2025-2026
PROGRESS REPORT

Agricultural Communications Documentation Center

Funk ACES Library, University of Illinois

AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS DOCUMENTATION CENTER

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 2025 to June 2026), 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 to form an internal (U of I) and/or external advisory council/board for ACDC.
- Strengthen the website and Bibleaves database search optimization.
- The ACDC role of Associate Evans reflects his extensive experience and evolving capacity.
- Plan and coordinate for the ACDC's 45th Anniversary Celebration to highlight the Center's contributions to agricultural communications and information services.

In August 2025, Abigail McBride, a 1st 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 2025-2026 academic year.

Also in August 2025, Alinafe Nyasulu, 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 2025-2026 academic year.

In January 2026, Avni Sabharwal, an undergraduate student in Illinois' Crop Sciences program, joined the Center in a Student Assistant (SA) position, working on an hourly basis for the 2025-2026 academic year.

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 Operations Associate Erik Chapman, University of Illinois.

Graduate student Nyasulu reviewed The Morris Collection metadata spreadsheet for documents in non-English languages and coordinated with Head Shearer for these Morris materials to be translated into English.

Graduate student McBride initiated the planning and coordination of the Stacks Shift Project, an effort aimed at creating more space in the ACDC's stacks and correcting filing errors present in the stacks (e.g., back-filed documents). The initial phase of documenting the stacks before the shift is underway, and the team aims to complete the shift by the end of the 2026-2027 academic year.

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 made 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 Nyasulu checked and rectified issues of the ACDC's web pages such as updating the homepage and staff contact pages.

Graduate student McBride conducted periodic updates of the manual, the outreach plan, and the running log of specific projects within the Center, including completed and future projects. She also rectified accessibility, layout, and link-related issues in the ACDC LibGuide.

Head Shearer consistently communicated with the Library IT to maintain the Bibleaves system when 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 to improve the assessment of the Center's activities and services, we continued to use LibInsight to record reference interactions.

During the reporting period, Library IT continued providing the Center with monthly reports detailing the subject terms used by patrons. ACDC staff applied an established process for cleaning and analyzing these reports to identify the topics most frequently searched by Bibleaves users.

The bar chart below indicates the count of the top 25 most frequently searched subject terms in the Bibleaves database. "Homemaker education," "farmers," and "attitudes" were the top three searches, indicating strong interest in teaching strategies, agricultural actors, and points of view. Moving forward, this data will provide useful insight into user needs and will help guide ACDC Bibleaves document collection, indexing, collaboration, and future resource planning.

