

THE ROLE OF EXTENSION IN POLICY EDUCATION

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CHANGING ROLE OF EXTENSION

During the past two years I have been interested in the tremendous volume of written and spoken words concerning the changing role of Extension. Here are titles of a few articles appearing in the press or talks presented at state conferences, professional meetings, or other places during this period: "Is the Role of the Extension Specialist (County Agent or Home Agent) Changing?" "Extension Education in Transition," "Modernizing Extension," "Extension's Role in a Changing Agriculture," "Whither Extension," and "Is Extension Due for Some Changes?"

This introspection and questioning has been very healthy. It indicates that Extension is well aware of the tremendous technological and sociological revolution about us, and sees the need for adjusting to unparalleled change.

Let us look for a moment at what has happened in recent years to cause this perplexing situation. We might ask ourselves the most basic questions of all: Why do we have a Cooperative Extension Service today? What motivated the formation of this organization almost fifty years ago?

If we examine the Congressional debate leading to the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, we find that Congress was quite sympathetic to agriculture and its problems at that time. This was understandable. A majority of our people lived in rural areas. Farmers and their families were faced with many unique problems. Farmers needed help in acquiring the results of research — to become more efficient and productive. Rural homemakers had special problems — isolation, lack of conveniences, and need for greater self-sufficiency. Young people in rural areas also had some special problems because of lack of opportunities comparable to those for urban youth.

Our nation had great resources for agricultural development, and the debate of the Smith-Lever Act revealed a strong feeling on the part of Congressional leaders that a program of informal and practical education was greatly needed to contribute to this development. It was readily recognized that such a program of education would benefit all the people, not just the farmer. Let me quote from the comments

of Congressman Adolph Sabbath of Illinois during the debate:

I am satisfied that not only will this law be of great aid and benefit to the farming communities of our Nation, but it must of necessity be of incalculable benefit to all the people of our land, including the great masses who reside in our large cities. Anything that tends to reduce the cost of production of our food supply, and anything that tends to improve farm conditions redounds to the advantage of all the people in this country.

We might say, therefore, that Extension was created to provide an educational program which would contribute to the development of our nation's abundant agricultural resources and to the solution of some of the important economic and social problems confronting a large segment of our population at that time.

I am sure that everyone would agree that the original objectives for which Extension was created have been fulfilled in admirable fashion.

We are all aware of a great revolution in agriculture in recent years, resulting from the adoption of new technology by the American farmer. Coincident with this has been a reduction in the labor force necessary to produce our food and fiber — from 42 percent in 1890 to less than 10 percent of the labor force today. We are also aware of the fact that the specific problems of rural homemakers and youth with which Extension was originally concerned no longer exist. Extension can claim much credit for the elimination of these problems.

Today, the farmer and his family — the people in rural communities — face much different and in every respect more complex problems than those confronting them fifty years ago. Extension's basic responsibility remains the same — that of providing a dynamic program of education for action aimed at helping our people deal with their important economic and social problems. However, Extension has a much greater challenge — a much greater opportunity for service to the American people today than it has ever had.

CHANGING PROBLEMS

Farm people find their relationships changing in the local community as many metropolitan areas expand into the suburbs and, more recently, beyond the suburbs in the form of interspersing rural nonfarm families among the farm people. We no longer have a farm-city relationship with easily identifiable boundaries. We no longer have schools of farm children and schools of urban youth. Our tax structure is no longer based upon the urban community as contrasted with the farm community. The county agent and the specialist have

calls for assistance from both groups on problems that concern both the farm and the rural nonfarm, as well as the urban.

Just as agriculture has contributed to national economic growth, the U. S. has contributed to world economic growth. In the struggle between the free world and communism, the U. S. must continue and even step up its contribution to economic growth, particularly in under-developed countries.

Just as the local community has become more complex, the role of agriculture in U. S. foreign policy is changing and becoming more complex. The sale of agricultural products for local currency under Public Law 480 has helped many countries, both in meeting serious food shortages, and in contributing to development. As you know, countries borrow part of the P. L. 480 funds back for development purposes. At the same time this has made more difficult the expansion of export markets of developing countries as they seek ways of improving their foreign exchange position.

