A DIRECTOR LOOKS AT AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT AT STATE AND COUNTY LEVELS

Marvin A. Anderson, Associate Director
Agricultural Extension Service
Iowa State College

I presume I was invited to speak on the topic assigned because in my state we have taken formal steps to commit ourselves to research and educational efforts specifically aimed at problems of agricultural adjustment.

I cannot give you a blueprint for such a program—only a few generalizations, for the stuff of which these programs are made is people. The subject matter is the pressures of today and the hopes for tomorrow.

I think it may be helpful to review briefly the numerous activities that have contributed to our thinking on agricultural adjustment education at the state and county level.

The foundation of the effort was a public affairs program, which provided understanding and strength among lay leaders in the state. The sharp drop in hog prices and farmers' income in Iowa in 1955 brought a sense of emergency and pointed up the need for effective educational leadership. As I look back, we floundered in deciding specifically what to do. Our reaction was that we should suggest to farmers that they tighten their belts by reducing costs, and market their hogs at lighter weights.

Your group will recall Richard Stevens' report last year on a letter from a group of farmers in the state suggesting that the college's efforts be reoriented or redirected giving specific attention to resource adjustment, market stimulation, and certain short-run programs that would assist the adjustment efforts in Iowa. The steps that followed were:

1. An agricultural adjustment seminar was conducted on the campus of Iowa State College, with assistance from extension, research, and teaching. As a result of this seminar three basebooks for agricultural adjustment in Iowa were published and have been distributed widely throughout the United States.

2. Our own State Extension Advisory Committee, meeting at the time the seminar was in progress, urged that we provide aggressive leadership in the adjustment program in Iowa. With the help of this

advisory committee, our extension administration met with the governing bodies of our county extension units in the state to discuss changes and the social and economic growth opportunities in our state. One thousand of the 1,600 extension council members participated in 12 district meetings.

3. In-service training was provided for our own extension staff at district conferences and at a central staff workshop. Here, the ideas discussed at the seminar were amplified and extended to those who did not participate in the seminar.

Thus, with the training of extension staff workers and meetings with the State Extension Advisory Committee and extension councils, the stage was set for a response to our county extension program.

4. Late last year we approached the idea of an intensified, broad-scale program beamed to all Iowans to help them see and meet the challenge of change. This was accomplished by a multi-pronged educational effort, using discussion fact sheets, mass media (TV, press, and radio), and voluntary discussion groups over the state. In addition, prior to the "Challenge to Iowa" effort, the county staff were equipped with visual materials and aids to bring the story of change and its implications to the many groups in their counties. State-wide reception was good, with 1,300 meetings for 40,000 people conducted by extension personnel.

The "Challenge to Iowa" effort resulted in the distribution of some 32,000 fact sheets which were used in 1,500 classes or discussion groups, plus 8,000 individuals or farm families. This was supported by seven TV stations carrying six programs of 30 minutes each, 27 radio stations carrying 15-minute tape recordings, and 197 weekly newspapers giving editorial support. The six themes in this "Challenge to Iowa" program carried through the fact sheets and the various media were as follows:

"1858 to 1958—A Century of Change"
"Growing with a Changing World"
"Facing Change in Iowa"
"Building Agriculture for Modern Needs"
"Building Iowa Communities for Tomorrow"
"Families in Iowa's Tomorrow"

PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS ON AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Agricultural adjustment is part of the whole process of adjustment in modern society—and does not operate in a separate "agricultural" compartment. When one large segment of the economic community lags

behind the others, this robs the whole society of some benefits of economic and social growth. Any deterioration of the favorable climate for technological discoveries could injure our programs in the short run, and in the long run strike at the heart of economic and social advancement in our nation and perhaps in the entire world.

I am confident that extension directors are universally aware of the situation. But readiness to tackle adjustment programs is not yet universal. This is understandable, for the decisions that individuals and families will make in this area tap a vast and intricate complex of economic, social, and psychological factors. This is, to put it simply, a "sticky" area of work. We can see that this may lead us down paths that many of us have previously avoided. This work leads us into the valleys of tradition, through the tangled undergrowth of values, across the pastures where sacred cows graze, past hidden places where sleeping dogs lie, up the mountains that habit built, along treacherous ledges of custom.

Some administrators are reluctant to move in this area because they genuinely question the ability of their institutions to make the inside adjustments needed.

Educational programs on agricultural adjustment involve all of the major areas of the director's job. Such programs raise perplexing questions about allocation of the institution's limited resources. We cannot expect to undertake a program of this kind with brand new resources earmarked for this purpose. We must sort out those areas where resources, personnel as well as finances, can be diverted. Equally important is identifying those areas where resources should not be disturbed. For our concern is not solely adjustment, but social and economic growth.

