



**AgEcon** SEARCH

RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

*The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library*

**This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.**

**Help ensure our sustainability.**

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

[aesearch@umn.edu](mailto:aesearch@umn.edu)

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

*No endorsement of AgEcon Search or its fundraising activities by the author(s) of the following work or their employer(s) is intended or implied.*

**I**t's history now. The 1990 Farm Bill may well have aroused more contention than any previous agricultural legislation at the national level. Even the venerable and generally respected land-grant university system was the object of occasionally spirited debate and criticism.

The final version of the 1990 Bill reflects a heightened awareness of the capacity of the agricultural research and cooperative extension system to deal with contemporary issues. Other provisions indicate dissatisfaction with past research and extension priorities and programs. Public concerns over such

issues as water quality, food safety, sustaining agricultural productivity, and improving rural economic well-being caused the Congress to consider new and expanded roles for the system. At the same time considerable lobbying and debate centered on language that would have established a set for explicit purposes of agricultural research and extension. Regulations would have required statements describing the relationship of individual research and extension projects and programs to these purposes in order to be eligible for federal funding.

There are many new provisions of significance to research and extension in the 1990 legislation. They include:

- A National Agricultural Research Initiative patterned on the recommendations of the National Research Council report.
- A new subtitle on sustainable agriculture with major new assignments for both research and extension.
- Programs for a national agricultural weather information system, plant and animal pest and disease control, and alternative agricultural research and commercialization.
- A new Rural Development Administration in the USDA.
- Expanded responsibility for cooperative extension in rural economic and business development programs.
- A competitive grants program for rural development research.
- New research and extension programs for private forestry as well as urban and community forestry.
- New and expanded responsibilities with regard to water quality.
- Identification of the USDA as the principal federal agency responsible and accountable for research, education, and technical assistance for users and dealers of agrichemicals.

### Wake Up Land Grants, I Hear Indians!

The agricultural research and extension system was subjected to sporadic criticism throughout the year, both in the Congress and in the various forums convened in Washington. A recurring theme was that during the "chemical decades" of the 1960s and 1970s, agricultural research and cooperative extension failed to consider the potential adverse effects on environment and human health resulting from the technologies being developed and applied on farms. Too much emphasis was placed on the private

---

*Robert L. Christensen is Professor of Agricultural Economics at the University of Massachusetts. From October 1989 through September 1990, he was on special assignment with NASULGC in Washington, D.C. as Director of the Farm Policy Project under funding provided by the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy.*

# On The Way to the 1990 Farm Bill:

## *Implications for Research and Extension*



goals of increasing output and profit while ignoring social concerns. Too little attention was given to water quality, food safety, worker health and the ecosystem.

Consequently, the land-grant university research and extension mandate was a focal point for debate as the 1990 Farm Bill developed. In particular, certain environmental and social advocacy groups devoted significant lobbying efforts to influence the "Research", "Conservation", and "Forestry" titles.

The logic of the critics seemed to be that if there is a lack of research knowledge, there must be a reason. If there is a problem, someone must be culpable - in this case the agricultural research and extension community. Agricultural researchers and extension specialists are alleged to have failed to anticipate the adverse environmental and health effects of the technology they developed and should be held responsible according to the critics. Their punishment is public chastisement, less independence in choice of research emphasis, greater accountability, and diversion of public funds away from the land-grant system to other universities and private research entities.

Public faith in the agricultural science community has eroded. Farmers too, feel betrayed as they are accused of polluting the water, upsetting the ecosystem, and providing food that is alleged to be unsafe to eat. Critics of the research and extension system

## ***Considerable lobbying and debate centered on language that would have established a set for explicit purposes of agricultural research and extension.***

Find some within the system who are willing to join the hunt for scapegoats. Legislators, university administrators, Washington bureaucrats, and even disciplinary peers can be faulted for not being perceptive enough to foresee the problems now revealed in hindsight.

