

CONTROL OF AGRICULTURE—AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Harold D. Guither

Extension Economist, Public Policy

University of Illinois

You have heard about the educational product—the policy alternatives which could influence who will control U.S. agriculture. Now we will talk about a delivery system as part of the regional educational effort.

If the American public is to understand the complex interrelationships, the policies that guide and direct the production of food and natural fiber products, if they are to consider the economic, social, and political implications of the alternatives now in use and the possible future trends, if they are to register their feelings through their elected representatives and national policy makers, then the educational effort that lies ahead is one of major proportions. It is one that will require innovative methods and the involvement of the public policy extension workers in every state.

This project began in group discussion during a meeting of the North Central Public Policy Education Committee in December 1970. A subcommittee was appointed to examine the possibility of a regional publication effort in the area of policies affecting the structure of agriculture. The subcommittee, along with invited economists as resource persons, met at the University of Missouri in late January 1971 to outline the publication format.

The title “Who Will Control U.S. Agriculture?” was proposed for the publication. We agreed that this was one of the major issues—who was going to make the production and marketing decisions that would exert ultimate control over our food and fiber production system. In a few words, we wanted a brief title, but its purpose was to convey the major educational effort being developed to inform the agricultural industry, the general public, and policy makers of the alternative policies and structures influencing the organization of the nation’s food and fiber production system. We should not advocate or prognosticate. Our sole purpose is to educate.

The base report, North Central Regional Publication 32, “Who Will Control U.S. Agriculture?” was published at the University of Illinois in August 1972. Orders were received from forty-five states and the District of Columbia for 28,000 copies. The publica-

tion was reviewed in *Farm Journal* and *Successful Farming*. We consider this a teacher's manual for leaders, not for mass distribution.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

The policy discussions on the future structure of agriculture at the 1971 National Policy Education Conference stimulated further interest in this subject. Encouragement and support from federal extension staff members in Washington, the National Public Policy Education Committee, the Farm Foundation, and the North Central directors made possible the development of a specially funded two-year North Central regional project.

Leaflets

The special project advisory committee, which met in March 1972 to plan its program, selected a group of authors to assist in preparing a series of six leaflets dealing with alternative systems of organizing agricultural production. Following the introductory situation leaflet, these systems include individual operators, cooperatives, corporations, government, and a combination of these systems. These leaflets will be shorter and more concise than chapters in the base publication. We would envision them as more useful for farmer meetings and for more widespread educational efforts.

Conferences are being arranged with the major national farm organization leaders. They have received drafts of the leaflets and their comments and suggestions are also being solicited.

Educational Program Development

In past regional publication efforts, the delivery of the publication or leaflets to each state marked the end of regional team effort. In this project, some additional assistance in developing state educational programs is planned.

Multistate conferences are now scheduled to coincide with the release of the leaflets. The conferences are being planned as follows: For Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois, at Purdue on March 14-15; for Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, at St. Paul-Minneapolis on March 28-29; for Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri, at Kansas City on April 5-6. At a two-day program, state extension leaders and farm organization leaders will discuss the content of the leaflets and major policy issues involved. The purpose of these conferences will be educational only. No resolutions will be called for. No votes on particular issues will be taken.

By holding three meetings in the region, we hope that each North Central state university will be able to send five to ten of its staff members interested in this subject. The success of these meetings will depend upon each state also inviting and securing the attendance of farm leaders.

Through this interchange between professional economists and extension leaders and the leaders of each state's major farm and cooperative organizations, we hope to stimulate interest and open the door for further educational efforts in each state. Members of the farm press and other public media will also be invited.

The multistate meetings will be open to interested representatives of any state outside the North Central region. Or if another region would like to organize a similar meeting, members of the project advisory committee would be available to assist and participate if invited.

Supporting Educational Effort

An important part of any educational program is the information materials that will aid and stimulate the learning process. The base handbook is now available, and the leaflet series is in process.

Some other materials that could be developed and made available include: overhead visuals, slide sets that would reinforce the ideas in the base publication and leaflets, audio tapes featuring comment and remarks from authors of some of these materials, and program development guides based on early experiences of state policy specialists who use these materials. The final decision on the development of these supporting materials will depend much upon the needs that you as policy educators and others in your states express.

An innovative effort that has been proposed and that could develop would make a major segment of the agricultural producers and industry of the North Central states aware of the issues and alternatives. This proposal is the inclusion of a printed four-page or eight-page insert summary of the six leaflets in a spring issue of each state farm paper in the North Central region. *Prairie Farmer*, which owns *Wallaces Farmer* in Iowa and *Wisconsin Agriculturist*, has expressed strong interest. Another publisher, who owns *Ohio Farmer*, *Michigan Farmer*, *Missouri Ruralist*, and *Kansas Farmer*, and his editors would also be approached on carrying this insert. *The Farmer* at St. Paul covers Minnesota and the Dakotas. If *Nebraska Farmer* would also be willing, the insert appearing in nine state papers could reach a total circulation of about 1,370,000.

SUMMARY

The following summary indicates the broad involvement and the innovations in this regional approach to policy education.

Involvement

Those involved included the North Central Policy Education Committee, the subcommittee and collaborators, seventeen contributing authors to the handbook, and forty-five states and the U.S. Department of Agriculture as purchasers of the handbook.

Also included in the special project with multilateral support were the twelve authors and six additional advisers for the preparation of the six leaflets, which will be offered to all states.

Innovations

One innovation is review of the publications by state specialists and farm organization leaders in addition to the authors. Another innovation is the multistate conferences to be held in the spring of 1973 for extension leaders, farm leaders, and representatives of the public media. Additional teaching materials may also be developed for public policy education programs.

PART III

Rural Development

