

# ***AN EVOLVING PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION***



## **FORTY YEARS OF INCREASING UNDERSTANDING**

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The fortieth anniversary of the first conference on public policy is being observed this year (1990). The program planning committee for the 1990 Public Policy Education Conference thought an understanding of the long and productive history of the National Public Policy Education Committee would be useful. We will place major emphasis on: (1) the origins of the organization — its philosophy and people, (2) the changing structure of the organization and (3) the major programs and some of the impacts.

### **Origin**

In the fall of 1949, the Farm Foundation invited a group of extension directors and agricultural economists from the four major regions of the United States to discuss: (1) the status of educational work among rural groups in the field of public policy and (2) what the Farm Foundation might do to help extension economists prepare themselves to work more effectively in this important field.

In January, 1950, agricultural economists from a large portion of the 48 states attended a meeting in Chicago to discuss the importance of educational work in the field of public policy, problems encountered in connection with carrying on such work and specific public policy issues. The specific issue sessions were designed to deal with presentation methods as well as content.

That fall, four regional work conferences were held to stimulate interest in, and discuss problems relating to, extension work in public policy in the various states. Extension directors were invited as well as representative groups of county agents and others interested in the development of the field.

### **Organizational Structure**

The Farm Foundation, with Managing Director Frank Peck and Associate Managing Director Joseph Ackerman, played a leading role in initiating, organizing and financing the newly-formed National Committee on Agricultural Policy chaired by F.F. Hill, Cornell University.

We would be remiss if we failed to note that Joseph Ackerman, who subsequently became managing director of the Farm Foundation, played a leading role in counseling and guiding the organization for nearly a quarter century.

It is significant that the original National Committee on Agricultural Policy, established in 1951, was composed of twelve people — four extension directors, four department heads and four extension economists representing four U.S. regions. This remained into the mid-1960s when it was changed to four extension directors and eight public policy specialists interested in extension work. The selection process for National Committee members was done within the National Committee until 1964-65. At this time, the four regional committees began electing two representatives while department chairmen were no longer represented as a special group.

The late 1960s and early 1970s can be characterized as a period of discontent and turmoil in the United States. The regional committees and the National Committee were not exempt from the economic and social forces at work in our society. The changing conditions resulted in a name change in 1971, from the National Committee on Agricultural Policy to the current name of National Public Policy Education Committee (NPPEC), thought to be more descriptive of the purposes and functions of the group.

The regional committees expended much time and effort in the early 1970s developing by-laws and operational guidelines for each of the four regions. These were finalized in 1973. At the 1974 conference, the Western Policy Committee proposed by-laws for the National Committee and, in 1975, at a special meeting of all participants of the National Public Policy Education Conference, National Committee by-laws were adopted establishing member election procedures, etc. that helped eliminate some sources of discontent. The membership article established a fifteen-person National Committee consisting of: 1. two representatives each from the North Central, Northeast, Southern and Western Public Policy Extension Education Committees as selected by those committees; 2. the managing director and associate managing director of the Farm Foundation; 3. one representative designated by Extension Service-United States Department of Agriculture (ES-USDA); and 4. the Cooperative Extension Service director serving as administrative advisor to each regional policy committee.

The winds of change began to blow through the extension policy education establishment beginning in 1971 when representatives of the 1890 colleges were invited to participate in the National Conference. Several attended in 1972. Likewise, in 1978, home economists interested in public policy education were invited to attend and a very few did so in 1979. In 1984, the National Committee by-laws were amended. Voting membership on the committee was expanded to nineteen with two members from 1890 land grant institutions selected by the 1890 extension administrators and two members of the home economics pro-

fession selected by the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy's (ECOP) Subcommittee on Home Economics. The National Committee remains at nineteen today as stipulated by the by-laws adopted in 1975 and amended in 1984.