### **Between the "Grassroots" and the "Cutting Edge"**

Cooperative extension people in the states seem to have both the most challenging critics and the fiercest champions. They form the bridge between the reservoir of knowledge represented by research and those who may use that knowledge. They are often accused of trying to be all things to all people. Some argue that extension's true mission is with agriculture and that programs directed to urban and suburban audiences and non-farm concerns drain resources away from the needs of farmers. At the same time, Congress assigns new responsibilities, state legislatures are increasingly influenced by urban constituencies, and the several publics of extension look for expansions in programs.

Some members of Congress look upon the extension system as a federal agency and an instrument of federal policy. This is enlightening because those of us who work for cooperative extension in the states experience quite a different view. The county commissioners, state legislators, and various advisory groups find some federal programs and priorities appropriate while, at the same time, they identify different programs and priorities to meet local needs. They do not embrace the notion that the Feds should call the shots on county and state programs, especially when federal dollars have an increasingly minor role in support of those programs.

### **If These Are Our Friends, Who Needs Enemies?**

A theme voiced repeatedly in Washington by critics of the agricultural research and extension system is that the system lacks goals, fails to plan, cannot or will not establish priorities, and is unwilling to coordinate efforts within the system and with other agencies. For example, Michael Phillips of the Office of Technology Assessment, in his statement during a House Agriculture Committee hearing on February 6, 1990, stated:

"Within S&E (Science and Education) at USDA, there are no short or long-term plans for coordinating the activities of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations, Agricultural Research Service,

## ***The agricultural research and extension system was subjected to sporadic criticism throughout the year.***

Extension Service, or the National Agricultural Library... Significant amounts of planning occur without necessary commitment of resources to set goals, implement plans, and measure progress... There is little specificity and clarity in stating priorities for the A&E System."

A collection of papers published by the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry (S.Prt. 101-61, Dec.1989) titled "Reform and Innovation of Science and Education: Planning for the 1990 Farm Bill" is replete with criticism of the performance of the agricultural research and extension system. Jack Doyle, Executive Director of the Environmental Policy Institute/Friends of the Earth, writes in that report:

"Today, America's once-premier agricultural research complex—the land-grant universities, the state agricultural experiment stations, and the agricultural extension service—is in decline, and is in danger of becoming irrelevant."

The late Robert Rodale, Chairman of the Board of the Rodale Institute, wrote in the same report:

"Theoretically, a system is in place to connect (researchers and farmers). Extension exists (on paper) for that purpose. Researchers are supposed to use Extension both to tell farmers how to solve their problems, and to listen to farmers about their needs. The problem is that Extension people are much better at telling than they are at listening. And even when the researchers do hear what farmers want in the way of preventative methods (for example),

## ***Public faith in the agricultural science community has eroded.***

they know full well that the farmer's voices carry no funding."

These kinds of statements reflect some of the perceptions and attitudes that have shaped the 1990 Farm Bill. The comments of Phillips and others may account for the plethora of Advisory Councils, Review Boards, Advisory Boards, new "Offices", "Centers" and "Directors" that one finds in the new legislation—all of which have charges to organize, prioritize, coordinate, and communicate.

Similarly, comments of the type offered by Doyle and Rodale may be responsible for the increasing number of explicitly defined responsibilities and accountability requirements for the land-grant research and extension system contained in the 1990 legislation.



## Who is Supposed To Do What, For Whom, And How?

The repeated criticism that the research and education system is uncoordinated and inefficient led me to check the record. Beginning with the 1977 Farm Bill, very specific language in Sections 1405, 1407, and 1408 of Title XIV sets forth planning, coordination, and priority setting responsibilities for the Secretary, the Joint Council, and the Users Advisory Board. It appears abundantly clear that necessary authorizations exist, at least since 1977, to deal with the system's alleged shortcomings. If indeed the system has failed to function in accordance with the mandates of the legislation, the question should focus on understanding the reasons for the failure before promulgating new legislation.

## Do I Hear A Goal?

A 1990 OTA report asserted that, among other shortcomings, the national agricultural research and education system has no clarity of goals. This criticism led me to examine the 1977 and 1985 Farm Bills. Again, I found language surprisingly consistent with the goals often articulated by critics of the system. Some examples from the 1985 Bill are shown in the "box".