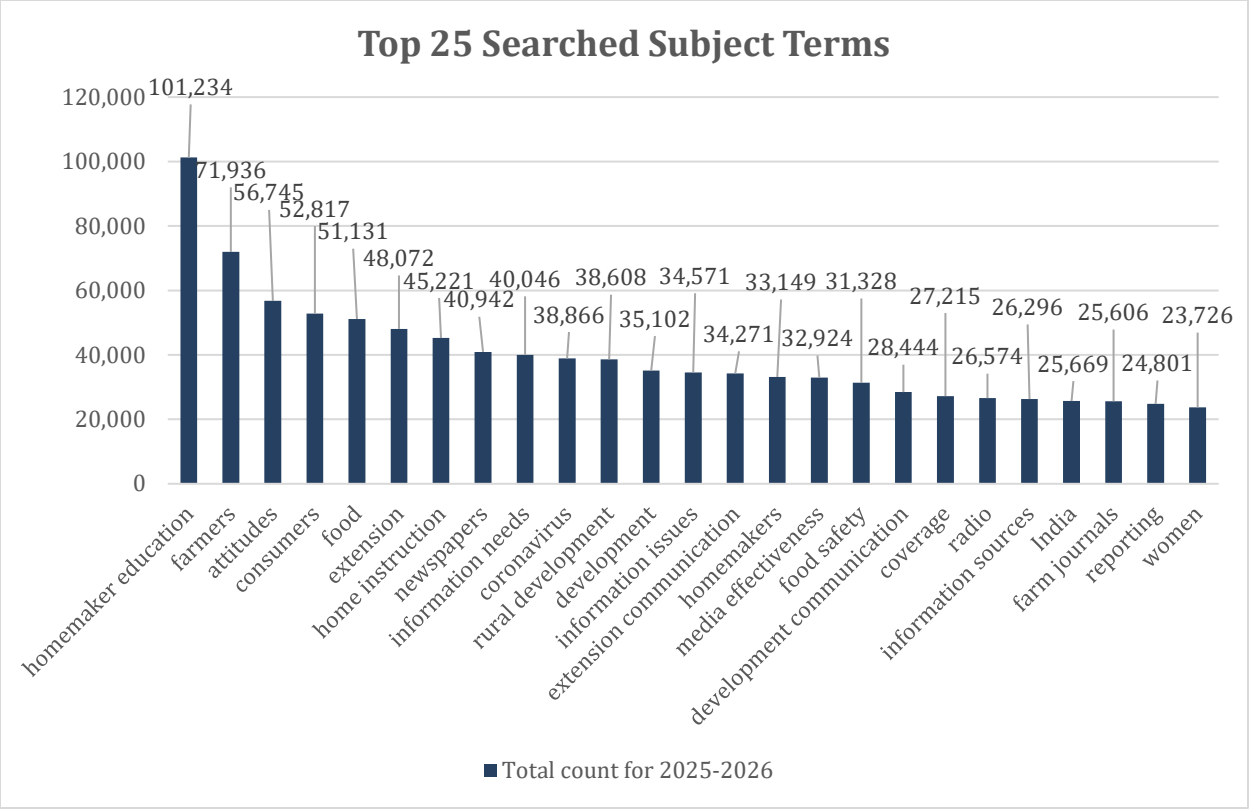


Fig 1: Bar chart showing the count of the top 25 most searched subject terms by users of Bibleaves in the 2025-2026 year.

Some of the key subject terms include:

- Homemaker education, home instruction, and homemakers showed a strong interest in homemaking and education.
- Farmers, food, and food safety indicated interest in food systems and food system actors.
- Terms like extension, information needs, information issues, extension communication, media effectiveness, coverage, and more suggest a strong, ongoing interest in communication efforts and needs.
- Users also searched for communication channels such as newspapers and radio, showing interest in traditional tools.

Content, Programming, and Services

Document Collection

Growth of the ACDC Collections:

The ACDC collection consisted of 52,516 documents at the end of June 2026, including 1,000 documents added during this reporting period. This includes documents housed in the ACDC's collection, the V1N1 collection, as well as citations of materials held at other libraries on campus. Graduate student Nyasulu focused on adding African journals and authors to Bibleaves database, aiming to highlight agricultural communication publications about and from the continent.

