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EXTENSION ACCOUNTABILITY--AN 1862 PERSPECTIVE

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Legislative Background

When the 1996 farm bill was being discussed, most of the attention was on commodity programs. Because of the extensiveness of that discussion, Representative Pat Roberts (R-KS), chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, argued for a delay in the consideration of the content of the research title of the farm bill for two years. He believed a more thorough airing of the concerns that surrounded research and extension was required and thus the delay.

In the fall of 1996, Representative Roberts was elected to the Senate. In that move, the leadership in the House Committee on Agriculture was transferred to Representative Bob Smith (R-OR). Smith had been promised the chairmanship of the committee if he would run again. Smith's agenda was quite different than that of Roberts. Consequently, the leadership for the writing of the research and extension title switched from the House side to the Senate side. It would now be written under the direction of Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry.

Lugar sought to get an accounting of all the concerns and considerations surrounding agricultural research and extension. The Senate sent out a set of survey questions to the research and extension community. In the spring of 1997, the Senate began work to develop various aspects of the legislation. The ultimate result was Senate Bill 1150. The bill first came out in draft form in July 1997. It was not passed during

that session of Congress, but eventually became law in June 1998.

The Debate in the Land Grant Community

The 1862 community¹ had a number of concerns during the legislation's development. Clearly, the National Research Council reports (National Research Council 1995, National Research Council 1996) were a concern to the 1862 community. It was believed that many of the recommendations were simply value judgments of the participants and there was no supporting evidence to suggest why they were relevant.

There also seemed to be a near complete disconnect between what was going on in Washington concerning the research and extension title and the rest of the country. As a simple illustration, a series of lobbyists in Washington, D.C. were arguing that Smith Lever funds should be used for agricultural extension work only. This was not the sentiment of the state presidents of the farm organizations, nor was it the opinion of the national presidents. This disconnect between the views of the people who made up the organization and the views of their profession staff was disconcerting.

Competitive Grants. The prevailing viewpoint that competitive grants was the way to award funds became a major consideration in the new research title. First, if you administer a competitive grants program, you award money only to projects in specified areas.

¹ The 1862 community refers to the land grant colleges and universities which were created or endowed by the 1862 Morrill Act.

Secondly, an accountability factor is already built into the competitive grants project because a final report summarizing the results is required. There is also an assumption of quality because the review procedure presumably selects only work of the highest quality. This is clearly the Office of Management and Budget perspective.

Through all of this, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) and the ECOP legislative committee had to decide what was acceptable. Nearly every measure in that bill which applied to extension could have been killed, but the war would have been lost in the process. You simply could not take on all the issues and argue against them effectively and still have something left. An attempt was made to evaluate the trade-offs for the system as a whole.

Smith Lever Funds. The deliberation process did not endorse the proposal that Smith Lever funds be limited to agricultural work only. Another proposal would have opened up Smith Lever funds to non-land grant institutions. The ECOP position was that funds under the Smith Lever Act must be retained for use by land grant institutions and that it would accept some other provisions in the legislation if this principle was accepted.

Plans of Work. One of the other provisions in the legislation is a required plan of work. The plan of work must demonstrate stakeholder input. What is sufficient stakeholder input? Are the stakeholders for extension and research the same? A plan of work is foreign to most of our research colleagues. They have worked everything on a project basis. A plan of work is much more familiar to the extension community. I have no qualms about our ability to satisfactorily meet this requirement.

Multi-state Efforts. One of the things which is required for funding is to demonstrate that 25 percent of our Smith Lever 3b,c funds are applied to multi-state efforts. There is no definition of what constitutes a multi-state effort, although some things are obvious. The Pacific Northwest region of Oregon, Idaho and Washington has a program which is funded in such a way that it is very clear that it is a multi-state effort. Frequently, in most cases, an educational program is developed by specialists from a number of states. This example is obviously a multi-state effort. However, are the county extension staff who carry out the programs conducting a multi-state program or not? Definitions are going to be crucial.

Integrated Efforts. States must also certify that 25 percent of the Smith Lever funds are integrated extension-research efforts. Multi-state and integrated research and extension are not mutually exclusive categories. In other words, this does not earmark 50 percent of the funds since some may fit both categories.

Accountability. Accountability and evaluation are not the same. From my point of view, accountability is "did we do what we said we would do in the plan of work?" Evaluation is what kind of behavioral change or difference came as a result of that work. My sense is that we will have to be more accountable for what we put in a plan of work. I do not think that we will have to evaluate everything, but we will probably need to target a few specific programs.

Conclusion

My personal view of the plan of work process is that the most important element in establishing credibility will be interaction with stakeholders. Once a plan is in place that relates to those stakeholders, I think we will clearly be held accountable for it. The

bottom line—evaluation of behavioral changes—will only be carried out on selected programs. Whether those will be state-based, regional or national is yet to be determined.

References

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