

“Anybody’s Dream”: A Decision Case of Marketing Alternative Crops¹

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ABSTRACT

Decision cases have been used in the USA for both classroom and extension education within agriculture and natural resources. Use of cases has sometimes been limited by the extensive amount of time that may be required to assign and analyze conventional, text-based cases. Availability of video decision cases, which are visual and do not necessarily require reading, could foster the use of cases on “short notice” for diverse education audiences. Although “video-enhanced” cases exist, these rely on appreciable amounts of reading and can still be time-consuming to use. *Anybody’s Dream* is an entirely video-formatted decision case that considers an agricultural situation and is suitable for extension, classroom, and experiential education learners. The case presents the story of a group of farmers in central Minnesota as they attempted to diversify their cropping systems by producing buckwheat (*Fagopyrum sagittatum* Gilib). One of the challenges these farmers faced was a need to resolve questions about how to best organize for processing, storing, and marketing their buckwheat crops. The case was developed using a “documentary” format and includes interview segments with representative farmers from the Buckwheat Growers Association. These farmers describe their perspectives on the challenges they faced in producing and marketing an alternative and uncommon crop. This article describes the *Anybody’s Dream* video and considers how it can be used for classroom and extension learning situations. The article further offers perspectives on the process of developing a video case.

DECISION CASES are a “problem-based” approach for enhancing learning in agriculture, food, and natural resource sciences (Simmons et al., 1992, 2000). When teaching with cases within a course, teachers usually follow a consistent protocol (Simmons et al., 2000). They assign a case—presented in a written format—and the students are asked to read the case and analyze it over a period of time varying from several days to weeks. These instructors then facilitate a group discussion of the case during a class session. Finally, the students may be asked to prepare a post-case discussion analysis and possibly a reflective writing about what they learned

¹Persons who would like to use this case for classroom or extension purposes may obtain a copy of the case video and Teaching Note (EP-6741) from the Educational Distribution Center of the Minnesota Extension Service, Univ. of Minnesota, 405 Coffey Hall, St. Paul, MN 55108-6068; phone 612-625-8173.

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from the case. The instructors’ goal is to assist their students to analyze the elements of the case, the decision objectives, and options, and to come to a reasoned decision regarding the dilemma that is presented in the case.

This approach to case teaching presumes that instructors have the opportunity to be with their students repeatedly over a period of several days or weeks. But what options exist for instructors who do not have the opportunity to assign a written case to their students and to provide time for study before discussing the case? This is often the situation faced by extension educators who only have the opportunity to engage their clientele for a period of an hour or so, not days or weeks. Similarly, some classroom instructors may desire to utilize a case on “short notice” or in advance of a field trip or other experiential learning activity. Thus, having the capability to present a decision case to students quickly would be an advantage in many educational situations.

One option for such “short notice” cases would be to use brief, text-based “mini-cases” that can be read quickly. Such cases do exist (e.g., Gamble et al., 1997); however, their brevity and lack of detail may limit their suitability for stimulating in-depth analysis and discussion.

Adult learners often differ in their level of comfort with text-based learning exercises that require extensive reading. Thus, a more visual approach to presenting a case topic, which minimizes text and reading, should prove useful. Such an approach utilizes the principle that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Several “video-enhanced” cases have been produced within the field of business (Harvard Business School, 2002) and at least one such case has been previously developed for agriculture (Taack et al., 1997). However, these are actually paper-based cases that also include supplemental videos that provide additional background information for the case and often incorporate “stock” promotional or commercial video footage that may have little direct relationship to the case dilemma itself. There have been, to our knowledge, no previous decision cases considering agricultural topics that are entirely formatted on video and where text plays only a minor supplemental role.

This paper describes a video decision case involving an agricultural situation that is suitable for “short notice” educational situations. The case considers an important current topic—the diversification of agroecosystems—and presents the story of a group of farmers in central Minnesota as they attempted to diversify their cropping systems by producing buckwheat (*Fagopyrum sagittatum* Gilib). In addition to the agronomic considerations involved in producing this alternative crop, these farmers also faced questions about how to best organize themselves to process, store, and market their buckwheat crop. The paper also considers the process involved in producing a video decision case, particularly in comparison to conventional text-based cases. It highlights the continuing evolution of media technology in relation to future opportunities for producing more visually enriched decision cases.