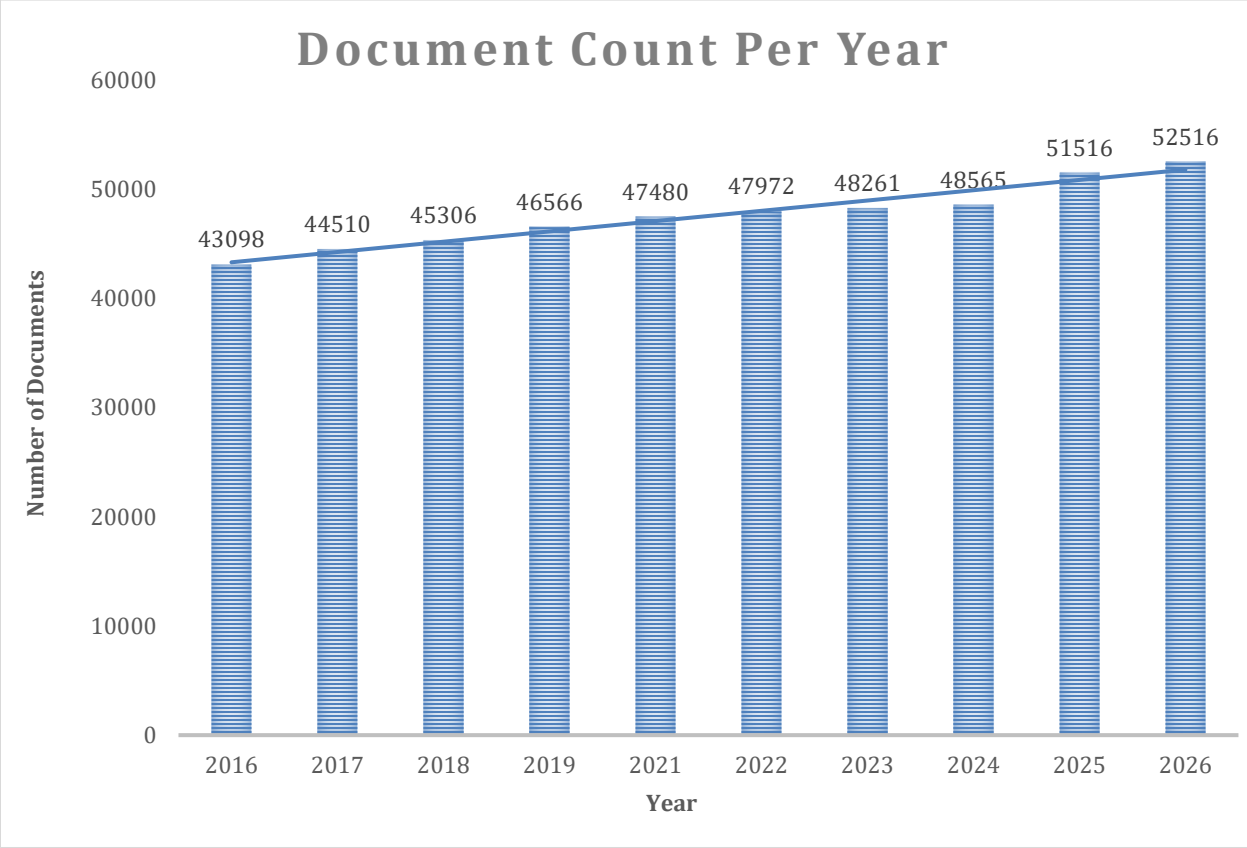


Figure 2: Bar chart representing collection growth between 2016-2026. The 2021 bar represents the 18-month period between January 2020 – June 2021.

Top document formats:

Of the 1,000 documents that were added to the Bibleaves database during this period, the ACDC collected a variety of formats. Most of these documents fell under journal article, news article, news release, or research article (Figure 3). Some of the ACDC's top sources from this period include The Packer, AgriMarketing, FarmProgress, AgWeb, Journal of Agricultural Sustainability, Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education, Journal of Agricultural Extension, Journal of Applied Communications, and Drovers Magazine.

Format / Genre	Total
Article	11
Blog	5
Blog posting	15
Commentary	7
Journal article	253
Magazine article	10
News	5
News article	294
News release	44
News report	32
Newsletter article	8
Online article	15
Opinion	22
Peer reviewed article	18
Press release	5
Report	17
Research article	81
Research summary	5
Review article	9

Figure 3: Table showing most frequent format types added to Bibleaves during 2025-2026.

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 Bibleaves.

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

Graduate student McBride began to update the Volume One Number One (V1N1) collection's finding aid. This included updating the document's heading levels for accessibility, revising the

arrangement and scope and content notes, reformatting parts of the finding aid, and adding folder numbers and dates to the finding aid.

Associate Evans continued to search for agricultural communication materials to add to Bibleaves.

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 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 anticipate working with the Evans Center's inaugural director Amy Roady.

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. Head Shearer additionally discussed collaborating with the rest of the Funk ACES Library for the building's upcoming anniversary with graduate students McBride and Nyasulu.

