

"Grassroots" Electronic News

You don't need a computer to take advantage of Grassroots, a first-of-its-kind electronic farm news and information service. Unlike other in-home electronic information systems, Grassroots can be picked up by your ordinary TV and a "decoder" box that sells for under \$250 (prices continue to drop). The new information system, which is also the first to feature state-of-the-art full-color graphics, can be received through a home computer as well.

To get "on line" you simply dial a toll-free 800 number. The decoder box is equipped with a portable keyboard that calls up any of over 30,000 different "screens" of information that include all commodities (ag and non-ag), Commodity News Service, weather (worldwide and state by state), USDA reports, Associated Press news wire, newsletters (15 in all, including Doanes & ASA SoyNet), extension service information, stock markets, and news from many other sources. The system also contains "calculator" programs that let you punch in data from your farm operation and figure "what if" options with different crops and livestock, as well as games and educational programs.

"It's like an encyclopedia. You can call up whatever you need in sec-

onds. All information is continuously updated 24 hrs. a day so you can be on top of every change in markets, weather, worldwide events, ag research, and so on," says company president Bruno Leps.

Grassroots is also the first electronic information system to sell advertising. Companies buy space along the bottom of the screen. If you want more information on a product, you simply punch it up. If you decide you want to order — an herbicide, for instance — just punch in the command and it'll be delivered to your door.

"Advertisers help defray the cost of the system and they provide valuable information to subscribers if they want it," notes Leps.

The system costs \$39.95 per month which includes 2 hrs. of access time. Additional time costs \$9 per hour. The company recommends taping needed information on a VCR for more leisurely viewing, which keeps the cost to the minimum. During the first month access time is unlimited to allow time to familiarize yourself with the system.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Grassroots America, Suite 100, 1001 Jefferson Street, Wilmington, Del. 19801 (ph toll-free 800 441-2128 or 302 652-2414).

"Non-Radio Shack people have developed good software and hardware that adapts to this computer. The major drawback of the Color Computer is the lack of a standard 80 col. by 24 lines display, although this can be overcome by software or hardware additions. Also, there is no built-in disk drive but it can be added."

"I'm very happy with my 1985 Panasonic computer. It's portable so I can take it out on the farm. Great for ration balancing, and budgeting," says Dwight Roseler, Norwalk, Ohio.

"They should separate the number pad from the cursor controls," says Richard Wolta, Schuyler, Neb., otherwise pleased with his IBM PC.

"You can make it as sophisticated or as simple as you like due to its open construction which makes expansion easy. Ideal for farm use," says Tom Robertson, Reinbeck, Iowa about his 1984 IBM PC which he uses to access informational data bases as well as for record keeping, word processing, and decision making via spreadsheets.

"Best & Worst" Software

"My best buy program comes from Plan-A-Farm America, P.O. Box 258, Northfield, Minn. 55057. It provides both cash and accrual accounting on both total business or individuals enterprise reports, and automatically transfers inputs to budgets. It works so well I haven't looked at any others," says Roderick Sommerfield, Mazeppa, Minn., who owns an Apple IIe.

"I like **Practicalc II** (Practicorp, 44 Oak St., Newton Upper Falls, Mass. 02164) for my Commodore 64 computer. It's easy to use and works great," reports Donald Davies, Dawn, Mo.

"We made up our own best buy programs using **PFS File** from Software Publishing Corp., 1901 Landings Dr., Mountain View, Calif. 94043. Works well with our Apple computer," says Bruce Zeeman, Bonduel, Wis.

DeWayne Calvert, Buda, Ill., uses **Homestead** software in his Vector computer. "We get it through our Farm Bureau, which recommended it. Works fine."

"**Guide-Line Software**, Rt. 2, Box 62, Argonia, Ks. 67704, makes good software written for Radio Shack computers. They have many programs I can use at a good price," says Lowell Guyer, Goodland, Kan.

"We're pleased with **Red Wing** general ledger software from Red Wing Business Systems, 610 Main St., Red Wing, Minn. 55066," says Bobby Greenwood, Carlton, Kans.

"**The Market Analyst**, S & S Programming, Box 2007, W. Lafayette, Ind. 47906 is error-free, reasonably priced, easy to use and maintain, and you can buy as much as you need to develop a marketing program," says Dean Berry, Royal Center, Ind.

"**Ag Disk** is too elementary. It's our worst buy. Our best buy is **Transaction Plus**, from-FBS Systems, Aledo, Ill.," says J.N. Carey, Bloomingburg, Ohio, who owns a Panasonic computer.