THE CASE

This video case, formatted as a “documentary,” begins with footage showing a crop of buckwheat and accompanied by brief statements from the farmers who are featured in the case story. Farmers explain how they got interested in growing buckwheat as a crop and describe some of the difficulties they faced, particularly in marketing their crop for a profit.

The principal farmers portrayed in the video, Tom and DeEtta Bilek, lived on a 88-hectare (220-acre) farm near Aldrich, MN. At the time portrayed in the video, they had been farming for about 20 years. During one cropping season about 15 years earlier, Tom had needed to identify an “emergency crop” since it had become too late in the season for him to plant his usual crops of corn (*Zea mays* L.) or oat (*Avena sativa* L.). A neighbor suggested that he grow the crop of buckwheat, which at the time was unfamiliar to him. Since that year, he had continued to produce buckwheat on as many as 12 hectares (30 acres) each cropping season.

Another farmer in the vicinity, Allen Schmitz, is then introduced and tells of having adopted buckwheat for production on some of the fields of his farm with poor soil. He notes that his grandfather had also grown buckwheat and contended that it grew well under weedy and/or poor soil conditions. A third farmer, Phill Arnold, is then introduced in the video. He also had been encouraged to grow buckwheat through a neighbor’s recommendation.

The narrator provides background information about buckwheat, including its agronomic characteristics and uses. The narrator concludes her introduction by saying:

Buckwheat has been around for a long time. It is now gaining popularity as farmers discover the benefits of growing this alternative crop... With first hand experience growing buckwheat, these farmers enjoyed the benefits of this alternative crop—but they also realized that they needed each other to make it profitable.

A Tough Sell

Though buckwheat offered several agronomic advantages for these farmers, such as competitiveness with weeds, a capacity to utilize poor soils, and a means to add needed diversity to their crop rotations, it was not without problems. The video draws on the words of the farmers to outline these concerns. For example, Tom Bilek states:

The big problem throughout the years was always the marketing. It’s been a sort of volatile crop...

To attempt to capture a better price for their buckwheat, Tom and DeEtta began talking to other local farmers about establishing a small association that would link buckwheat producers and provide the opportunity for collective cleaning and marketing of the crop. They hoped that the association would help create more marketing opportunities than any of the farmers could have found individually. According to DeEtta Bilek:

You either had to sell it [buckwheat] to a local feed mill, or if you lined up your own buyer, you didn’t really have enough volume to fill a ‘semi’ [semi-trailer truck]. If you sold to a local feed mill, you got a low price where if you sold directly to a buyer, you got a better price, but you don’t have enough volume to fill the semi. So, those are the rea-

sons we started talking to other people about growing it and selling it collectively.

An “association” was formed and a “board of directors” made up of member farmers was established. The operation of this Buckwheat Growers Association, as it was named, depended entirely on voluntary labor. And it was not without problems, as described by Phill Arnold:

There are a lot of rules on how you do things. You know, our packaging—that sort of thing. Working with people, making sure that we get things delivered, all of those details, that’s a dilemma. How do we pull that off with a volunteer group?

From the beginning, the goals and aspirations for the Buckwheat Growers Association differed among the members. In the video each of the featured farmers is quoted as they explain their expectations and concerns. Association member Paul Friedrich offers an optimistic vision of the crop and the Association’s potential, and contributes the following from which the video derives its title:

I mean it could be anybody’s dream as to what you wanted to do with the stuff—if you wanted to continue on a larger basis or move into all the by-products that are associated with it [buckwheat].

However DeEtta Bilek, who was a particularly active member and handled most of the administrative responsibilities, offers a more tempered view:

We were trying to accomplish too much. We needed to step back and take a look at the elements that make a strong organization. So we had to look at those before we could really put ourselves into researching the [buckwheat] marketing possibilities.

Such divergence of viewpoint led some members of the Buckwheat Growers Association to consider reorganizing as a cooperative. Tom Bilek explains:

All I thought was this is going to be a small organization where we get a group of growers together and we were going to market it [buckwheat]; but down the road as far as I can see in the future is maybe we’ll have to go to a “coop”- type situation because of the liability.

After hearing from the farmers about their diverse aspirations and concerns regarding the Association, the narrator frames the principal decision facing the members, which then becomes the focus of the case for the remainder of the video’s duration. The farmers’ were unified in their goal to make buckwheat a profitable crop but they differed in their perspectives on how best to organize toward that end. The dilemma came down to whether the group’s goals could best be achieved by staying as an informal association or changing to a more structured agricultural cooperative?

