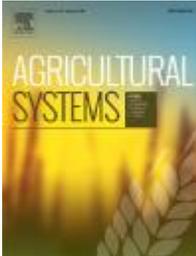


AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS

- About the journal
- Submission and acceptance rates
- Desk-reject decisions
 - Scope
 - Significance
 - Obvious flaws
 - Quality
- How to avoid a desk-reject
- Before submission
- Hints for revisions
- Questions



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About the Journal - Editors

	Guillaume Martin INRAE, Toulouse, France		Mark van Wijk ILRI, Quito, Ecuador
	Emma Stephens Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Lethbridge, Canada		Val Snow AgResearch, Lincoln, New Zealand
	Jagadish Timsina Institute for Study and Development Worldwide, Sydney, Australia		

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Scope

www.journals.elsevier.com/agricultural-systems

Agricultural Systems is an international journal that deals with interactions:

- among the components of agricultural systems,
- among hierarchical levels of agricultural systems,
- between agricultural and other land use systems,
- between agricultural systems and their natural, social and economic environments.

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Subject classification of manuscripts

- resilience and adaptation
- agricultural economics
- farm or land optimisation
- digitalisation of agriculture
- design of farm systems
- sustainable intensification
- agro-environmental impact assessment
- crop/livestock/tree integration and silvopastoralism
- agroecology
- food systems
- food security
- innovation systems
- supply or value chain

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Special Issues: completed

- Risk Management in Agriculture: what challenges and prospects?
- Agricultural research for rural prosperity: Rethinking the pathways
- Agricultural Systems Perspectives on Global Food Security
- Next Generation Data, Models and Knowledge Products

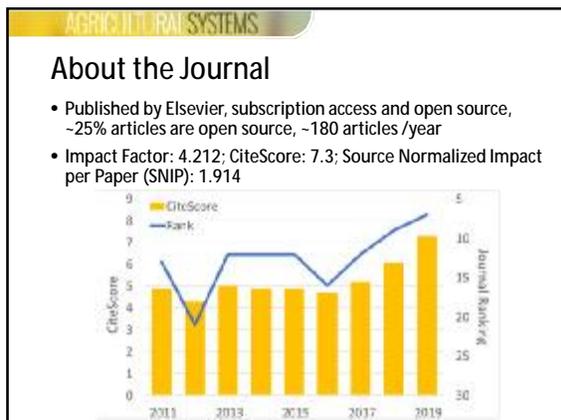
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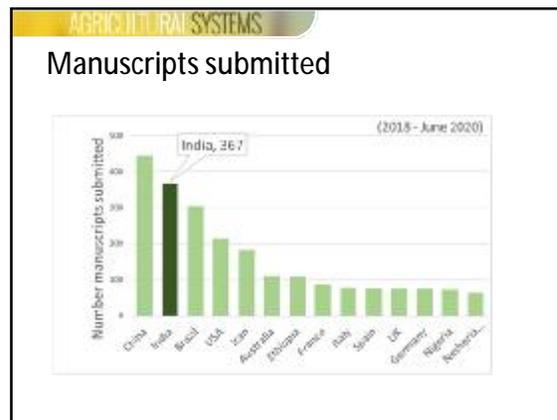
Special Issues: underway / in progress

- Science of scaling: connecting the pathways of agricultural research and development for improved food, income and nutrition security
- Sustainability transitions in the making in agro-ecosystems: changes in scope and methods in agronomy
- Farm system models and modelling: levers for linking society and the land for sustainable development – data, design, usability and interoperability
- Immediate Impacts of COVID-19 on Agricultural and Food Systems Worldwide

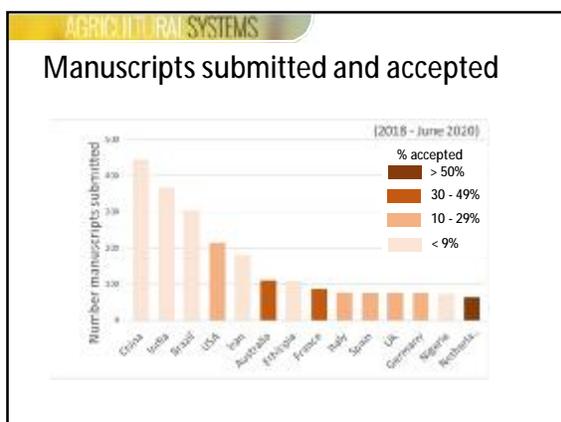
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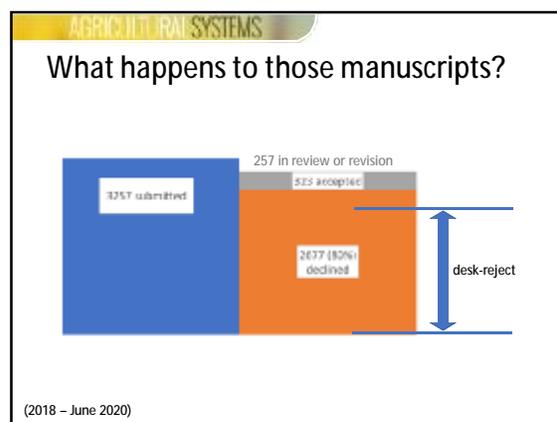
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Desk-rejection

