

# ENERGY POLICY WORKSHOP

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Most participants were concerned about how extension and research personnel can deal with large and complex issues like the "energy crisis." Questions raised by the participants reflected these kinds of concerns as well as those specifically relating to energy.

A basic problem is the difficulty of communicating with the general public about issues such as energy, land use, etc., until such issues affect their lives. Yet, the need for research and education on dormant issues could be just as important as on hot issues. In the 1960's, new funds could be obtained when new problems arose. Now we have to determine how existing extension and research funds can be reallocated to give priority where needed to large and complex policy issues—especially before they become critical. The energy crisis received little attention before it became critical. Participants noted that many private research firms are now undertaking much of the energy research due to the flexibility they have in financing and personnel allocation.

Some states have set aside special funds for energy research. This may allow the land-grant institutions in those states to take leadership in some critical areas. This type of funding, however, does not solve the problem for dormant policy issues which may need substantial attention but may be too controversial for public funding.

There are definite perils for the extension educator when he becomes involved in these sorts of issues. The "facts" may just not be available, or many different groups may have their own facts. Such is the case with energy industries, consumers, and environmentalists regarding the energy issue. "Policy educators" are increasingly being asked to deal with problems in which they have no expertise and where "facts" may not be obtainable. Under these conditions it appears almost impossible to set forth clear public policy alternatives as was done with agricultural programs in the 1950's and 1960's.

It is increasingly necessary for policy educators who do not have specific expertise in a broad problem area to be able to draw on outside sources, often from other disciplines. Yet, even within the university, such help may be impossible to obtain without consulting fees or some reciprocal arrangement. The extension

educator may often have to become something of a specialist himself if he is to be effective. The participants were also concerned with the problem of involving the extension staff with such diverse interests in new fields.

After reviewing the experiences in several states, the participants agreed that a number of these problems must be resolved if policy educators are to cope with the new policy issues. A substantial research effort is needed if policy educators are to give a balanced presentation of the "facts" and let the public make the decisions.