Association or Cooperative?

A text-based exhibit with the case explains some of the technical differences between a partnership (the legal name for the Association) and an agricultural cooperative. The farmers are quoted in the video as to their positions on the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of these two forms of organization. For example, Phill Arnold states:

There are legal advantages to being a coop, protection from liability and so forth, the ability to set or fix prices as a group and not be subject to antitrust laws. And the other big advantage is, if you're going to own equipment, or some sort of facilities, if you're a coop it's set up to do that, where if you're an association it's a lot more awkward.

However, some within the Association were reluctant to form an agricultural cooperative. As a rule, they saw this as an initial step toward creating unneeded complexity in the organization and likely relinquishing individual and localized control of the decision making that would affect their production and marketing options. Allen Schmitz comments:

Co-ops seem to have a lot more laws as far as guides, I guess guidelines that you have to follow, as far as paying dividends and things like that. I guess they each have their benefits; you know if it's a really small group it's probably less hassle, you know with just an association as opposed to being a coop. But as things grow you need a little more order, or you know, structure to the organization.

Furthermore, Paul Friedrich states:

With an association you can stay with small numbers and still probably do pretty good not getting into a lot of "after market" things. But, if we become a co-op, then pretty soon we've bumped ourselves into volume. Then you have lots of growers, so then we start moving further away from the community, further out, maybe even out-of-state. Then what happens to the control, because obviously the big grower's going to want to have a say.

Other members of the Association had positive experiences with agricultural cooperatives and associated them with times of prosperity for local communities. In the words of Ray Eiswald:

I can remember when we had our cooperatives, our communities were thriving, and as we've lost our cooperatives, we can generally see that the communities have degraded.

The Decision

As the video concludes, the narrator summarizes the major points presented in the video and rephrases the key elements of the decision faced by the Association members:

Buckwheat has many advantages as an alternative crop for these farmers. They need to decide how they will organize themselves—as an association or a coop. They also need to determine how they will market the buckwheat—locally, nationally or internationally. Finally, they need to consider the impact that their decisions will have on other issues.

Exhibits

There are two text-based exhibits that accompany the video. Exhibit 1 is an "Alternative Field Crops Manual" (Oplinger et al., 1989) that describes history, uses, growth habits, environmental requirements, cultural practices, yield potential and performance results, and economics of production and markets for the crop of buckwheat, as well as listing additional information sources. Some teachers may choose to not use this exhibit depending on their purposes for the case. But if deliberations of the case are to include detailed con-

siderations of production and utilization options for buckwheat, Exhibit 1 can provide good background information for these discussions.

Exhibit 2 is two pages in length and is titled "What is a Cooperative?" It provides background information on various agricultural business organization types: partnerships, limited partnerships, corporations, cooperatives, and "new generation" cooperatives. It also explains the marketing advantages for agricultural cooperatives arising from their antitrust exemptions via the Capper-Volstead legislation. Most teachers who use the case will likely choose to provide Exhibit 2 to students to add depth to discussions of the case.

INTERPRETIVE NOTE

Case Objectives

Through deliberation of this case, students will learn about a wide range of topics bearing on the adoption and marketing of alternative crops. The case provides a backdrop for consideration of principles and considerations faced in deciding how members of a loosely organized growers "association" might proceed to produce and market an alternative crop. Although this case considers the crop of buckwheat for a small group of growers in central Minnesota, the principles should be broadly applicable to many crop situations and localities.

Upon completing this case students should have:

- A better understanding of agronomic and economic challenges faced by farmers who choose to diversify cropping systems by growing uncommon (alternative) crops
- A better appreciation of the range of values, attitudes, and beliefs that affect choices related to diversification of cropping systems
- Gained experience deliberating a "real world" decision and considered aspects of leadership and management associated with beginning a new agricultural business
- Engaged in discussion that leads to information exchange and critical reflection

Use of the Case

This case was developed for use on "short notice" with learners in situations such as extension, university classrooms, and experiential education within the disciplines of agronomy, agricultural business management, agroecology, and leadership studies. The case has been used in a "capstone" course (see below), as well as for extension in-service workshops. It is designed to be used within a class or extension period of 45 to 90 minutes, which includes the 14 minutes necessary to view the video. This case is intended for use with a discussion-based, active-learning process focusing on definition and resolution of the dilemma faced by the Buckwheat Growers Association. The case facilitator guides the discussion, asks clarifying and probing questions, redirects questions among the discussants, and helps facilitate transitions from point to point. The facilitator also validates the discussants' contributions and may record information and key points on a blackboard, flip chart, or overhead projector. A decision case such as this one is not intended to be a backdrop for an instructor-centered lecture, although a facilitator may provide his or her interpretations of the case as part of a "debriefing" *after* the discussion of the case itself by the participants.