A second major problem is programs. What priorities must be changed? What recent programs must be short-circuited? What established programs can, should, or must be discontinued?

A third critical area is training of present and future staff members. What are the special needs of a staff committed to adjustment programs? Can a staff trained and experienced in different emphases make the necessary changes? Can we, in fact, effectively coordinate and integrate the many disciplines so that they can be focused on the significant problems that people face?

These are only a few of the problems that a director faces in considering an energetic program on agricultural adjustment. But this is his problem, not yours. The point I want to make is that you must have patience. You can be of great value in helping the administrator understand the problems of agricultural adjustment. You can also help

him see some of the internal problems. You have no doubt noted that time—you have called it indecision or even less flattering terms—is one of the administrator's pet techniques. It is his great ally. Things that cannot be done at one time, can be done at another time.

The kind of program that public affairs specialists consider capable of achieving worthwhile adjustments demands a kind of positive leadership. Some of you may have read John Garner's recent book on "The Pursuit of Excellence," which treats some of the institutional needs that have relevance here. Particularly critical to the director's role in such a program as this is keeping the focus on the genius and capacity of the individual and at the same time maintaining an institutional atmosphere conducive to true creativeness and growth. This type of leadership is infinitely more difficult to provide than either authoritarian commanding and directing or the free-floating acquiescence of laissez faire. Also, staff and public support for this type of leadership is more difficult to maintain. However, as I read the signs of change in the Extension Service, I feel hopeful that we are headed toward this orientation of leadership.

CONSIDERATIONS AT THE COUNTY LEVEL

As in all extension programs, the county level is the crucial level. Not only is this the point of maximum saturation for the subject matter we may be communicating. It is also the point at which influential individuals and groups wield the greatest legitimizing power over our program. Without this legitimacy, the most magnificent of programs would be as the chaff before the wind.

I hope I am wrong in this generalized observation, but I feel economists too frequently underrate the county staff's capacity to handle material related to economics. I will agree with your reluctance to entrust them with matters involving difficult fundamental economic concepts and principles. However, we have found Iowa county staffs both ready and able to take the lead on educational programs dealing with social and economic change. I have at the same time observed a response from the local people that reflects confidence in the county staff unlike any associated with efforts to extend technical facts. They need tools, teaching aids, and most of all, ideas. The quality of the educational job they do will depend largely on the kind of help you give them. They can be trained and equipped and given the confidence necessary to spread the benefits of your deeper insights far beyond what you alone or perhaps beyond what you and ten others like you can as state specialists in this area. Meeting this need is one of the most effective ways to use your special talents.

We believe that educators can make an important contribution toward change and still maintain the philosophical chastity that democratic society demands. This contribution is in teaching the process of change. All of us are aware of the sociological advances in demonstrating the process of social change. If I may again cite our Iowa county staffs as substantiating evidence, I say definitely that the county workers can understand this process and develop the competence needed to deal with it in an educational setting.

In summarizing my views on the county level, let me re-emphasize two points: First, *don't* underrate the capacity of the county staff, second, *do* use your own skills and ingenuity to provide training, the ideas, and the tools that will equip the county staffs to work at their full capacity. This is, in my opinion, the most important job of education that you can do.

CONSIDERATIONS AT THE STATE LEVEL

Any major educational program on agricultural adjustment demands something new in methods. In the past, we have often used the group approach as a means of efficiency. An educator's efforts have been multiplied by gathering together 50 persons to hear a message. This message most often was directed, not to the group, but to the individual in the form of a generalized recommendation. And the result was almost exclusively an individual response. A man would or would not elect to adopt the practice.

Few individuals will be able to isolate themselves so that an adjustment response need not affect others. Most of the responses cannot even be made without both the acquiescence and complementary responses of others. Group education, in this context, is something different.

The subject matter of adjustment presents a great communication challenge in itself. It deals with symbols for action and thought, not with overt behavior. It is a complex matter of why, rather than the relatively simple what, when, and how. Agricultural adjustment must recognize and deal with the modern technology complexities of economic interrelationships, the many-faceted concepts of social relationships, the illusive variables of both conscious and unconscious psychological behavior.

We have all been criticized for failing to consider a farmer's total situation in our technological recommendations. I believe that some of these criticisms have been overdrawn, but our records are not completely unblemished in this area. If we are to undertake education on agricultural adjustment we cannot remain an institution of neatly

compartmented programs based upon neatly compartmented research and teaching disciplines. Ideally, I think, the research and teaching departments will remove false barriers around their disciplines. But they are likely to change more slowly than we in adult education programs. We are, historically, more sensitive to the needs of the people we serve, for we are in much closer contact with them. It is our opportunity, and our responsibility, to move boldly and quickly to put our houses in readiness for the immense task of adjustment if this is the road we choose. Some worthwhile trends of modernization in research and teaching may follow our lead.