The U. S. wheat farmer, through our government, has joined with other wheat producing countries and worked out the International Wheat Agreement. The U. S. has also been asked to participate in working out details of an international coffee agreement.

Yes, we have a leadership role in the world, and most of the world recognizes the importance of our performing this function adroitly. It is important that our citizens understand these complex situations.

SCOPE OF THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAM

The need for and scope of public affairs education is, obviously, as broad as the problems of the people who have to deal with those affairs. To better set the stage, let us look at the major problems—broad national issues, complex local issues, and vital international questions—particularly those which relate to the problems of agriculture.

NATIONAL. The farm problem—the farm program—the need for agricultural adjustment—is the area in which you have concentrated most of your efforts in the past. The Farm Foundation has been immeasurably helpful, in sponsoring these annual workshops and in providing constant leadership. The Iowa Center for Agricultural and Economic Adjustment has been instrumental in sharpening our thinking on the adjustment issues. The 13 leaflets on “The Farm Problem—What Are the Choices?” now provide us with good subject matter material on the farm program issue. The North Carolina Policy Institute, as it concentrates in the South, will be making a vital contribution to our total program. The stepped-up emphasis on economic growth,

rural areas development, retraining, etc., of this administration will raise new issues on which educational programs will need to be developed.

Rural Areas Development, community economic growth, and agricultural adjustment are closely related. For those who would question Extension's involvement in developmental efforts outside of agriculture, the obvious answer is found in the fact that a basic objective of RAD is dealing with problems of agricultural adjustment. From the standpoint of solving these problems, the development of employment opportunities for rural people outside of agriculture is a means to an end as well as an end in itself.

A consideration of various types of legislation affecting agriculture will continue to require our best efforts. The broadened scope of extension work makes it our responsibility to provide educational assistance on such issues as monetary and fiscal policies, and policy in the areas of manpower, education, conservation, parks and recreation, and many other problem areas of concern to farm and rural people. Congress is concerned today, more than ever before, with the problem of water. California passed a billion and a half dollar water bond issue last year. Michigan and Pennsylvania have both encountered water policy problems. Land and water policies will be increasingly important national issues that will need your attention in the future.

LOCAL. In a few of the states you have begun to develop educational programs on complex local issues. The urban sprawl and the interspersing of rural nonfarm with farm people will step up the demands in this area quite rapidly. In the past ten years, according to the census, the population in the average standard metropolitan area has increased by 1.5 percent within the city itself, 44 percent in the suburbs, 120 percent in the county outside the suburbs in which the city is located, and 42 percent in the thirty-mile radius or the counties immediately adjoining the county in which the city is located.

Suburbia, the "bedroom" community, where it is not a part of the city itself, will fast encounter the problem of adequacy of the tax base. The rural areas outside the suburbs, with the rapid infiltration of nonfarm families, are encountering school problems which call for a change in the tax structure or in the school organization system, combined with the city and its industry tax base. Location of schools, shopping centers, churches, parks, and other community service facilities will be important to the citizens of this total community.

Adequate planning and zoning and early acquisition of land needed for public purposes will help assure efficient use of the tax dollar. Educational programs concerning these issues will be new in many

states, but they will be no less important to Extension's farm clientele—its total clientele for that matter—than many of the national issues.

INTERNATIONAL. We need only to mention Berlin, Cuba, and now Brazil to make us realize the concern of the U. S. citizen in world affairs. Foreign trade and policies related to agriculture are important, but we need to expand our programs to include many broad international dimensions of foreign affairs. Expanded foreign trade, P. L. 480, Food for Peace, and foreign relief programs all make important contributions toward the solution of the farm problem. Trade negotiations under GATT (General Agreement for Tariff and Trade) become increasingly important with the development of the European Common Market, and the expansion of that program to include England, possibly to be followed by inclusion of the other six of the "Outer Seven." A question now being raised is, "When will we bridge the ocean to include the U. S. in this trade organization?" Steps have been taken to formalize our role in the OEEC (Organization for European Economic Cooperation). Could this be a first step in the U. S. becoming a part of the Common Market program? Where does the Latin American Common Market fit into this picture?