The senior author has used *Anybody's Dream* as the basis for discussions about leadership in a Senior Capstone course within the agronomy major. In this context, the students have viewed the video and discussed the case within a single, 90-minute class period. Most of the discussions have considered the role of leadership within the specific situation faced by the Buckwheat Growers Association. In most years, some form of written "reflection" has been required of the students after the case discussion has been concluded. The students have been also provided with additional background readings on leadership before discussing the case to provide a conceptual framework for their comments. Averaged over 4 years of use (1999–2002), a total of 26 students rated the case as "satisfactory" to "good." Some of these university students expressed a desire to have the case presented to them in "paper" form in lieu of video. They expressed that it was difficult to remember specific information while watching the video alone, whereas they felt that a text-based case could be more readily referenced later. Although it is true that a video presentation of a case does not readily lend itself to recall of *specific* data or information, it is seldom that a decision case—either text-based or video—is intended to primarily teach specific knowledge. Decision cases are better suited as a basis for elucidating an understanding of broader concepts and principles. It is our judgment that a video-formatted case is well suited for this purpose.

This case can also be used directly with farmers. However, it should be noted that, when used with farmers or extension educators, the case is not intended only to familiarize them with buckwheat production and marketing. It is *primarily* meant to provide a basis for enhancing understanding of marketing options that can be more broadly applied. Thus, the case can be used even in geographical areas where buckwheat is not, nor is likely to become, an important crop. Before using the case, the facilitator will want to emphasize this point to the learners that the case has a broader purpose than just learning about buckwheat and challenge them to consider how the concepts elucidated from the case might transfer to other crops or situations.

When using a video case, it is assumed that many audiences will not have had prior introduction to the case before discussing it. Since the case is formatted on video, it is well-suited to be introduced quickly to the learners. It is helpful for the instructor to "frame" the video before showing it to the audience and to encourage them to take notes while viewing it, such as asking them to keep track of the principal characters portrayed in the case and their ideas about how to organize for the marketing of buckwheat. The characters in the video who represent the Board of Director decision makers in the case are Tom Bilek, DeEtta Bilek, Phill Arnold, Allen Schmitz, Ray Eiswald, and Paul Friedrich.

Anybody's Dream may precipitate disagreements. Just as the principal decision makers in the case differed in their perspectives on the value and implications of changing from a growers association to a cooperative, so the learners may also bring differing values to the discussion as well. It is important that the discussants be encouraged to maintain a degree of objectivity about the case and to not "choose sides" prematurely. The teacher should strive to have the students view the case dilemma from multiple perspectives.

Students may likely also want to have more information about the case than is provided in the video and associated exhibits. Instructors can handle this situation in several ways. As part of their deliberations of the case, they can have the learners list the "needed" information and discuss how that information might be obtained and used. In classroom situations, the instructor might suspend discussion of the case after generating such a list of needed information and ask the students to retrieve some of it before continuing their discussion of the case at a later class session. However, in most extension situations, and many classroom situations as well, there is not sufficient time to permit retrieval of additional information so the learners are asked to proceed without the benefit of the desired information. The facilitator can remind discussants that in the "real-world," one seldom has all the information and background that one would like to have, yet a decision still often needs to be made.

Once teachers are satisfied that their purposes for using the case have been fulfilled—and usually after the learners have reached a consensus decision and attained a sense of "closure" for the case—teachers should move into a period of "de-briefing" of the case. It is important to realize that there is no single "correct" answer for decision cases such as *Anybody's Dream* and it is possible that a "split decision" may occur.

Discussion Questions and Issues in the Case

Below are some examples of questions that might be used to facilitate a discussion of *Anybody's Dream* after viewing the video.

