# 2024-2025
# PROGRESS REPORT

Agricultural Communications Documentation Center

Funk ACES Library, University of Illinois

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

As a special resource and service of the Funk ACES Library, the Agricultural Communications Documentation Center (ACDC) is an increasingly robust, and recognized asset. It contributes uniquely within the four-part "Framework for Strategic Action" of the University Library.

· It capitalizes on the University Library's national and international leadership by expanding access to unique collections and resources, and by leveraging international engagements to develop unique collections, services, and partnerships.

· It maximizes the use and impact of library services and collections through application of emerging technologies, new service models, and changes in scholarly communications.

· It enhances user success in information retrieval and use, including a variety of outreach, engagement, and marketing strategies.

· It strengthens the campus infrastructure to support scholarship and innovation through resources and services for the full life cycle of scholarly communications.

## Overview

During this reporting period (July 2024 to June 2025), the ACDC abided by standard fiscal year reporting over the past twelve months which brought changes in staffing, operations, and outreach activities. The Center continued work on existing projects, started new projects, and sought out opportunities for collaboration, outreach, and engagement. In addition, the staff members continued to provide excellent service and commitment to ACDC users and the wider community.

## Administrative

### Staffing and Operations

Assistant Professor Janis Shearer served as head of ACDC during this administrative period, as part of her faculty services within Funk ACES Library. Beyond email contact, Janis Shearer and Associate Jim Evans used phone conferences to share updates and discuss plans for administrative staffing and operations during this period. Among the topics and actions involved in staffing and operations:

- Identify Associate Contributors, people who contribute their services to various aspects of the ACDC mission.

- Determine potentials and procedures for forming an internal (U of I) and/or external advisory council/board for ACDC
- Strengthening the website and Bibleaves database search optimization
- The ACDC role of Associate Evans, reflecting his extensive experience and evolving capacity

In September 2024, Yanling Liu, a 2nd year graduate student in Illinois' Information Sciences Program, joined the Center to serve in a Graduate Hourly (GH) position, working on an hourly basis for the 2024-2025 academic year.

Also in September 2024, Izzy Jebe, a graduate student in Illinois' Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications, joined the Center in a Student Assistant (SA) position, working on an hourly basis for the 2024-2025 academic year.

Precious Olalere, a Ph.D. student in Illinois' Information Science Program, rejoined the Center in an Extra Help position in June 2025.

Associate Contributors continued to play an active role in the ongoing success of the Center. They identified relevant literature from throughout the world, assisted in project development, offered counsel, and provided contacts. Associates during this period included, Jim Evans, emeritus professor of agricultural communications, University of Illinois; Liz Harfull, associate for the Asia/Pacific Region, based in South Australia; Paul Hixson, emeritus chief information officer, University of Illinois; and Map Library Senior Library Specialist Erik Chapman, University of Illlinois.

Graduate student Gross completed the finding aids and metadata spreadsheet for Box 9 and 10 of The Morris Collection. Box 10 contained a video home system (VHS) tape that GH Gross and SA Jebe viewed with assistance from Illinois' Media Preservation. Doctoral student Olalere reviewed The Morris Collection metadata spreadsheet for Box 9 and 10 and coordinated with Library Information Technology's Infrastructure Management and Support (Library IT) for all Morris materials from box 1-10 to be uploaded to Bibleaves in June.

Graduate student Liu worked on processing materials from Illinois Extension's Assistant Dean Anne Silvis into the Bibleaves database.

Overall, The Morris Collection continued to be the primary focus during the academic year, while ACDC services continued both virtually and physically through agricultural communications (AGCM) student presence in the center and other patrons.

## System Development

As ACDC listserv administrator, Associate Evans periodically reviewed and revised the email address list for people who receive issues of ACDC News.

Efforts are designed to maintain a bounce rate of less than 1 percent. Head Shearer and Associate Evans discussed the possible need to review adequacy and effectiveness of the current Bibleaves database management system.