## **Programming**

### **1951 Conference Program**

The subject matter of the 1951 conference, held in Allerton Park, Illinois, included: (1) international affairs, (2) inflation, (3) agricultural production policy and (4) the interrelationships of agriculture and other segments of the economy. The equivalent of a full day was devoted to each of the subjects. The working committee responsible for each subject had complete charge of the program during the time allocated for their presentation.

It is worthy to note that ten out of twelve speakers on the 1951 program were extension economists. Out of curiosity, we checked the attendees at the 1951 and 1970 conferences and found that eleven people had attended both conferences. We determined there were at least twenty-two people that attended over half the conferences in the twenty year period of 1951-70. Likewise, there were at least thirty-nine people that attended over half the conferences in the period from 1971-1989. This continuity of attendance by people with a common purpose and interests contributed greatly to the long-term success of the policy committee.

A major function of the 50s conferences was to prepare teaching materials and to critique presentation methods. Gradually the presentations changed as outside speakers were invited to provide greater in-depth information. The methods portion of the program has been retained with changing formats.

### **Subject Matter**

The 1951 program subject matter was diverse, especially given that the name of the sponsoring organization was the National Committee on Agricultural Policy. A tabulation of major program topics shows that, from 1951 through 1970, commercial agricultural policy was on the program seventeen times, policy education fifteen, international issues fourteen, domestic economic issues fourteen, topics related to resource use nine and low rural income five. Table 1 shows the breakdown into specific issues. There was a concentration in certain broad subject matter areas yet substantial diversity within the major topical areas and a rather broad perspective of the economic and social issues of the times. A similar pattern emerges for the years 1971-1989. Note, however, a decline in the emphasis on commercial agricultural policy and a significant increase in the emphasis on resource policy including human and natural resources. Program topics of the forty-year history of the policy conferences support the observation that public issues are

solved only temporarily. Circumstances change, issues are recycled and new solutions emerge. It is a revolving evolutionary process.

**TABLE I. MAJOR TOPICS ON NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION CONFERENCE PROGRAMS**

| Topic Heading and Issues                         | Number of Times |           |
|--|-----------------|-----------|
|  | 1951-70         | 1971-90   |
| <b>COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURAL POLICY</b>            |                 |           |
| Production, Wheat, Cotton, Feed Grains           | 6               | 1         |
| Price and Income Support, Effectiveness          | 6               | 3         |
| Marketing Systems, Agreements                    | 2               | 2         |
| Structure of Agriculture                         | 2               | 4         |
| Research   | 1               | 1         |
| Subtotal   | 17              | 11        |
| <b>POLICY EDUCATION</b>                          |                 |           |
| Methods, Effectiveness, Programs                 | 9               | 11        |
| Role: University, Extension, Land Grant          | 4               | 3         |
| Political Process                                | 2               | 6         |
| Subtotal   | 15              | 20        |
| <b>INTERNATIONAL ISSUES</b>                      |                 |           |
| Agricultural Trade, Aid                          | 6               | 6         |
| Foreign Policy: Role, Issues, Alternatives       | 4               | 2         |
| International Affairs, Food Needs                | 4               | 3         |
| Subtotal   | 14              | 11        |
| <b>DOMESTIC ECONOMY</b>                          |                 |           |
| Agriculture and the Economy, Growth, Development | 6               | 4         |
| Taxes: Budget, Services, State and Local         | 3               | 3         |
| Inflation  | 2               | 1         |
| Social Security                                  | 2               | 1         |
| Emerging Policy Issues for the Next Decade       | 1               | 2         |
| Subtotal   | 14              | 11        |
| <b>RESOURCES</b>                                 |                 |           |
| Water Problems, Land Use                         | 2               | 7         |
| Role of Rural Development                        | 2               | 5         |
| Human Resource Development                       | 2               | 2         |
| Changing Structure of American Society           | 2               | 2         |
| Environment and Quality of Life                  | 1               | 7         |
| Subtotal   | 9               | 23        |
| <b>LOW INCOME ISSUES</b>                         |                 |           |
| Rural Poverty                                    | 3               | 1         |
| Family Income Support, Maintenance               | 2               | 3         |
| Subtotal   | 5               | 4         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                     | <b>74</b>       | <b>80</b> |