1. What are the growers' motivations for growing buckwheat? Each of the farmers in the association is seeking to enhance the profitability of their farming operation. Not all of these farmers rely solely on farming for their income; some have off-farm employment or are retired from another job. However, all sense the need to diversify their cropping systems for agronomic and economic reasons. Several in the video refer to purported agronomic advantages of buckwheat. Many of the soils in the Aldrich, MN, area are coarse-textured and lacking in inherent fertility. For some of the farmers, the idea that buckwheat absorbs phosphorus from the soil and then releases it to a subsequent crop is an attractive feature. Some also cited the competitiveness of buckwheat with weeds as favorable. Buckwheat is also distinctive for its short growth cycle, which permits farmers in northern climates to plant the crop later in the growing season and still have it mature before frost.

But for all of the farmers in the association, a key motivation for participating is to gain access to a new "niche" market that may be more lucrative and stable than conventional ones like those for corn, soybean [*Glycine max* (L.) Merr.], and small grains. At the time of this case, there was a high demand for buckwheat hulls as filler for therapeutic pillows, as well as an interest in marketing buckwheat "value-added" products directly to Asia, Europe, and other regions of the USA. One of the growers on the video noted the importance of establishing new industry in rural communities as a stimulus to their economies.

In contrast to some alternative crop situations, the production of buckwheat itself does not pose a particularly difficult challenge to these growers. Management of weeds, diseases, and insects had not yet become a production constraint

for this crop. The material in Exhibit 1 could be used to provide additional background for discussing production aspects and for projecting possible “weak links” in the production of buckwheat in the future. For example it is often observed that biological and ecological problems become more prevalent once the land area of a crop increases and the crop is produced in shorter rotations (i.e., fewer seasons between successive buckwheat crops).

2. What is the dilemma faced by the Buckwheat Grower’s Association? This question is addressed directly by several of the principals in the video. DeEtta Bilek summarizes the dilemma faced individually by growers of small-acreage alternative crops: “. . .if you sold to a local feed mill, you got a low price where if you sold directly to a buyer, you got a better price, but you don’t have enough volume to fill the semi.” However, discussants should also move to a deeper level of the dilemma by recognizing that the farmers do not all see the organizational strategy for collective marketing of buckwheat in the same way. Similarly, one can see a myriad of obstacles facing a small “start-up” organization such as the Buckwheat Grower’s Association in areas such as leadership and administrative support.

3. What issues do you think are important in affecting this dilemma? This question provides the opportunity to explore the various issues bearing on the choice of organizational structure to be followed by the buckwheat growers in the future. There is a rich array of business philosophies and personal values portrayed by the farmers in the video.

Some, such as Phill Arnold, see the cooperative as having a number of clear advantages, particularly from a business and legal/liability perspective. It is important to note that Arnold acquired some of his perspective by attending a workshop on “new wave” cooperatives, an experience shared by none of the other growers within the association. Some, like Paul Friedrich, articulated a more skeptical viewpoint. Friedrich is critical of the longer-term implications of forming a cooperative and notes several limitations such as loss of localized control, dominance by large-acreage growers, and creation of a large “corporate” infrastructure where “decision makers” would be separated from actual production of the commodity. Implicit in this argument is the thought that continuing with a smaller, less structured association would help assure the opportunity to directly participate in its operation. But even those who were skeptical acknowledged that more “structure” was needed if the association was to attain its goals.

Students should be encouraged by the instructor to list and discuss the various “pros and cons” of moving toward a cooperative structure. One of the most compelling arguments for forming a cooperative is the legal protection that it affords to the individual members of the cooperative and its governing officers. Another is the opportunity it provides for collective marketing in accordance with the Capper-Volstead Act and the Cooperative Marketing Act, which provide antitrust exemption for farmer-owned cooperatives. Perhaps the most compelling argument against forming the cooperative is that it could lead to a more diffuse, less producer-focused leadership structure. However, it should be noted that to qualify for the antitrust exemptions in cooperative-specific legislation, a cooperative’s membership must be limited to producers and it must engage only in marketing of products produced by them.

4. Why is the decision about how and where to market buckwheat also a dilemma? There is another critical question faced by the association, whether it chooses to become a cooperative or not. This involves the strategy that should be used to market their buckwheat. In their quest to make buckwheat more profitable and to find more stable markets, they have acknowledged the necessity to move beyond marketing raw buckwheat commodity to “value-added” products. But it is unclear to them how far this should proceed at this point in their organization’s history since creating additional products increases the level of risk and expense for the association. For example, although the market for therapeutic pillows seemed attractive at the time of this case, it proved to be a short-lived consumer “demand.” Had the association chosen to create such value-added product, it and its members would likely have incurred a significant economic loss. This dilemma of how and where to market is a recurring matter for any alternative crops without an established track record.