While these statements might be somewhat differently phrased as goals and objectives for the agricultural research and extension functions of the land-grant universities, the intent of Congress comes through quite clearly. In fact, it seems clear that it is the Congress who establishes the goals and objectives for the agricultural research and extension system, even though it is not always

clear how the Congress itself would prioritize among the many issues identified in the legislation (except as the appropriations committees provides funding for competitive grant programs and other forms of earmarking).

Partially in response to the critics, the Senate attempted to state a set of national "Purposes" for agricultural research and extension. That version caused discomfort among some of the members of the Congress, the Administration, and the research and extension system and was termed by some an attempt at "social engineering". The Division of Agriculture Legislative Committee of National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC), in turn, developed and provided to Senate and House staff an alternative statement of "Purposes" consistent with existing legislative mandates and encompassing the current range of

agricultural research and extension programs. Some further discussion occurred between NASULGC and certain of the lobbyists on the use of the statement of purposes for funding decisions. In the end, the Congress adopted a set of purposes that should cause little problem for the research and extension community.

## Who Speaks for The Agricultural Research and Extension System?

Input into Congressional policy making for agricultural research and extension is diffused. The traditional farm organizations and commodity associations were relatively uninvolved in the debates and testimony concerned with the research title. Their attentions were primarily focused on the commodity and regulatory policies under consideration by the Congress which directly impact their

*In the end, the Congress adopted a set of purposes that should cause little problem for the research and extension community.*

## Excerpts from the 1985 Bill Title XIV – Section 1402

"(10) (B) – AGRICULTURAL POLICY. – The effects of technological, economic, sociological, and environmental developments on the agricultural structure of the United States are strong and continuous. It is critical that emerging agricultural-related technologies, economic changes, and sociological and environmental developments, both national and international, be analyzed on a continuing basis in an interdisciplinary fashion to determine the effect of those forces on the structure of agriculture and to improve agricultural policy making."

"(10) (F) – NATURAL RESOURCES. – Improved management of soil, water, forest, and range resources is vital to maintain the resource base for food fiber, and wood production. An expanded research program in the areas of soil and water conservation and forest and range management practices is needed to develop more economical and effective management systems. Key objectives of this research are – (i) incorporating water and soil saving technologies into current and evolving production practices; (ii) developing more cost effective and practical conservation technologies; (iii) managing water in stressed environments; (iv) protecting the quality of the surface water and groundwater resources of the United States; (v) establishing integrated multidisciplinary

organic farming research projects, including research on alternative farming systems, that will identify options from which individual farmers may select the production components that are most appropriate for their individual situations; (vi) developing better targeted pest management systems and; (vii) improving forest and range management technologies that meet demands more efficiently, better protect multi-resource options, and enhance quality of output."

"(10) (G) – PROMOTION OF THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF PEOPLE – The basic objective of food and agricultural research, extension, and teaching programs are to make the maximum contribution to the health and welfare of people and the economy of the United States through the enhancement of family farms, to improve community services and institutions, to increase the quality of life in rural America, and to improve the well-being of consumers. The rapid rate of social change, economic instability, and current energy problems increase the need for expanded programs of research and extension in family financial management, housing and home energy consumption, food preparation and consumption, human development (including youth programs), and development of community services and institutions."



constituents near term economic well-being. Historically the research, extension, and teaching interests of the land-grant system have been primarily represented on Capitol Hill and with the Administration by the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture. That Office performs very ably in that role. However, it must also represent the policies and political philosophy of the incumbent administration.

Some individual colleges and universities aggressively pursue funding for research and extension activities of direct concern to their individual states. Results of such contacts are sometimes seen in the form of legislation and/or appropriations resulting in grants or contracts to the land-grant university in the home state. Such pork barrel activities often erode the credibility of the system as a whole. Those members of Congress most knowledgeable about the system are a minority and are often diverted by the battles that surround the more costly and controversial commodity programs and priority non-farm rural issues.