## **Educational Programs Initiated by National Committee**

The very first effort of the National Committee to prepare a set of educational materials to be used nationwide started in 1959. The thirteen leaflets entitled *The Farm Problem Identified: What Are the Choices?* discussing the pertinent alternatives-consequences was published in early 1960. Agricultural policy was a major issue in the presidential election that year. The publication was well-received and widely-distributed and was used extensively by farm leaders, educators, political candidates and others involved in the issues of the day.

The training and experience of a nucleus of agricultural economists in conducting educational programs on highly controversial subject matter was very fortunate. The very political and hotly contested wheat referendum was held in 1963. Almost all of the participants in the annual conferences were heavily involved in their state educational programs. Most were under much pressure — political and otherwise. The vote was on the adoption or rejection of mandatory supply management. The “no” vote won. As a result, a major turning point in agricultural policy resulted. Voluntary market-oriented programs were initiated and continue with variations to this day.

The major impact of the leaflets and the wheat referendum was that agricultural policy became less political and less controversial. Interest in agricultural production policy and price and income policy by both research and extension economists declined substantially. By the late 1960s, agricultural policy was on the “back burner.” The annual program of the National Committee in the late 1960s placed greater emphasis on foreign trade and aid, international relations, low income of rural people and various resource issues.

The long standing interest in foreign affairs and trade on the annual program of the National Committee resulted in study tours in 1959, 1964, 1968 and 1977. The study tours were sponsored by the National Committee on Agricultural Policy (later NPPEC) in cooperation with the ECOP, ES-USDA and the Foreign Agricultural Service. The purpose was to further train ten to twelve participating state extension specialists on each of the three or four study tours to various regions of the world. Upon their return the specialists felt more comfortable in expanding their educational efforts on foreign affairs and trade issues.

In 1962, six leaflets entitled *World Trade: What Are the Issues?* were published. In 1968, six leaflets, *Agricultural Trade Policies: What Are the Choices?* were made available for nationwide use. The 1962 leaflets were largely descriptive with such titles as “Why Trade?”, “Balance of Payments,” “Reciprocal Trade Agreements,” “European Common Market,” “Food for Peace” and “Can Exports Solve the Farm Problem?” The second set emphasized various trade alternatives and their consequences. NPPEC Publication #6, *Speaking of Trade: Its Effect on Agriculture*, was published in 1978 after a study team completed its tour. For those of us involved in foreign trade policy education pro-

grams, these leaflets were invaluable tools. The increasing sophistication of our audiences during the 1960s, 70s and 80s has been very noticeable.

In 1969, a series of ten leaflets was released entitled, *People and Income in Rural America: What Are the Choices?* The leaflets identified the rural problems of low-income, nonfarm people as well as the low-resource/low-income people in the farming sector and addressed some of the alternative solutions and their probable consequences.

The next major output was the basebook, *Who Will Control U.S. Agriculture? Policies Affecting the Organizational Structure of U.S. Agriculture*, published in 1972. The North Central Public Policy Education Committee, supported by the ES-USDA, initiated the project. The basebook approach provided in-depth background information useful to people involved in both extension and research. The National Public Policy Education Committee "came on board" for the 1973 publication of the leaflets written for use by extension faculty with lay audiences and in conducting the six conferences held in each of the four regions of the United States. Many states organized extensive educational programs using the six leaflets published under the provocative title *Who Will Control U.S. Agriculture?* The leaflets offered five alternative organizational scenarios of U.S. agriculture.

The "Who Will Control" educational project was influential in triggering much interest in the structure of U.S. agriculture among farm organization leaders, agribusinessmen, farmers and other lay leaders. In particular, the project triggered a substantial amount of both economic and social issue research by personnel in the USDA Economic Research Service and by personnel in universities. The basebook received AAEA's 1973 Quality of Communication Award.