These questions are all important to the American farmer, but they are just as important to American society. These questions can be important in the continuing struggle with communism. Our challenge in this area is not new. We have made a successful beginning in our preparation for handling it, but the job is much bigger than our present ability or manpower is able to handle.

The charter is ours, the scope is broad, the challenge is great. But in you, Extension has the nucleus for carrying out an extremely important function in this area of public affairs education.

TOOLING UP FOR THE NEW MODEL

Extension's basic mission has always been to provide a dynamic program of education for action to meet the important social and economic problems confronting us.

Public policy decisions are deeply involved in all such problems. The guidelines to our Scope report, which many of you helped prepare, states clearly: "There can be no question of Extension's responsibilities in public affairs. The legal mandate is implicit—reinforced by insistent demands of people for help in understanding public problems." It is also clear that all the Extension staff faces these problems and that the Scope report was outlining a challenge to the entire staff.

I am sure you see in public affairs a very broad and complicated field of problems that sometimes baffle you and make you wonder

where to start. It must look even more complicated and baffling to the agents and other extension workers, who are not as versed in public affairs as you.

You as public affairs specialists and leaders have the most important challenge of leading the total extension effort, of stimulating and training and guiding the agents and other specialists. This, to me, is a challenge of calling on competencies wherever you can find them, of assembling and sorting facts as well as preparing needed educational material. Many times you have an in-service training job of helping the rest of the staff better understand the issues involved and the alternatives. You may have to help them decide where to start, suggest methods, and help them analyze audiences, and aim their efforts more specifically at those audiences.

We have done a lot of public affairs education in farm and other forums, in short courses and special meetings. We have made some good beginnings on self-administered discussion groups that could become much more widespread. I wonder seriously, if we have done enough with opinion leaders, whom we can reach through regular letters and other ways.

Many of these opinion leaders we will find among the editors and broadcasters who manage our tremendous mass media channels. Mass media can help extend our public affairs meetings and forums to wider audiences. Where we need wide discussion of broad public interest we must encourage fullest use of the mass audience outlets, as a part of the total educational program.

Some states are more important, agriculturally, than others, but all states have a stake in sound farm policy legislation. We should realize by now that legislation seldom occurs at a "convenient" time—convenient in that it occurs well before farmers' decisions and action are necessary, convenient in that the necessary educational work does not conflict with another project underway. Is it not of basic importance that people be informed on public issues *before* they reach the legislative stage if possible? Otherwise, it may be difficult to provide enlightened guidance to legislative bodies considering such issues.

How well were we equipped to do an adequate job when the feed grain legislation was passed last spring—when the Agricultural Act of 1961 was passed? Did we provide the people with the information they needed when the Omnibus Bill was before Congress? We saw the good work many states did, and we know of your great interest in doing this job. Can we meet future demands?

Marketing agreements and orders will receive increasing emphasis. Your program this week reflects your awareness of this. How well do

your farmers know the mechanics of such programs? How well do your urban people understand the effect of such programs on them? What are the economic implications of a turkey marketing order? Extension will have the responsibility for informing the people of the nature and significance of marketing orders.

With 30 to 50 percent of the production of our wheat, cotton, and tobacco moving into export markets, conditions in these markets should figure prominently in farmers' decisions. U. S. foreign trade policies have an impact on the farmers' economic condition in the states producing these commodities.

Twenty-one of you had the privilege of gaining better first-hand knowledge of market conditions in many of the other more important countries. You learned that the political and economic stability of these countries were important factors in developing satisfactory trade relations. I hope that more of you can have similar experiences in the future.

In all states your people are concerned about the future of Berlin, Cuba, Brazil, and other trouble spots in the world. All of these problems have important agricultural implications.