- Manuscript declined before review
- Primary reasons
 - Not in scope
 - Too local or low apparent significance
 - Obvious flaws in the methodology
 - Insufficient quality of writing or language
- ~40% of manuscripts that go into review eventually get accepted

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Scope

Agricultural Systems is an international journal that deals with interactions:

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Scope

- Lengthy statement of scope
- Generally excludes work concentrating on
 - econometrics
 - descriptive survey results
 - descriptions of typology development
 - life-cycle analysis (LCA)
 - straightforward fertiliser, crop or livestock trials
 - machinery- or processing-focussed studies

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Significance

- Novelty
- Implications or meaningfulness beyond the immediate study
 - primary reason that descriptive studies are usually excluded

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Obvious flaws

- Good internal processes in your organisations usually avoids this issue

Quality of writing or language

- If the only issue would be returned for editing with resubmission invited
- Important for attracting quality reviews

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How to avoid a desk-reject

Think about it in this order:

- Significance
- Scope
- Quality

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Significance

“What would someone else get out of reading this paper? What would they learn?”

- What do the results mean beyond this study?
- Are there implications beyond this time and place?
- Is there a methodology advance that others might want?
- Consider this well before you start writing
 - Effort here will pay off no matter where you end up submitting your manuscript

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Scope

- Difficult because most manuscripts come from funded research or extension projects, but:
 - a paper from a project should not be a report about the project (see “Significance”)
- Think about the journal's scope before you start writing
 - have a short-list of journals and refine as the manuscript develops

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Quality of writing and language

- Hard to do but the easiest to fix
 - Seek input from colleagues and co-authors
 - Professional editing services
- What is your main point/finding/message?
 - What information do you need to support that?
 - Longer does not equal better
 - Avoid a lot of passive sentence structures
 - Highly recommended reading: Hotaling, S., 2020. Simple rules for concise scientific writing. *Limnology and Oceanography Letters*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/lol2.10165>

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Getting a manuscript in scope

We used field and household level data from an extensive and homogeneous household survey (n = 613), to ... describe the variability in household levels of endowment ...; and to parameterize a whole farm model ... to quantify benefits and trade-offs in terms of changes in ... Distinctive from other studies is the ...

“To mulch or to munch? Big modelling of big data”
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agvs.2017.01.010>

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Getting the significance part right

- This is the hardest part ...
- Need consider the value of your work to others
- Read widely and critically analyse published work from a high-level perspective
- Gather opinions / perspectives from others

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The abstract is important – don't neglect it

- Most desk-rejects are not read beyond the abstract
 - the abstract is not a chore to do after the real work is done
- Structure – there is a symmetry to a good abstract
 - Background – why, what is the problem?
 - Objective – specifically what did you want to find out?
 - Methods – very high level (two sentences max)
 - Results – high level (not long lists)
 - Conclusions – against your objective
 - Significance – to others, should relate to the background
- Avoid acronyms, lists of values, equations, a lot of statistical results/significance, ...

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Other points - 1

- The title is somewhat important – make the significance obvious
- Follow the instructions to authors
 - line spacing and numbering
 - reasonable quality figures embedded in text (mostly)
 - captions always with the figure or table
 - highlights
 - suggested reviewers are required, good suggestions helpful
 - mostly beyond your country
 - have published similar work
 - “working researchers”, not international luminaries

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Other points - 2

- The cover letter should explain why it is significant and in scope
- Get good proof-reading done

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Next steps – after review

- “Major revision” will be reviewed again - mostly
- “Minor revision” might be reviewed again

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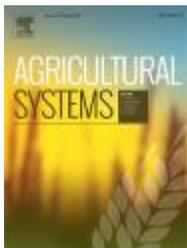
Replying to review comments

1. Consider each comment carefully.
 - What did they really mean? It might not be what they wrote.
 - Did they misunderstand something?
 - Is it a point of valid scientific disagreement?
 - You don't have to agree with all comments but pick your battles
2. Construct a reply to the reviewer AND modify the manuscript.
 - The reviewer didn't ask out of idle curiosity
3. Look for issues that are patterns in the manuscript and need wider attention
4. Make it easy to see the modification in the manuscript aligned against the reply to reviewers

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Thank you for your interest. The journal would not exist without authors willing to submit their best work and reviewers willing to assist with critical assessments to maintain quality.