5. What principles of “leadership” and “management” apply to the dilemma of the Buckwheat Growers Association? One possible application of this case is in courses and situations where principles of management and leadership are considered. This question offers learners an opportunity to distinguish between the concepts of leadership and management, as well as to develop an understanding of how important strong leadership can be when an organization such as the Buckwheat Growers Association is in its “formative” stages. The comments by members of the association provide some basis for considering elements of leadership at both an individual and collective level.

6. What objectives should the association growers have in making a decision about how to proceed? This question asks students to put themselves in the place of the buckwheat growers portrayed in the case. They can collectively define the objectives that they would seek to attain through their decision regarding the future organization.

7. What options do the growers have in resolving their dilemmas? To the extent possible, the learners should brainstorm options they feel the growers should consider in responding to their dilemma. These could include, but are not limited to:

- Retain the current association structure and seek to increase production capacity (e.g., recruit more growers and acreage) that could make their association more attractive to potential buyers and handlers.
- Establish one (or more) cooperative to market their buckwheat seed and/or to produce and market value-added buckwheat products.
- Seek additional counsel and obtain additional information to make a better decision. If the discussants settle on this option, it is important that they be asked to list the specific kinds of additional information that they will need to make a decision.

The instructor may also choose to guide the discussion into consideration of the additional dilemma regarding how to specifically market buckwheat in the future. As noted above, this dilemma applies whether or not the association members choose to become a cooperative.

8. What should the growers do? It is customary to conclude a case discussion by asking the participants to make a decision based on the information and options that have been generated. However, this may not always be necessary, depending on your purposes for the case. Since groups often do not reach a consensus regarding what should be done, a teacher may find it helpful to divide the group into subgroups of three or four individuals each, and then have each subgroup make a decision. Finally, the facilitator might have each discussant decide individually and to share their response to the dilemma and their rationale orally or in writing.

9. What did we learn from this case? After closing the discussion of the case, it is very helpful for the teacher to lead a “debriefing” of the case discussion. Again, it is important that learners who discuss this case understand that the purpose for considering it is not just to resolve the buckwheat growers’ dilemma. It is also to examine how the “lessons learned” might be applied to other situations, some of which may be “closer to home.” The teacher might ask, “What did the students learn from the case experience”?

Video Production Considerations

Before producing a video case, one should consider whether their prospective case topic lends itself to a video format. We believe that the number of video-compatible topics is large, but we also know that not every case topic is equally suited for development as a video. Clearly, a producer must have access to and trust of the case protagonists and that they will permit themselves to be visually portrayed on video rather than merely quoted using text as in a conventional paper-based case. Having existing “stock” footage related to the topic of the case available is an asset, although it is important to note that no such footage existed for *Anybody’s Dream*.

One should also ask how well a case topic would lend itself to a visual portrayal. For a case where most of the interest is internal, such as for a case involving a moral dilemma of the decision maker, there might not be enough of visual interest in the case to favor using a video format. Such cases might be better portrayed using a conventional text-based approach. We felt that there were a number of visually attractive features with the *Anybody’s Dream* topic and dilemma such as the visually interesting and articulate qualities of the decision makers and their community setting, as well as the novelty of the buckwheat crop itself. We used a “documentary” approach for this video. This helped us to convey, in the farmers’ own words, their analysis of the problems and their aspirations for the Buckwheat Growers Association.

Scripting Process

We began by traveling to Aldrich, MN, and interviewing each farmer on audiotape. This one-on-one interview without the video camera team present gave the farmers a chance to talk freely and express their viewpoints. We interviewed six members of the association in one day. We also scouted locations that would be appropriate for videotaping as context footage (“b-roll”) when we returned later with the video camera crew. These locations included the town of Aldrich, some of the landscapes in the vicinity such as fields of growing buckwheat and the farmsteads.

From the transcripts of the audio taped interviews, we composed a *treatment*, which is a short (2–3 page) description of the flow of the video from beginning to end. It included excerpts from the interviews and added other narration for clarity when needed.

We then composed a first draft of a script, including desired b-roll from the location that could help connect the viewer with the farmers’ lives and expand their understanding and visualization of the situation. The producer then “blocked” the script and created a master schedule including filming locations and the time at each location.