Graduate student Liu checked and rectified accessibility issues of the ACDC's LibGuide and web pages such as switching the LibGuide to side navigation, updating staff contact page, deleting 16 unnecessary spaces in hyperlinks, updating 1 broken link, updating 4 search instructions (How to search by author, How to search by subject term, How to search by subject, and Ways to narrow your search), rectifying 5 strikethroughs, adding 8 names to unnamed projects, replacing 13 URLs with hyperlinks, and replacing 10 "click here"/ "available here" / "see below" with meaningful and accessible link names.

Graduate student Gross conducted periodic updates of the manual and updated the running log of specific projects within the Center, including completed and future projects.

The Center staff worked closely with Library IT to document the essential requirements for the bulk upload of The Morris Collection to Bibleaves. In June, doctoral student Olalere used the spreadsheet template created by IT for The Morris Collection bulk upload.

Head Shearer consistently maintained communication with the Library IT to keep updating the Bibleaves system anytime we ran into a system issue. She also held a meeting with IT on how the Bibleaves system used by the ACDC can be updated or migrated to a new system as it is currently running on an outdated version of software.

Although the ACDC staff continued to document needs and request IT improvements that will provide detailed metrics involving information needs and requests, search patterns, and other online activities of those who visit the ACDC collection and website, online metrics limitations persisted during this period. To improve the assessment of the center's activities and services, we continued to use LibInsight to record reference interactions.

During November 2024, Library IT began providing the Center with a monthly report detailing the subject terms patrons used. In preparation for this report, Doctoral student Olalere cleaned and analyzed the subject terms reports to determine the frequently searched terms by users of Bibleaves. This analysis offers insights into what topics users are most interested in.

This word cloud represents the top 50 searched subject terms used by users interacting with the Bibleaves database. Larger words reflect more frequent searches. This visualization helps us understand user behavior and would help guide our future content development and resource planning.

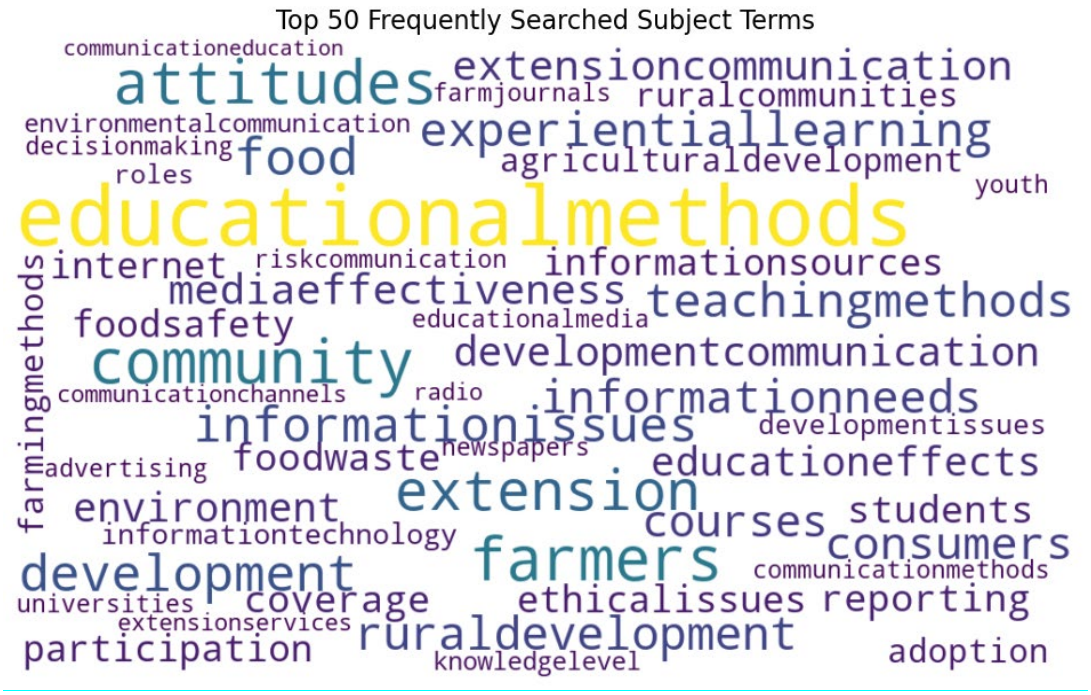



Fig 1: Word cloud showing the top 50 most frequently searched subject terms by users of Bibleaves

The bar chart below indicates the frequency count of the top 25 most frequently searched subject terms in the Bibleaves database. As shown in the bar chart, "educational methods," "farmers," and "community" are the top three searches, indicating strong interest in teaching strategies, rural stakeholders, and outreach efforts. Moving forward, this data will provide us with useful insight into our user needs and will help guide ACDC Bibleaves document collection, collaboration, and future resource planning.