Serving Users

ACDC Newsletters

The Center's 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 over 200 countries. Ten issues were prepared and distributed during the 2025-2026 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, advancements in technology, 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:

- "Protein-dazed, and still confused"
- Imagine growing fresh food in space
- Insights in the 2025 U.S. Food and Health Survey
- How 'ugly' produce is reshaping the food waste conversation

- Five-year analysis of cover crop adoption in the U.S.
- Adding updates about the police raid on a rural community newspaper
- Information needs for climate smart farming in Bangladesh
- Updates on Americans' trust in food and nutrition science
- "Artificial intelligence cannot replace the agricultural journalist"
- Community radio giving voice to the rural poor

Individual issues provided news and identified research reports that were added to the ACDC collection. Associate Evans served as managing editor and maintained the distribution database. Graduate student McBride proofread, formatted, and posted the newsletter to the Center's social media account and website beginning in September of 2025.

Social media

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

Outreach Activities

Partnership with AgNIC:

The University of Illinois continued to maintain the Agricultural Communications LibGuide, originally developed through its role as an AgNIC "Center of Excellence" in agricultural communications. As part of the Agriculture Network Information Collaborative (AgNIC) of the National Agricultural Library, ACDC continues to serve as a portal to information about agricultural communications.

In May, Head Shearer attended the U.S. Agricultural Information Network, which also hosted AgNIC's Annual Meeting.

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.

Head Shearer conducted six instructional sessions in September 2025 for an ALEC class, including their visit to the ACDC.

Partnership with IFAJ:

This professional organization, The International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ), serves more than 5,000 members in 62 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.

Graduate student McBride began the use of the ACDC's BlueSky account to promote each newsletter release. She also began a document of sample Throwback Thursday posts to help keep the account active and bring more attention to the ACDC's collections.

Special Searches, Requests, and Contacts:

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

In April, an Agricultural Communications alumni toured the Center. This visit was coordinated with the College of ACES.

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

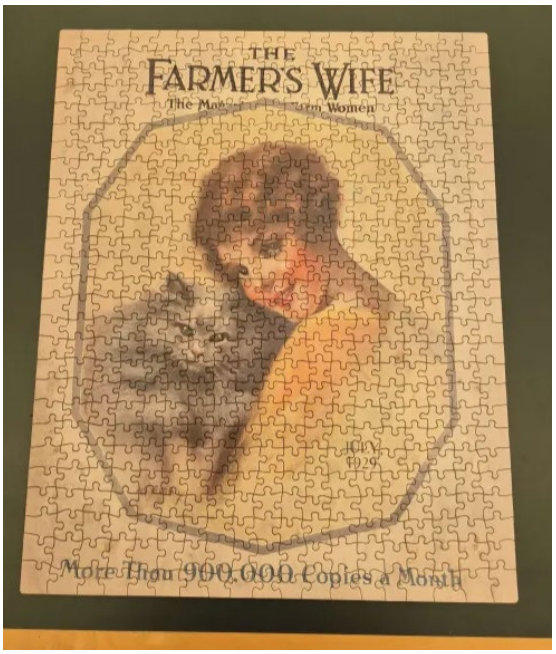
- Meaning and representation of agriculture in the African American community
- History of the ACDC
- History of agricultural communications in Oklahoma
- Current conversation surrounding public perceptions on genetically modified food

Other Activities:

In Fall 2025, ACDC materials were used in a *Brief History of Farm Radio* exhibit created and installed by graduate student McBride from December 2, 2025 to January 23, 2026. The exhibit featured V1N1 materials, film, CDs, cassettes, and other documents to give a rough overview of the history of farm radio. Materials featured farm radio activity in the United States, the Caribbean, India, and Africa.

The team continued to use the *Farmer's Wife* puzzle during de-stress fest activities during the December and May finals weeks.





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.

- We enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to visit and discuss the ACDC.
- Thanks for sharing the report. Good to see that Extension is one of the top 5 searches including along with educational methods, Farmers, and community.
- Thank you for the latest newsletter, I appreciate being connected!