Arlo Gordon, Murdock, Minn., says **Red Wing's** depreciation pro-

What uses have you developed on your own for your computer?

"I built a spread sheet to decide whether or not to sell feeder pigs or feed them out," says Dean Berry, Royal Center, Inc.

"We've developed field by field histories of soil tests, expenses, crops grown, weed problems, herbicide use, and profit, or lack of it. Helps us plan," says Bruce Glick, Hartsville, Ind.

"I've developed a cash flow spread sheet that ties into the various income tax forms. For example, cash flow, investment credit, depreciation, Schedule F and the form 1040 all tie together. I've also developed break-even models for hog and cattle producers," says Phil Birkedal, Mason City, Iowa.

"I wrote a special program just for sprayer calibration," says Lanny Deckinger, Falls City, Neb.

"Pre-programmed software is too rigid so I developed my own programs to figure dairy rations, follow commodity prices, keep all financial records, type up rental agreement forms, and store information such as crop yields, fertilizer rates, and so on," says Mike Fischer, Fairchild, Wis.

"We've come up with production curves for dairy cattle and sales curves for retail sales in our farm store," says John Epler, Northumberland, Penn.

"I keep records for each field and do a lot of market charting. I use an inventory control program for our seed corn business," says David Curnes, Osceola, Iowa.

"We've developed programs that incorporate technical signals for grain markets," says Paul Stone, Princeton, Ill.

"We've used the computer to enter each cow's name, and keep track of when they freshen, the date and sex of each calf, milk production, and so on," says Bruce Zeeman, Bonduel, Wis.

"We've used spreadsheets to divide partnership and corporate income information and for profit analysis on whole herd and feeder pig performance. We also enter and analyze information on our breeding herd and apply indices and probable breeding values to sow and sire performance," says Tim Burke, Dorchester, Neb.

gram is his "worst buy" in software. "There are bugs in the program. We also found bugs in other Red Wing programs. Our best buys are Reaper programs from **Reaper Software**, 1700 So. 1st. St., Willmar, Minn. 56201. Very user friendly and good service."

"**Ag-Business Manager** by Ag-Wave, P.O. Box 1503, Kearney, Neb. 68847, provides complete accounting plus a complete set of reports for financial management. Reports include, but are not limited to, budget comparison, monthly and annual profit and loss statements, and balance sheets," says Gerald Beattie, Sumner, Neb.

"**Dynacalc** is the fastest, most powerful electronic spreadsheet I've ever tried. Easy to use. (Computer Systems Center, 42 Four Seasons Center #122, Chesterfield, Mo. 63017). In my opinion, the worst software on the market is anything from Radio Shack, except for OS-9 related software. Their programs are cumbersome, slow and have no respect for either the power of the computer or the person using it," states David Archer, Finley, N. Dak.

"**Farmhand Computer Systems**, Mitchellville, Iowa 50169, makes the best software we've seen. Gives very good accounting results," says W. Robbins, Hopkins, who runs a Xerox 820.

"**Agri-Key** crop program from A.O. Smith is our worst buy. It has since gone off the market. We received little support and many changes were needed to speed it up," says Brymer Humphreys, New Hartford, N.Y.

"I make my own programs on the **Timeworks** spreadsheet from

Timeworks, Inc., Deerfield, Ill. 60015. Gets the job done on my Commodore 64. Commodore's own program, called **The Manager**, didn't have the ability to do anything let alone handle the inventory work we needed it for," says Gary Hild, Davenport, Neb.

"I don't know if this is the best but we like the tasks it performs on our Apple IIe such as field records, crop inventory, and accounting," says Richard and Catherine Ness, Rulhton, Minn., pleased with **Reaper Software**, 1700 So. 1st. St., Willmar, Minn. 56201.

"We like **Multiplan** software from Microsoft Corp., Bellevue, Wash. It's the least expensive way to go but it also has drawbacks, especially if you don't want to spend the time designing your own worksheets," says James Barker, Ireton, Iowa, who owns an Apple Macintosh.

"**Horison Accounting** by Harvest Computing Systems, Alexandria, Ind., is a best buy. Company support is good and integration between the accounting and field manager packages work well," says Bradley Ferree, Jasonville, Ind. He operates an IBM PC.

"**Micro Mars** from the Iowa Farm Business Association, Ames, Iowa, provides detailed records and year-to-date ledger information. Does a good job on our Apple IIe," says Duane Madoerin, Williamsburg, Iowa.

"**The Great Plains Crop & Livestock** program from Great Plains software, 1701-W. 38th St., Fargo, N. Dak. 58103, is my best buy," says Delane Thoreson, Climax, Minn.