

POLICY OPTIONS TO FACILITATE CAREER REORIENTATION

Ira Ellis
Maine Cooperative Extension Service
and
Theodore R. Alter
The Pennsylvania State University

The objectives of this workshop were twofold: (1) to discuss the career reorientation needs of people experiencing economic and social stress in agricultural and rural areas, and (2) to identify alternative, feasible policy options for effectively addressing these needs.

Workshop participants were provided with a bibliography of reading materials as an information base for this task. They were also provided with a set of possible policy options gleaned by the workshop leaders from the reading materials and from discussions with the authors of those materials.

The workshop opened with a viewing of a video tape featuring the Ag Action Center, a part of the Agriculture-in-Transition program, a joint venture of the Greater Nebraska Job Training Program and supporting agencies, including the Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service.

The definition of “dislocated worker,” as provided by Lynne E. Browne in a paper entitled, “Structural Change and Dislocated Workers,” was discussed. Browne offers the following definition:

Dislocated workers are individuals with established work histories who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own and who are likely to encounter considerable difficulty finding comparable employment. Such individuals are thought to have lost their jobs because the industries or occupations in which they worked are in long-term decline (p. 21).

Browne notes the following points regarding dislocated workers:

- “. . . dislocated workers are workers faced with the need to make a major change. How difficult this change will be depends, in large measure, upon the extent to which private sector em-

ployment practices and a variety of public sector policies recognize, or fail to recognize, the possibility of displacement (p. 27).”

- “Dislocated workers are not a new problem, not a rare problem, not a problem of a few readily identifiable industries. They are not an easy problem to solve. However, part of the solution must be to recognize the prevalence of the problem and to develop institutions, both private and public, based on an awareness that many workers will at some time be faced with the need for a major career change (p. 27).”

The following policy options for addressing career reorientation needs were outlined and discussed.

Short-term Policy Options

- Maintain and expand predislocation services to individuals and families who may be facing the possibility of dislocation.

Such services may include but not be limited to farm and ranch management assistance, financial evaluation and counseling, legal assistance counseling, employment placement services to identify supplemental income opportunities, equipment and labor cooperatives, and foreclosure moratoriums.

It is essential that predislocation services be maintained due to the fact that (1) many stressed individuals and families refuse to accept the fact that they will have to make a change, and (2) predislocation services are often the only means of helping stressed individuals and families accept reality.

- Develop a comprehensive set of interim dislocation services to assist individuals and families undergoing dislocated worker experiences.

Such services could include: personal counseling (stress and grief), vocational counseling (e.g., career exploration and assessment, identification of transferrable skills), and social support services (housing, food, medical, unemployment income, child care, transportation, and others) extended to include dislocated workers and their families.

- Offer a complement of career retraining and reorientation programs for dislocated workers and their families.

These programs could include but not be limited to: job seeking skills and job search assistance, retraining, and on-the-job training and work experience programs.

Long-term Policy Options

- Develop affordable programs offered by educational institutions adapted to the needs of dislocated workers and their families.

Primary and secondary schools, for example, might adjust programs to meet the needs of dislocated workers' children. Vocational technical schools, colleges and universities might directly address educational needs of dislocated workers and their families. A federal educational payments program, similar to the G.I. Bill program, might be developed for dislocated workers (Chamberlin).

- Conduct adequate rural labor market research for rural economic development.

Briggs makes the following observation regarding such research:

The need to establish a firm commitment to rural labor market research is too obvious to be belabored. All of the major issues confronting the urban economy—shifting industrial patterns; changing demographic characteristics of the labor supply; growing abuse of the nation's immigration system; increasing foreign competition and acceleration changes in the rate of technological change on both the production of goods and services and on the preparation of workers for jobs; and the growing unwillingness of the federal government to accept responsibility for the protection of workers from the harsh and cumulative effects of these happenings—are also buffeting the rural economy. But given the marked differences that exist between the two sectors, it is certain that they have not been affected in the same manner or degree. The burden has fallen heavier on the rural economy. An ongoing research program for rural economic development could provide the information needed to develop policy options.

- Identify and coordinate all state and federal programs and funds to focus on the needs of dislocated workers and their families.
- Examine federal policy and programs to determine their differential impacts on rural and urban areas. Establish federal policies that do not adversely discriminate against rural relative to urban economies and people.

- Encourage a societal change in the distribution of economic rewards, either in the labor market or by reform of the tax and transfer system (Burtless).

In discussion, workshop participants made the following observations regarding the array of policy options to facilitate career reorientation:

- Careful consideration should be given to the various levels of government as well as to which agencies and organizations are and should have a role in developing and implementing these policy options. It was suggested that a matrix format would be helpful in identifying various organizations (e.g., governments and their agencies, private sector entities, voluntary organizations, Cooperative Extension Service, farm families and perhaps others) and their respective roles in developing and implementing policy options for assisting dislocated workers and their families.
- Individual policy options will likely involve multiple levels of government and multiple agencies or organizations. Some levels of government or organizations may have solely a funding role, while others may have solely a program implementation role. In these circumstances, flexibility and cooperation among governments and organizations are keys to effective career reorientation policies.
- It is especially important to recognize the variation and diversity of the career reorientation needs of dislocated workers and their families from community to community, state to state and region to region. Accordingly, what is appropriate policy and the roles of those organizations involved in developing and implementing those policies will of necessity reflect this diversity. For example, policy options for local government will necessarily differ from community to community in response to the diversity of career reorientation needs.
- Career reorientation policy options for dislocated workers and their families cannot be viewed in isolation from policy issues inherent in the broad scope of society and the economy.

REFERENCES

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