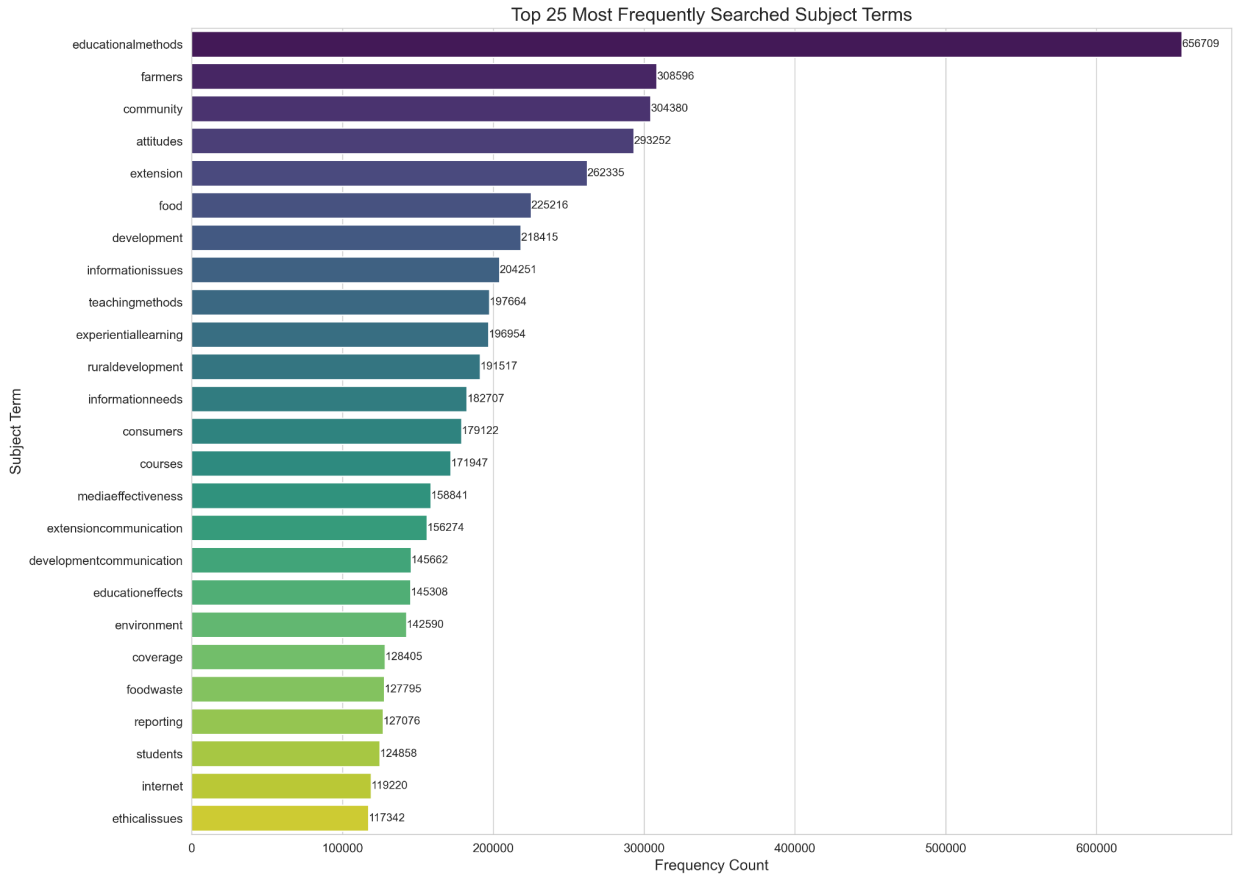



Fig 2: Bar chart showing the frequency count of the top 25 most frequently searched subject terms by users of Bibleaves