These changes are not easy. The institutional habits of a hundred years are deep rooted. As a director, I see this problem of change within our ranks as one of the greatest challenges. Of this I am sure: Desired change will occur only through leadership, in its purest sense, and teamwork.

This, I think, presents you with one of your greatest challenges. You will be only human if you tend to look upon programs in agricultural adjustment with some proprietorship. This is the area you have been pushing and defending and pouring your energies into, the area you have often found hard to sell when the technological specialist has found ready-made audiences clamoring for his information and sympathetic administrative ears for his program needs. When the worm turns, as is true to some extent when a full-scale adjustment program is launched, your reaction may be, "Aha! the millennium—now watch my dust!" But you will, I am sure, resist this temptation.

SOME GUIDES FOR ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMING

In my state we have had what we consider some small success in our first year of real emphasis on adjustment. I cannot say which of many factors is truly the most important. But I am certain that at or near the top is the team approach. We had no prima donnas. Certainly, Wallace Ogg, Carl Malone, and Eber Eldridge filled leading and crucial roles in the planning and execution—but not as individual specialists, not even as a team of public affairs specialists. They were key members of an *educational team.* They worked side by side with supervisors, editors, and specialists from many fields, and with county workers. Each member, no matter how slight his formal grounding in economic theory or social processes, was a full-fledged strategist, contributor, and worker.

This team was able to build a program, rather than merely pursue segments of a specialist's master plan. This teamwork was without question the finest example of group endeavor that I have ever seen

in the Iowa Extension Service. You may be sure that we are taking all steps to preserve and improve this team approach as we continue to build our program in this area. I do not believe, however, that "group think" is a substitute for individual creativeness. Team effort is successful to the degree that each individual can respond to the challenge of problem solving.

In Iowa we have repeatedly urged our staff—both state and county —to see agricultural adjustment in its correct program perspective. Adjustment, we believe, is a reorientation in extension programming. It provides a different frame of reference for all of the work we do. It is moving forward together on a broader front.

This point of view carries many implications, some of them frightening. One implication, certainly, relates to the program development process. We prize highly in extension the real study by local people which sets our program priorities. Yet, traditionally, we have planned these programs around subject matter areas that pretty much conform to our subject matter departments. Program projection was an important step toward determining the needs for agricultural adjustment programs. However, you know better than I how difficult it will be for local program projection committees to cut through the fantastic complexities to find the real problems. Few of us are able to identify clearly the roots of a free-floating anxiety such as we experience ourselves when we get into situations we do not understand.

J. M. Gaus once wrote these words:

> There is a great deal of sentimental nonsense that gets spoken or published about the knowledge of the local community, its needs and resources by persons who happen to live there.

This is a pretty strong statement. But if it has ever had an application to the Extension Service, it might apply in adjustment program planning.

This in no way questions either the right or the ability of the local community leadership to make decisions. It questions only that local leaders can unaided collect the decision-making data. Does this have implications for you? I say that it most certainly has. Your success in developing awareness of fundamental issues and basic needs may well determine the effectiveness of adjustment programs. One of the critical needs is maintaining within the local community a corps of leaders who understand and support this great educational effort. These are the influentials who legitimize the work. They are unique and indispensable links in the communications chain by which influences are received and most persuasively transmitted to others.

I would like to call to your attention one final problem. This problem is not yours alone; in fact, the great rights of ownership probably rest with the director. The problem is this: In our institutions are capable persons of specialized abilities in certain fields of work, particularly in some limited phases of production technology. Such specialists often enjoy well earned status and prestige. Their potential role in an adjustment-oriented organization is not always obvious, and where it is obvious, it may not be attractive.

It seems to me that understanding among production specialists must develop in three or more ways:

1. An understanding of the consequences of agricultural surpluses on farm income.
2. A better notion of what an economic unit is in terms of the use of land, labor, capital, and management, so technological advances can be used to best advantage.
3. Reassurance that if adjustment can and does take place, more and more technology will and must be used.

When we consider the vastness of the challenge of adjustment education, our resources seem pitifully small. We cannot afford the luxury of wasting ability that can be brought into it. Yet, we must face the reality that we have some capable persons who do not see how they fit into the scheme of things. You can make an important contribution to program development by helping these persons to see their unique potentialities in this kind of program.

PART V

Agricultural Programs Around the World