A pioneering multi-disciplinary project on food policy was initiated by the NPPEC in 1974 with the support of the ES-USDA. The publication was entitled *Your Food: A Food Policy Basebook*. The authors included a consumer economics specialist, sociologist, nutritionist, microbiologist, political scientist and agricultural economists interested in marketing, international development and policy. The basebook was written for educators and leaders of lay organizations. A series of six leaflets was prepared for use with local lay audiences. Teaching materials, including overheads with narrative and slide tape sets, were prepared for distribution to states.

One major achievement was the interdisciplinary nature of the program and the state teaching teams. The program was a major attraction to nontraditional extension audiences. Formal and informal evaluations, conducted by many states, were generally very favorable. The 1976 revised edition of the basebook was the recipient of AAEA's 1977 Quality of Communication Award.

Throughout the remaining years of the 70s and the decade of the 80s, the National Committee helped parent numerous projects and publica-



tions. Included (but not inclusive) were (1) *Marketing Alternatives for Agriculture: Is There a Better Way?* (2) *Farm and Food System in Transition*, (3) *Federal Marketing Programs in Agriculture: Issues and Options*, (4) *Policy Choices for a Changing Agriculture*, (5) *Canadian/U.S. Trade Issues*, (6) *Farm Credit Crisis Policy Options and Consequences* and (7) *Vitalizing Rural America*.

Simultaneously the regional committees were undertaking a wealth of projects. The record shows that the project and publication output of the regional committees increased in recent years while that of the National Committee reached a plateau and leveled off. Of course, the work of the National Committee and regional committees has been complimentary and the genesis and production of ideas and projects is blurred.

Throughout the forty-year history, a network of extension specialists in all fifty states has been established. Numerous known and unknown educational projects have spun off from this network. An evolving mentoring process occurs, impossible to measure, but clearly impacting the quantity and quality of extension public policy education.

There is a long history of developing educational materials and surveying farmers as farm bills come up for renewal. Extensive materials were developed in 1977, 1981, 1985 and 1990, for example. The record documents the impact of these efforts on the policy making process, that is, use by farm organizations in position development and by extension educators in policy seminars, Congressional testimony and consultation with farm leaders, Congressional staff, etc.

An activity given close attention by the National Committee from the early days that has had a "foundation building effect" is training in public policy education methodology not only at National Policy Conferences for specialists, but at summer and winter schools for agents. The National Committee, Farm Foundation, ES-USDA and state Cooperative Extension Services have provided guidance and financing for schools over the years at Colorado State, Arizona, Wisconsin, North Carolina State and Minnesota. In 1976, the National Committee appointed an Agent Training Subcommittee which recommended extensive training and support for instructor stipends and scholarships. Training included generic methodology, but also encompassed specific issue training in agriculture policy and later at the Minnesota school a course was designed specifically for home economists interested in public policy education.

### Conclusion

What have we accomplished? First, a body of thought, a subsience (perhaps an art form is more accurate terminology) has been developed called public policy education. Second, a tested and accepted methodology has been perfected — the alternatives/consequences approach. In this approach, facts, myths and values are separated and

their roles in the policy making process are more clearly understood. Objectivity is a goal for an extension public policy educator. Third, Jefferson's dream of an educated citizenry governing itself has been enhanced. Fourth, a camaraderie, a spirit of fraternity, has been developed among extension policy educators and broadened from a few agricultural economists at 1862 institutions to include 1890 institutions and home economists. We have learned from each other. But, this still doesn't succinctly answer the question. We are a unique outfit. We thrive primarily because of the wisdom and generosity of the Farm Foundation. And since inception of the National Policy Conference in 1951, the proceedings have been published and distributed to every County Extension Office in the United States under the title *Increasing Understanding of Public Problems and Policies*. What have we accomplished? Increased understanding!