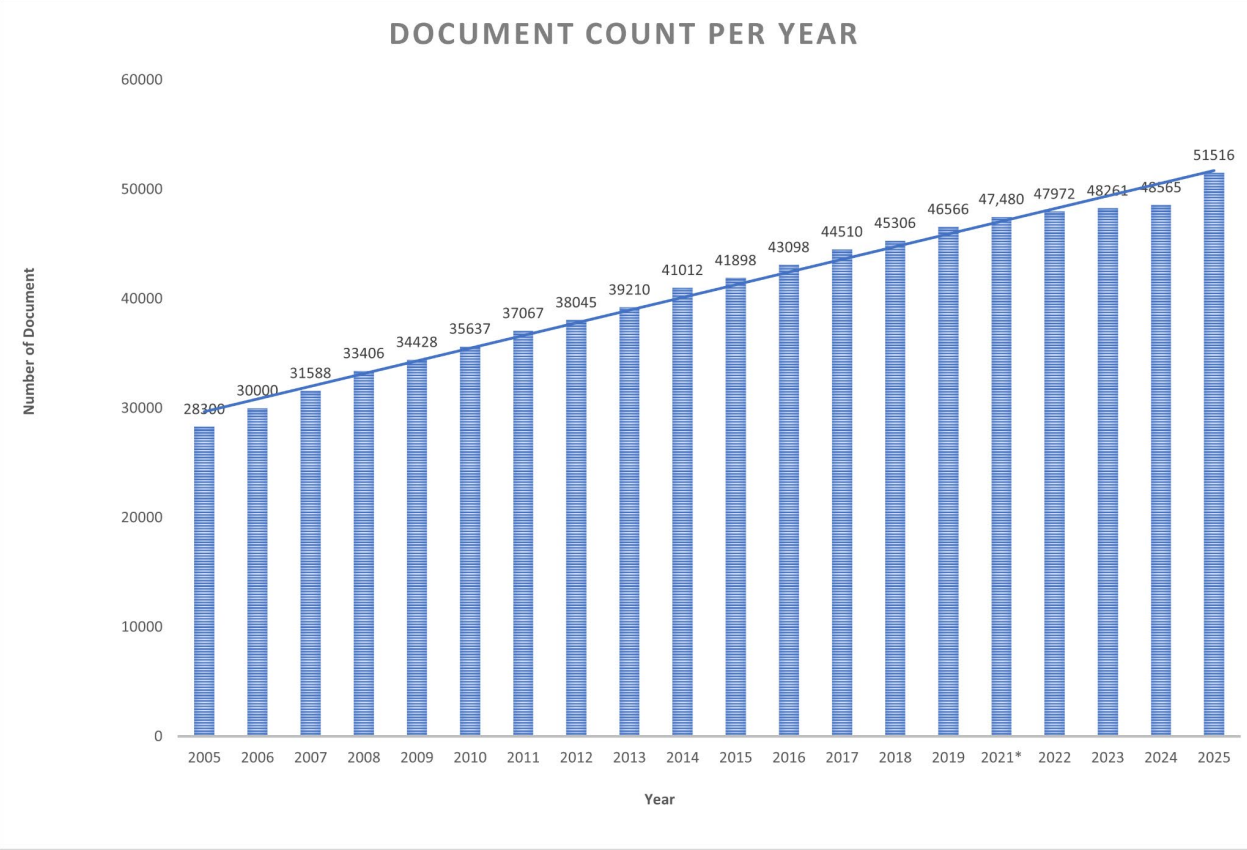
Some of the key subject terms include:

- Educational methods, teaching methods, and experiential learning were commonly searched, showing strong interest in instructional strategies.
- Searches related to community, extension, and farmers highlight ongoing engagement with rural development and outreach efforts.
- Topics like food safety, food waste, and the environment suggest a growing focus on sustainability and public health.
- Users also searched for communication channels such as Internet, radio, and media, showing interest in both digital and traditional tools.
- Frequent searches for information needs and sources emphasize a demand for accessible and reliable agricultural information.

