

From the editor

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I have been editing *Agriculture and Human Values* for three and a half years. During this time I have noticed a dramatic increase in the number of papers submitted to the journal (there were 40 percent more submissions in 2009 than in 2007). However, the number of pages I can publish annually has not increased, which means that acceptance rates have declined. Currently I am accepting fewer than 20 percent of papers submitted.

Because I receive such a large number of submissions, I need to be selective not only in the papers I accept for publication, but also in the papers I choose to move through the peer review process. Finding and managing effective peer reviewers is a time consuming process for me, more so than any other editorial responsibility I have. To streamline the process, I typically read papers at the time they are submitted to decide whether to assign reviewers or reject them without review. I find myself rejecting a lot of papers without sending them to reviewers because they are often below an acceptable standard for academic work, in my opinion of course.

As an editor I see both good and bad research. Since I am also a publishing academic, this experience of editing an academic journal has been helpful for me, although in the interest of full disclosure I admit that I still have to deal with a rejection letter from time to time. Nevertheless, I think I know what it takes to get published in an international and interdisciplinary journal such as *Agriculture and Human Values*. In order to help the aspiring author of an *Agriculture and Human Values* publication, I will explain the three most common reasons that I reject papers without

review. I admit that these items are simple and perhaps even obvious to most readers, but since I have rejected so many papers without review because of one or more of these issues, I felt it necessary to address them openly.

First, submitted papers need to fit squarely within the aims and scope of the journal. That means they need to engage topics dealing with “agricultural and food related institutions, policies, and practices” as they relate to, impact, or are affected by “human populations, the environment, democratic governance, and social equity” (quoting from the journal’s website at <http://www.springer.com/journal/10460>). A good way to know if a paper fits within the aims and scope is to see what other papers have been published on the topic in *Agriculture and Human Values*. However, just because a submitted paper is on a topic similar to others published in the journal does not ensure that it is a good fit. Sometimes I assess fit by looking at the submitted paper’s reference list. Although citing papers published in *Agriculture and Human Values* is not a prerequisite for publishing in the journal, if the submitted paper refers to no papers in either this or related publications then I almost never send it to reviewers.

Second, submitted papers must contain a review of existing literatures. Indeed, one of the most common reasons I reject papers is because of missing reviews of the literature. A literature review serves two primary purposes. The first purpose is to define the “state of the art”—that is, what is already known about the topic. This is not a trivial matter. *Agriculture and Human Values* is an international, multidisciplinary journal. Readers (the editor included) will not be familiar with all literatures on all topics published here. Therefore, authors need to provide sufficient background to their proposed research problem so that readers can understand how the paper fits into the existing body of scholarship. The second purpose is to expose holes in the

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existing literature. Authors of submitted papers need to justify their contribution by explaining what is not known about the topic that needs to be, and a well-written literature review is a good way of doing this.

Third, submitted papers that present an analysis of data should have an appropriate conceptual framework, which is a logical, mental analysis of the research problem. Its purpose is to guide both the researcher and the reader in how to think about the research problem and what data or evidence is needed to answer it. Developing a conceptual framework is not an easy thing because it can take any number of different forms (mathematical, narrative, diagrammatic, graphical, etc.). Regardless of the form it takes, the conceptual framework is a necessary part of an empirical study because without one it is not logically possible to analyze and interpret data in a meaningful way. Papers that introduce a research problem but then jump right into a discussion of the methods and procedures, including how data were collected and analyzed, leave me wondering why they choose that evidence, those variables and this particular statistical technique rather than other evidence, variables or empirical techniques I could think of. Moreover, how do scholars know they have found an answer to their research question if they do not have a framework outlining what an answer ought to look like?

There are other reasons I reject papers without review, such as poor quality of writing (e.g., excessive spelling and grammatical errors). But these three items seem to be the most prominent reasons. Hopefully prospective authors can learn something here. At a minimum it will give them a better chance of seeing that their research gets a fair review by their peers.

This issue of *Agriculture and Human Values* contains six research articles, three “in the field” reports, and one discussion piece, all of which have passed editorial and review muster. The group of research papers begins with a paper by Moritz, who contrasts mixed-farming systems in which agriculture supports livestock production with agricultural production in which livestock is supportive of crop farming. He argues that, to be effective, development policies must account for these differences. This paper was originally scheduled for the first issue this year (in fact, I mentioned it in my “From the editor” column), but it was inadvertently left out of the issue by the publisher.

Desjardins, MacRae and Schumilas estimate for a specific region in Canada the amount of food needed and how much food the region can produce in order to meet specific dietary requirements. Smith, Butterfass and Richards examine how the interaction of shopping behavior and environmental characteristics of available food stores affect the food purchasing strategies of residents of homeless shelters. Nation shows how the dynamics of West African households, including their specific livelihood strategies, affect women’s participation in irrigated agriculture. Loudon and MacRae consider how Canadian food labeling laws controlling the use of terms such as local, sustainable and natural, affect third party certification programs that seek to inform consumers concerned about food production issues. Centner examines the effectiveness of laws in various US states that attempt to limit the liability businesses may face in providing agritourism-related activities. In the first “in the field” report presented here, Kizos, Dalaka and Petanidou study differences in farmer characteristics and farming strategies that might explain why and how changes have occurred in quality and variety of terrace farming in Greece. Millar and Connell examine strategies and technologies needed to effectively “scale out” and “scale up” local food production processes in a Southeast Asian country. Nelson et al. illustrate how alternatives to third party certification programs for organic agriculture have emerged to support Mexican agriculture and agricultural producers. Finally, Smithers and Joseph discuss how “discourses of authenticity” help inform on the identity of the farmers market.

Our Thanks

This is the last issue that Douglas Constance will serve as book review editor for *Agriculture and Human Values*, an assignment he has held for more than three and a half years. On behalf of the journal’s editorial board, I express my warmest appreciation for his service as editor. Thank you, Doug. I wish you best in your new assignment as a co-editor of the *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*.