## ***Such pork barrel activities often erode the credibility of the system as a whole.***

The land-grant research, extension, and teaching system has lobbied its collective interests rather sporadically in the past through NASULGC. Several of the NASULGC "COPs" have legislative subcommittees. However, the members are full-time administrators in their home universities and cannot be in close contact with the people and events in Washington. Consequently, their activities have tended to be reactive and uncoordinated. There have been problems of communication among the COPs, and difficulties in finding the time and opportunity for seeking consensus. Lags in response to proposals can be fatal to any chance of change, particularly as Congress is rushing to closure on legislation.

In contrast to this historically relatively uncoordinated and erratically focused approach of the research and extension system, those who have been termed the "externalities/alternative" special interest and advocacy groups are very active in efforts to further their specific causes. These include Washington based representatives who pay regular visits to Congressional offices to argue their positions as well as provide assistance to Congressional staffers in writing legislation.

The NASULGC-led effort for the 1990 Farm Bill marked a new approach. In fact, the NASULGC Division of Agriculture Legislative Committee, together with the ECOP Legislative Committee, developed and made available to key staff of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, a proposed revision of the "Research Title" before those Committees began drafting their versions. In addition, staff from NASULGC maintained regular contact with the COPs and NASULGC Legislative Committee on proposals and actions being considered by the Congress relating to agricultural research and extension. These activities clearly enhanced awareness in the land-grant system of issues and needed input from the system to the Congress.

### **Preparing For The Next Farm Bill**

The experiences of my year in Washington made me aware of the need for better communication and understanding between the Federal policy makers and the land-grant agricultural research and extension system. While notable exceptions exist, Congress fails to appreciate the breadth of expertise and potential capacity that exists within the land-grant system for addressing a range of

contemporary problems. At the same time researchers and educators must understand that, for the political process to function in the best interests of society, the Congress needs input from the system. I am convinced that improving communication, both in terms of information and intellectual exchange, will ultimately result in benefit to both the system and the public interest. I have three specific suggestions for my land-grant colleagues.

First, develop an on-going program of information and education that helps policy makers make wise decisions on research and extension related issues. I would propose that NASULGC and the COPs sponsor an annual or semi-annual policy forum at which policy issues of direct relevance to the agricultural research and education community would be debated. These might be held in conjunction with the annual NASULGC meetings or, alternatively, might be a part of the regular meetings of the COPs. It is essential that these forums be organized so that key members of Congress and their staff can be involved. Further, I suggest a NASULGC produced quarterly "Policy Issues Newsletter". It would draw on the expertise throughout the research and extension system and be designed for the dual purpose of keeping both the Congress and the land-grant community aware of current issues, policy needs, and alternatives. While this sounds similar to *CHOICES*, I envision it as being rather more narrowly focused on the interests of the land-grant research and extension system.

Second, the land-grant system needs to find ways to respond quickly and effectively to Congressional needs for information and analysis as they deal with issues related to agriculture and rural America. NASULGC could attempt to acquire staff for that purpose or foster arrangements whereby the appropriate expertise in land-grant universities could be accessed speedily and at minimum cost using electronic technology.

Third, land-grants need to better understand and communicate with their critics at the local, state, and national level. The majority of these critics are honest, sincere, and motivated by purposes largely congruent with those of the land-grant system. Developing effective methods to communicate and interact with these people and organizations will enhance their understanding of the goals, programs, and activities that are conducted by researchers and extension educators and, at the same time, increase understanding and appreciation of the values, attitudes and goals that are the basis of their criticism. The better this mutual understanding, the more likely their suggestions and advocacy will match those of the land-grant system. The potential benefit from such coalitions can be very great. **C**

## **OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY**

### ***National Needs Fellowships in Food and Agribusiness Marketing***

Oregon State University's Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics will award two USDA National Needs Fellowships in 1991 for study toward a Ph.D. in agricultural economics. The fellows will pursue a specialty in food and agribusiness marketings. Applicants must be U.S. citizens and have completed a master's degree in economics, agricultural economics, business, or related area.

Fellows will receive \$15,000 per year for up to three years. Application deadline is February 15, 1991.

Please contact Dr. Steve Buccola, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Oregon State University, 213 Ballard Extension Hall, Corvallis, OR 97331-3601. Phone (503) 737-1410.