## Document Collection

### Growth of the ACDC Collections:

The ACDC collection consisted of 51,516 documents at the end of June 2025, including 2,394 documents added to the Bibleaves database in the last year. This includes documents housed in the ACDC's collection, The Morris Collection, as well as citations of materials held at other libraries on campus. Graduate student Liu focused on adding Eastern world journals and authors to Bibleaves database, aiming to diversify the ACDC collection. These multiple efforts allowed the Center to exceed its goal of publishing 600 documents during this reporting period.




* Represents the 18-month period between January 2020 – June 2021

### Top document formats:

Of the 2300+ documents that were added to the Bibleaves database during this period, the ACDC collected a variety of formats. Most of the collection document types fell under online article, journal article, or other. Some of the ACDC's top sources from this period include The Morris collection, The Packer, Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education, Journal of Agricultural Extension, Journal of Applied Communications, and Drovers Magazine. The bulk of newly published works for this period were physical works.

| Entry Type | Total |
|---|---|
| Blog | 1 |
| Booklets | 63 |
| Book Chapter | 36 |
| Commentary | 3 |
| Conference Paper | 7 |
| Correspondence | 6 |
| Guide | 11 |
| Handbook | 9 |
| Infographic | 1 |
| Journal Article | 282 |
| Magazine Article | 34 |
| News Article | 6 |
| Newsletter | 24 |
| Online Article | 268 |
| Press Release | 2 |
| Promotional Video | 1 |
| PowerPoint | 1 |
| Reports | 38 |
| Research Report | 1 |
| Survey Report | 1 |

## Contributed Collections

Staff members continued to identify appropriate documents for the ACDC collection, using online search protocols, and preparing citations for deposit and publication in the Bibleaves system.

Staff members reviewed and considered offers from several professional communicators and leaders and retired or retiring professional communicators.

Associate Evans continued to search for agriculture communication materials to add to Bibleaves while the processing of the Robert and Susanne Morris collection into the ACDC database was completed in June 2025.

Upon the retirement of Anne Silvis, Illinois Extension's Assistant Dean and Program Leader of Community and Economic Development, the Center received a contribution of materials from Silvis' personal collection.

## Opportunities for collaboration

Head Shearer conferred with a selection of ACES faculty members about potential for ACDC to engage and serve them in their programming interests. Examples include faculty members in

the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) Program of the College of ACES and the statewide Illinois Extension Service.

Staff members also discussed potential opportunities for such collaborations during their monthly staff meetings. With the announcement of the James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications, staff began to discuss how we might collaborate and support the new organization as it develops.

Head Shearer and Associate Evans continued to discuss opportunities to connect the ACDC more closely with other University of Illinois administrative units such as the University Archives, Illinois Extension, and the Agricultural Communications program in the Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications (ALEC) academic unit of ACES College. They also discussed opportunities for ACDC to cooperate with non-University organizations such as Illinois Agri-Women.

## Serving Users

### ACDC Newsletters

This open-access online newsletter serves an international audience of more than 1,000 educators, researchers, professional agricultural journalists and communicators, students, and others located in 21 countries. Eleven issues were prepared and distributed during the 2024-2025 program year. Contents focused on research, news and points of view involving communications related to climate and environment, food systems and consumer behavior, misinformation and communication, rural and local journalism, ethics and governance, and other aspects of agriculture. Formats ranged broadly across journal articles, books, reports, commentaries, social media, visuals, and face-to-face interactions. Here are some sample topics addressed during the program year in ACDC News:

- On climate change and the effects of U.S. animal agriculture
- When is most food wasted during the year?
- Significant misinformation about GMOs in mainstream and online news media
- “The college solution to rural news deserts”
- Key focus areas ahead for grocers
- Ethics issues in farmers market organizations
- Community radio: Important for addressing climate change
- Three produce trends for food retailers
- Working alone in US rural journalism
- How consumers define “truth” in food and agriculture these days
- Community radio: An entertainment factory or catalyst for development

Individual issues provided news and identified research reports being added to the ACDC collection. Associate Evans served as managing editor and maintained the distribution database. Graduate student Liu proofread, formatted, posted the newsletter to the Center's social media account beginning in October of 2024.

### Social media

Outreach over social media took place through ACDC's X (formerly Twitter) account. The account is used to interact with the Funk ACES Library, industry professionals, and users of the Bibleaves citation database. It is updated with current updates relevant to center events, exhibits, local programming at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Funk Library, and to advertise the publishing of the Center's newsletters. X interaction was primarily with the Funk ACES Library account, and other University accounts.