With this draft in hand the team of camera operator and sound technician, producer/director, and the project managers went to Aldrich a total of three times and videotaped the interviews with six farmers, as well as the b-roll footage. Although we did not expect the farmers to use exactly the same words they had used in the earlier audio-taped interviews, the farmers were asked to express some of the same ideas they had expressed then. They also had time since the audiotaped interviews to think more deeply about their responses to our questions. The views represented in the videotaped interviews generally exceeded the audiotaped ones in quality. We also did the videotaping in early summer, late summer, and fall to capture the appearance of buckwheat fields as different stages of development.

After collecting the video footage, writing the narrator’s text that would connect the interviews together completed a final script as well as presented other key information. Placement of graphics such as superimposed text over the video (e.g., interviewee’s names and bullet points) was also noted in the final script.

Editing

Videotape editing is often referred to as *post-production*. It involves producing the elements not recorded on location or in a studio and combining them with the video footage itself. Such elements include graphics, video effects, the narration track, and music. Post-production involves at least two rounds of editing—the first is selecting the best “takes” of the video interviews and b-roll and then electronically splicing them together. This is similar to writing a rough draft of a manuscript since it lays out the basic content.

Next comes refining the edits and then one adds all the other elements. During this step it is important for the “content” professionals and those who will be using the video to be involved and to help with the selection of the narration, music, and other creative elements that will make the video suitable for their intended purposes.

Costs

At the time of its production, *Anybody’s Dream* cost \$12,000 to produce. The videotaping costs were approximately \$5900 and post-production (including narration, graphics, music, etc.) cost \$4600. The remaining expenses were for transcribing the audiotapes and script writing.

When *Anybody’s Dream* was produced in 1998, videotaping and editing was costly and involved professional cameras, editors, and graphic systems. Since that time, digital video cameras have become more common and are relatively easy to use. Desktop computers have become faster and have large

file storage capacities that can run required editing software. Currently, videotaping and post-production costs would be about one-third less than in 1998 assuming that digital cameras and desktop computers were used. These technological advances are changing the preferred format through which video is viewed and the videotape itself is gradually being supplanted by CD-ROM and DVD technologies. However, the process and considerations outlined above remain the same.

Areas of Concern Unique to Video

Identity of Case Principals

Because we asked people to tell their personal stories, we needed to build trust with them, as well as provide credit and recognition for their contributions. As explained previously, the two-step process of conducting audio interviews followed by videotaping helped reduce anxieties about having only one chance to speak. It also built rapport between the interviewer and the farmers. All interviewees signed University of Minnesota Extension Service release forms and were identified by their actual name in the video. We also acknowledged their contributions in the credits provided at the end of the video.

In conventional paper-based cases, it is relatively common to change the names of principal characters in a case to protect their confidentiality. Video cases such as *Anybody's Dream*, which portray the principals themselves in the video are not suitable for disguising the identities of the principal characters. It is possible to use "actors" rather than the principals themselves, but this can diminish the impact and credibility of the case with viewers. This quality of visually rich video cases will likely limit their use to case subjects where confidentiality of the principals is not an overriding issue.

Length and Content vs. Audience Attention and Retention

The utility of video is being able to tell a compelling, visual story so that by the end, the audience is engaged, informed, and motivated to discuss the dilemma that was portrayed. As a "rule of thumb," we feel that the attention span of an average viewer is about 15 minutes. The pacing of words and pictures is crucial to keep the viewer interested. *Anybody's Dream* is 14 minutes in length.

Another challenge in producing *Anybody's Dream* was developing the story while avoiding the confusion that might

arise from hearing six different people's points of view. It would have been easier to script the entire case around a narrator, but we felt that for the sake of interest and authenticity it was important to "hear" many of the arguments directly from the farmers themselves. We also had to strive to convey the leadership and organizational dilemmas ahead of the buckwheat production or utilization dilemmas that are alluded to in the video. Developing a clear vision of the case's purposes and objectives, an understanding of the dilemma(s) to be portrayed, and a firm hand in editing the interviews helped to overcome some of these challenges. It also helped that we had exceptionally cooperative farmers to interview and interesting location footage from which to draw. It also helped that this was a *real* story with important implications for the principals in the case, which greatly enhances the likelihood that viewers will understand and relate to their situation.

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