program.

Also, if possible, recruit a respected person who understands your farming audience. Ask them to listen to a few episodes and comment on their value and their relevance, in light of the program’s purpose statement and its annual goals.

Ask the producer-host to comment on how well she or he thinks the program is fulfilling its purpose statement and its annual goals. You can then provide your own comments and those of anyone else who has evaluated the program.

*NOTE: When you provide comments, it is always best to begin by mentioning something that is working well. This will establish a positive atmosphere in which you can also provide comments about things that need to improve.*

End the discussion by reviewing how well the annual goals were achieved, and then work together to establish goals for the coming year. The review can be as simple as this:

Achievement of this year’s goals:

* *Increase the number of visits to villages from 10 to 20*.

PARTLY ACHIEVED.

The number rose from 10 to 15. Lack of transportation made it impossible to go higher.

* *Find an extension agent who can speak on air, regularly, in an interesting way*.

NOT ACHIEVED. The extension department is willing to assign someone, but so far, we have not found a candidate who can talk comfortably on air.

Goals for next year:

* With additional transportation to be shared with the News Department, increase the number of visits to communities to 20.
* Begin a regular new weekly feature that identifies the ways that climate change is impacting local farmers, and provides ideas on what they can do about it.

**Closing words**

Creating radio programs that effectively address the needs of rural people is hard work. Managing those programs can be challenging because creating programs that effectively address the needs of rural people is a complex task. But don’t be discouraged. Broadcasting a successful farmer program can grow your station’s audience and create a very strong sense of satisfaction and purpose for you and your team. By taking your management work seriously, you will help grow your station’s audience, better serve your farmer-listeners, and develop skilled broadcasters.

***Other sources of information***

Wikipedia, undated. *SMART criteria*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria>*-*

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## Acknowledgements

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