## Outreach Activities

### Partnership with the Agricultural Communications Program of ALEC:

Head Shearer and Associate Evans continued to confer about ongoing and potential collaborations with colleagues in the ALEC academic unit. Center staff completed a LibGuide for ALEC 115 in spring 2025, class instruction during March 2025.

### Partnership with IFAJ:

This professional organization, The International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ), serves some 5,000 members in 60 countries. A long-time collaboration with ACDC continued during this period.

- The ACDC website continued to provide a special section for IFAJ members to acquaint them with ACDC resources and to offer information services to them.

### Marketing Materials:

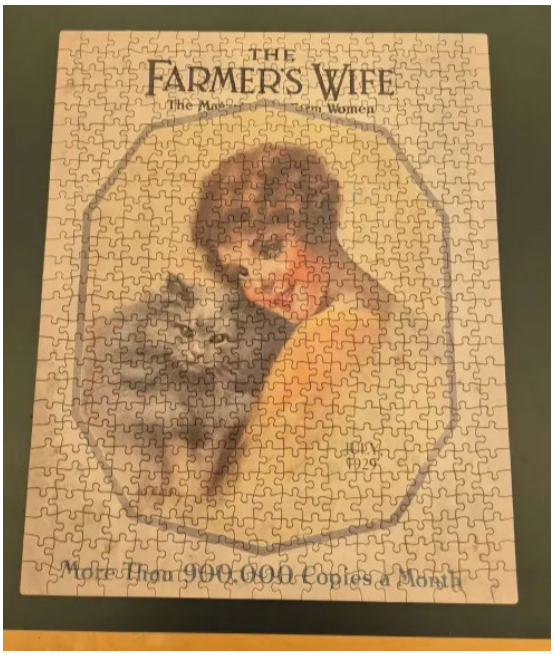
Staff members continued to distribute the ACDC brochure electronically to an on-campus list of selected administrators, faculty and staff members throughout the University Library, College of ACES, College of Media, and University of Illinois Extension.

### Special Searches, Requests, and Contacts:

During August, Center staff responded to a request for information related to Emeritus Professor Jim Evan's materials within University Library Archives at Illinois.

Also during this period the ACDC responded to requests related broadly to cultural discourse and agricultural communications history. Among them were:

- Meaning and representation of agriculture in the African American community
- History of the ACDC
- History of agricultural communications in Oklahoma




## Other outreach activities

During fall 2024, the ACDC staff continued to increase awareness of our services. In September, graduate student Gross and Head Shearer worked with Library Facilities to rearrange the Center's furniture, intentionally shaping the space to be more inviting, comfortable and student friendly.

The team also created a puzzle and raffle to engage library patrons. During the last reporting period, patrons voted to select a cover image of a 1929 issue of the *Farmer's Wife,* and create the image into a puzzle. Then during December finals week, the puzzle was used during de-stress activities, and patrons working on the puzzle were entered into a raffle prize (tote bag with study supplies). Of the puzzle participants, 75% were not aware of the ACDC and were open to learning more through instructional sessions, programming, exhibits or appointments.

ACDC materials were also used in a *Country Cooking* exhibit created by graduate student Gross between October 7 to November 25. The exhibit highlighted the V1N1 (Volume One, Number One) Collection and featured U.S. family recipes.



## Encouragement from Users and Reviewers

Following are examples of feedback from faculty members, professional journalists and communicators, organizations,

students, and others during this period. The samples reflect responses to individual search and advisory services provided by ACDC, issues of ACDC News, and various features of the ACDC resources, services, and website.

- Thank you so much for sharing this!
- Thanks for the hours I can visit the library while I'm in town. I'm sure those will be adequate.
- Many thanks for sharing this article. It was interesting reading - and thanks to ACDC for writing about it, and bringing it to my attention.
- I may yet take a road trip to UI to access your collection. Thanks again.
- Thanks for the information. I look forward to receiving your reports going forward.
- It has been a phenomenal two years working in the ACDC! I can't wait to take the skills I've learned here and apply them in my career. Thank you!