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Opening Remarks

In the fall of 1949 the Farm Foundation invited a group of Extension Directors and agricultural economists from the four major regions of the United States to discuss: (1) the status of educational work among rural groups in the field of public policy and (2) what the Farm Foundation might do to help extension economists prepare themselves to work more effectively in this important field. Administrators of agricultural research and extension have approved the general project and have appointed the representatives of their respective institutions as conferees of the national and regional meetings.

In January of 1950 agricultural economists from a large portion of the 48 states attended a meeting in Chicago to discuss the importance of educational work in the field of public policy and problems connected with such work. A number of sessions dealt not only with the content but also with methods of presenting specific questions in the field of public policy.

In the fall of 1950 four regional work conferences were held to stimulate interest in and to discuss the problems relating to extension work in public policy in the various states. Extension Directors as well as representative groups of county agents and others interested in the development of the field were invited.

In the fall of 1951 agricultural economists from 38 states attended a conference at Allerton Park, Illinois, to discuss both public policy subject matter and methods of presentation. Four working committees prepared and presented material regarding: (1) international affairs, (2) inflation, (3) agricultural production policy, and (4) interrelationships of agriculture and other segments of our national economy.

The National Committee has been concerned with ways of approaching public policy problems. Several methods may be used to present material for use by the farmer, and consideration should be given to where these methods fit.

One method is a presentation of facts and/or an explanation of programs which bear on policy issues but with no statement of issues or their implications.

Another method is the presentation of a position supported by sorting and assembling facts that justify the position. This

type of presentation is usually used for specific groups, such as farm organizations, labor organizations, pressure groups. Pros and cons may be considered, but in each case the speaker has taken a definite position.

A third method is an analysis and evaluation of public problems or policies based on established principles applied under stated or assumed conditions. The individual makes a judgment in light of his own values, and the answer depends upon the value judgment and the economic analysis.

A fourth method is the presentation of the problem and the alternative solutions and their implications leaving to the group audience the job of appraising the policies in the light of their own judgments. This method has received the general approval of extension workers in presenting policy problems to discussion groups.

At this conference consideration will be given to how these methods of presentation might be used in connection with the following subjects: (1) the farmer's stake in foreign trade, (2) taxes and the federal budget, and (3) farm price and income supports.

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