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Questions

How can I attract attention of the Editor of a journal in the first place? What are the key aspects that the Editor looks for in a paper as soon as he/she receives it?

- Does it meet scope?
- Does it have significance to the readership?

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Questions

Why are most of the research papers are rejected in high impact journals?

- Because there are a lot of submissions. The impact factor (and possibly just the title) attract about 1400 submissions a year. Most of them are just not in scope.

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Questions

Can you elaborate the reasons for rejection? How to avoid a desk rejection?

- To decrease the likelihood of a desk-rejection, either:
 - fully consider the journal scope before you start framing the paper, or
 - write the paper and then look for the right journal
 - (usually a combination of the two)

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AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS

Questions

Why does publishing in Elsevier take more time than other journals?

- For Agricultural Systems we usually have a short time to the first decision (desk-reject or into review).
- After that it really depends on how quickly we can get reviewers to accept and then submit reviews.
- We take more time because of the quality of reviews that we require.

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Questions

Do you publish review articles? Can we submit directly or require invitation?

- Yes we do publish reviews. We strongly encourage people to contact us before they start writing the review for advice.

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Questions

How large the sample size must be? Is there any criteria related to sample size for research papers?

- The sample size should be appropriate for the topic.
- But note that we rarely publish work based on survey alone.

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Questions

Is it essential to use sophisticated statistical or other data analysis tools in a research paper for publishing in a reputed journal?

- Not really – the real test is if it is the right technique for the question/problem.

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Questions

Why can't we reduce the review period by including more number of reviewers?

- My personal record for review invitations is about 30!
- We do this already.
- You may be surprised about the number of review invitations that never attract a response!
- If you get a review invitation please either accept or decline it (we'd prefer accept but a non-response just delays progressing the review)

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Questions

Can we expect any kind of honorarium for contribution of articles to your esteemed journal?

- Sorry – no – that is not the publishing model that Elsevier uses.

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Questions

I found many times (at 5-6 times) that views of the reviewers were diverse. One reviewer agreed for modification, whereas, other suggested to decline the submission based on only one or two points.

- This happens!
- More frequently it will be that different reviewers will highlight different aspects but sometimes their opinions are in conflict.
- You can ask the Editor for guidance about responding to the reviews and they may be directive about that as well.
- It is the Editor not the reviewer that makes the decision about acceptance or not of the manuscript.

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Questions

Do we need to pay any publication charges?

- Agricultural Systems is mixed-mode.
- You can choose open access (paid) or subscription (free).
- It is your choice and does not affect the likelihood of the manuscript being accepted.
- Your funding body may have requirements for open access.

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Questions

Four of the top five 'most downloaded articles' in Agricultural Systems are Open Access and all the top five 'most cited articles' in the journal are Open Access. Authors without funding, however, may find it difficult to afford your Open Access charges.

- To be fair, most of those top-cited articles would have been well cited even if not open-access. They had the right topic and were written well.
- The Open Access charges are very high. These are set by Elsevier.

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AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS

Questions

What is your advice for young authors who aspire to publish papers in high impact journals like Agricultural Systems?

- The hardest thing is to consider your work from someone else's perspective and to pull out the part of your work that fits well with the journal's scope.
- Read a lot of papers from that journal and consider them critically.
- When a manuscript is desk-rejected remember that usually it is not a judgement of quality.
- You will get rejections – try and see if there is something that you can learn from each one.

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Questions

Your suggestions to improve writing skills of authors?

- Find the significance of the work for the journal readership and write it down clearly ... this might not be the main point of the original project.
- Find your 'story' and then stay with it (don't get side-tracked).
- Keep it direct – read "Simple rules for concise scientific writing".
- Pay attention to the title and particularly to the abstract.
- Never use "respectively" (would you ever list items irrespectively?).
- Good "Materials and Methods" sections are actually surprisingly hard to write – expect to revise it many times.
- Start with a good outline and gather opinions.
- Remember that it is a paper about an objective ... not a report of everything that you did.
- Consider getting some professional editing assistance and try to learn from their example.
- Good writing takes time.

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