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Maintaining the Cutting Edge

Proceedings of the American Agricultural Economics
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Editors: Cara L. Mitchell
Kim B. Anderson

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A Multidisciplinary Systems Approach to Farm and Ranch Management

Jose Pena, Ashley Lovell, organizers (Texas A&M University)
Fred Tyner, moderator (Mississippi State University)
Richard Conner, Jose Pena, Ashley Lovell (Texas A&M University)
Rob Martin (Auburn University)

Challenges, including the adoption of research-based knowledge, clientele expectations of new, innovative approaches in Extension educational programming and the financial/profitability crisis in agriculture, have resurfaced interest in the development of multidisciplinary systems programs.

Professor Richard Conner, described the research/extension interface in two multidisciplinary programs: Integrated Brush Management System (IBMS) and Intensified Grazing System (IGS) programs.

Extension economist Jose Pena presented the total Ranch Management (TRM) program, a multidisciplinary systems approach, developed jointly with animal, range, and wildlife scientists to address profitability and competitiveness issue in the southwestern Texas ranching industry.

Extension economist Ashley Lovell described the technical leadership required to develop a multidisciplinary dairy farm business analysis service.

Professor Rob Martin overviewed modeling approaches to a multidisciplinary, multi-agency farm demonstration program in Alabama which focuses on water quality, farm management training, and assistance.

Farm Management Associations: Bridging the Information Gap between Agricultural Producers, Extension Educational Programs and Applied Research Activities

Richard Trimble, organizer (University of Kentucky)
Bud Langer, moderator (USDARS)
Bud Langer, Dan West (USDARS)
Don Greizer (Kansas State University)
George Young (Auburn University)
Charles Moore, Sr. (North Carolina State University)
Richard Trimble (University of Kentucky)

Farm management association programs have the objective of providing farmers with insight (largely one-on-one) assistance in farm management decision-making. The program operates under a mutual agreement between the association and extension under which (1) they jointly employ a farm management specialist (fieldman) who provides the technical assistance; (2) association members pay fees to cover a major proportion of program costs; (3) members provide record data which is summarized and analyzed, and used in assisting members with management decisions; (4) record data and analysis is used in other extension and research programs; and (5) fieldmen receive training, organizational support, and subject matter support from subject matter departments of the college of agriculture.

A survey of long-time association members found that they feel they have received substantial benefits from the program and a majority indicated a willingness to pay higher fees for the program. In some states the member fees pay up to 95% of their program operating costs.

Farm management association programs have existed in several midwestern states for many years--over half a century in a few states such as Illinois and Kansas. Some states, such as Alabama, have organized associations in more recent years. For states considering starting association programs, emphasis was placed on: (1) need for strong administrative support; (2) need to employ a highly experienced and competent person as the first fieldman; (3) need for the program to be subsidized during the first year (and possibly second year) until member fees are received; and (4) need for the fieldman and the program to be provided with continuous support and backstopping by other state and county extension staff.