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OUTCOME OF PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION

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Every educator in public policy, who has survived and retained a semblance of credibility, recognizes at least implicitly that no predetermined outcome of a public policy educational effort can be reasonably stated. For most of us, this does not create either a problem or concern. The educator in public policy rarely, if ever, has the luxury of even identifying (let alone measuring) impact. My experience suggests that among the successful efforts are those in which the educational recipients neither recognize nor admit that either extension or I was a significant factor.

Why the concern over outcomes of public policy education? There are two pressures that create this concern:

1. Demands for accountability and evaluation of programs supported with public funds.
2. Inclinations of program managers and administrators to ensure that education achieves the program objective.

Public policy educators must continually strive for methods to respond to and satisfy the first pressure and constantly resist and avoid the second. Accountability and evaluation are vital for continued support; they are also a significant input into our own program planning.

Thus, if making a more rational, more easily achieved decision by an educational recipient within that recipient's value system is the expected outcome of public policy education, our challenge as educators is to discover means of demonstrating relationships — perhaps not causal but at least associative.

Pressure to achieve program objectives through public policy education abounds in the relationships of public agencies with cooperative extension. From commodity programs to environmental quality, natural resource decisions and human nutrition, the common point of conflict arises over outcome expectations. The agency expectation — even demand — is for an outcome that achieves perceived mandates. The public policy educator must avoid any such

expectation. No matter what issues, it remains the prerogative of the educational recipient to make any selection appropriate to that recipient. Therefore, under any set of definitions, outcome for program managers and public policy educators are not the same.

The challenge for cooperative extension is to both articulate our educational methodology and its expectations and to effectively communicate with those whose expectations cannot be met with educational programs. Extension staff members have perhaps devoted too little effort in this direction — at least with agency and program people.

Further, each time one of us slips from objective methodology into advocate roles, the capacity to articulate and communicate is severely constrained. Thus a critical factor each of use must constantly address: have I been objective and neutral or have I allowed some implicit assumptions to impinge upon my efforts?

The outcome of public policy education must be effective democracy at work.