This is a good time to take a hard look at Extension's program in policy education. To do this each state should decide the objectives it should strive to achieve in providing an adequate educational program.

The next step is to inventory the resources necessary to do the job. It has been said that for a person to do an adequate job in public affairs education he should be trained and competent in the disciplines of: economics, sociology, psychology, political science, local government, law, and logic. Most of us would fall short in some of these, but then no one person could perform the necessary work load anyway. We must explore ways of "tapping" the talents of other resource groups. We might:

1. Develop and use personnel from other disciplinary groups within Extension. Many have direct or indirect interest in public affairs education.
2. Enlist the help of other resource people on the university staff that might be available part time for special jobs.
3. Make use of representatives of other state or federal agencies, to treat specific subjects, such as taxation or school reorganization.

If this recruiting of resources is approached in a cooperative manner, you may be surprised at the amount of assistance available.

These “other resource people” must be interested in your program. Also, they must be able to see where cooperating will strengthen their own work and increase their effectiveness. Providing them with a ready-made audience interested in finding the best solution to a problem in the resource person’s area should make this easy. Several of the states have had considerable success with this kind of recruiting.

FEDERAL EXTENSION SERVICE CHALLENGE

We in the FES (Federal Extension Service) recognize that if we are to provide adequate service for such an expanded program as envisioned here, some changes will need to be made in our organizational operations. We recognize our responsibility for leadership in this area and are hopefully exploring ways of increasing our effectiveness in assisting the states in their program efforts.

Of course, the major job has to be done by you in the states. Our mission will be to serve you in whatever manner we can be most helpful.

Perhaps we can be of assistance in the preparation of certain materials—particularly on national and international issues. We might assist in the organization of regional or national workshops in specific areas—drawing on the most competent resource people available to “service” these workshops. Then we can provide staff specialists in the various fields to work with state personnel in planning and conducting effective programs. In order to serve this need we in FES must broaden our base in program leadership.

We realize that this is a big order, but if Extension is to do an adequate over-all job in policy education, we in FES must get geared up to provide the assistance which you need to get the job done. We shall count heavily on your advice and counsel as we move ahead.

EXTENSION’S CHALLENGE IN THE STATES

As you already realize, a broad program of public affairs education such as we are discussing will not be an easy undertaking. We know that certain risks are involved—that in carrying out such a program we will inevitably be subjected to criticism, particularly from those who fail to appreciate the significant contributions these efforts can make to the fulfillment of our major over-all mission of serving American agriculture.

Some, for example, were very critical of Extension last spring for carrying on an aggressive educational effort in connection with the feed grain program. They felt that this was not an appropriate activity for Extension.

Obviously a farmer's income could have been affected far more by decisions concerning his participation in the feed grain program than by his choice of hybrid corn or the amount of nitrogen he might apply to his crop. It was just as important that he have the basis for making sound decisions on these program alternatives as his agronomic practices. No one is better equipped to give him assistance in making these decisions than Extension.

Many of these programs will present challenges to our skills as objective educators as we attempt to present all sides of issues, free of personal bias and judgment. Such an approach will be completely foreign to some of our personnel.

I was told of a staff discussion in one state last spring as plans were made to do some educational work on the Omnibus Farm Bill. One of the oldest, most effective, and respected county agents in this state was indignant when told that he was not to advise a farmer whether he should support or oppose this measure. He pointed out that he had been giving recommendations to farmers all his life and he saw no reason why this situation should be any different. (Such an attitude on the part of some county agents undoubtedly explains why things were so lively around our office in Washington last spring when Extension was alternately accused of favoring or opposing this legislation).

Irrespective of some of these hazards and difficulties, I am convinced that Extension must assert positive and aggressive leadership in developing and carrying out broad programs in public affairs education—particularly in those areas which relate to some of the major adjustment problems in agriculture. Such programs can make very significant contributions to the further economic and social improvement of our people.

There is no substitute in a democracy for an enlightened citizenry. Extension can render one of its greatest services if it will contribute further to this enlightenment as we help people deal with the broad problems confronting them today.