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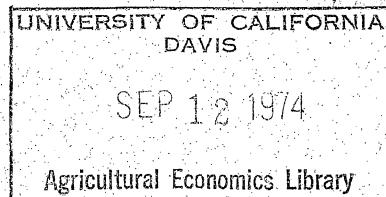
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DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING AN IN-SERVICE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM
IN ECONOMICS FOR COUNTY EXTENSION PERSONNEL*

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Introduction

One of the major responsibilities of Extension Economics specialists is to provide educational leadership for statewide programs in Economics. Under the traditional county-state organizational structure in North Carolina, this responsibility can only be discharged in partnership with county Extension personnel. An effective Economics program can be conducted if county personnel with program responsibilities in agriculture, home economics, resource development, and 4-H and youth understand and can apply economic principles to the problems of their clientele at the local level.

North Carolina is not unique. The typical Extension agent is highly trained in a production discipline. Each agent is generally assigned responsibility for educational programs in one or more commodities in agriculture or one or more subject matter areas in home economics such as foods, clothing or family resource management and/or 4-H and youth programs. Very few of the agents are specifically charged with the responsibility for programs in Economics. They are expected to incorporate economic analysis into their on-going programs.

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Considerable effort has been made in the past to provide in-service training programs in farm management, marketing, and rural development in North Carolina. Extension economists regularly cooperate with other production disciplines in interdisciplinary training efforts. However, it was still felt that the general level of economic understanding was below the desired level.

How could this situation be improved? The purpose of this paper is to discuss the development and initial implementation of an intensive in-service training program in Economics for all county staffs.

Study Committee

The first step was to appoint a committee of six members of the Extension Economics section and one from Home Management to study the situation and to develop a training proposal. Personnel records were examined to determine the number of agents who had received in-service training in Economics. It was found that the majority of agents had received no in-service training specifically in the area of Economics since joining the Extension Service. A survey was sent to the male agents in the state to determine the number of courses they had taken in Economics in their undergraduate program. These data also indicated a general lack of exposure to this subject.

After consultation with a committee of five county personnel, the study committee developed a training proposal to present to the total staff and the Extension Administration. The report suggested that the objective of improving economic competency be approached from three fronts: (1) the undergraduate program be made more attractive for future Extension workers, (2) strengthen the minor's program and make it more

attractive and more readily available to those agents planning a graduate program, and (3) expand the in-service training program.

The members of the committee suggested that the in-service expansion consist of three phases of training. The first phase of the program would consist of about 40 hours of training in the application of the most basic principles of Economics. This phase of training would be designed for those with little, if any, background in Economics. The next phase of training would consist of about 40 hours of instruction in the application of economic principles in each of the areas of production and resource use and marketing and consumption. The third phase would be a continuation of traditional in-service training programs in specific subject matter areas or specific economic topics such as futures training, credit, economics of environmental quality, etc. The length of this type of instruction would depend on the need. It was visualized that future training in this area would be more productive than in the past if the agents trained in these types of topics had first gained a basic understanding of economics through participation in the other phases of the program or had received equivalent training elsewhere.

In addition to these recommendations, it was suggested that a training coordinator be appointed. His responsibilities would be to inform the agents of the training program, coordinate the development of teaching materials, work with the Administration in selecting participating agents, arrange for the logistical aspects of the training, and develop a system of evaluating the training program.

Staff Response

The training proposal was presented to the total Extension Economics staff for approval. The group agreed that the in-service training portion of the training proposal was a step in the right direction. The study committee and specialist-in-charge emphasized that if this program was undertaken it would be the major thrust of the section for the next few years. The general consensus of the section was to move in this direction. However, the group emphasized that an effort should be made to select only those agents who wanted to be involved in this type of training. In other words, they did not want the Administration to have to draft participants.

Administrative Response

After departmental approval of the committee report, a meeting was held with the Extension Administration. This included members of the administration from the district chairmen through the Director. The report received a favorable response from this group. They agreed with the suggestion that this proposal be presented to all the county personnel in one of the seven districts in the state to get an indication of their opinion of the program.

County Meetings

A series of five meetings was held in one of the seven districts. The specialist-in-charge and training coordinator, the district chairman and district home economics agent participated in the meetings. The proposed program was presented and overall reaction was very favorable.

A major feeling of the home economists, however, was that they would like to participate in the program but were of the opinion that the instructional program would be more effective if a training session at the intermediate level was developed specifically for home economists.

The county personnel were asked at the meetings to complete a survey form and state whether they would like to participate in this program. Listed in Table 1 is a summary of their responses.

Table 1. Response of county personnel in North Central District to training proposal

Sex	No.	No. desiring to participate in:		
		Basic	Intermediate	Special
Male	71	22	37	45
Female	52	34	19	21
Total	123	56	56	66

A report of these meetings was made to the Extension Administration and they agreed to the suggestion that similar meetings be held throughout the state. Before these meetings were held, the study committee met and discussed the home economists' proposal about a separate program for them. The members of the committee agreed this was a good suggestion and that a session titled "Economics for Home Economists" be developed at the intermediate level. Thus, the proposed in-service training program consisted of the "Basic Course," intermediate level courses in "Production and Resource Development," "Marketing," and "Economics for Home Economists." Each of these proposed courses was to include about 40 hours of instruction. In addition, the program included the special topics sections which would be of varied lengths depending on the particular subject matter.

A total of 21 additional meetings were held throughout the other six districts. Listed in Table 2 is the summary of the total number of county personnel and their responses. About 20 percent of those in the meetings

Table 2. Response of county personnel in the state to training proposal

Sex	No.	No. desiring to participate				
		Basic	Intermediate			Special
			Women	Production	Marketing	
Male	310	53	0	168	163	154
Female	226	63	213	4	8	181
Total	563	116	213	172	171	335

indicated they would like to participate in the basic program. Ninety-four percent of the women indicated that they would like to participate in the course for home economists. About 50 percent of the male agents indicated that they would like to participate in both the production and marketing sections. About 50 percent of the men and 80 percent of the women indicated they would like to participate in some type of special topics training. The topics mentioned most by the men were futures trading and hedging, credit, and marketing specific commodities. The special topics need mentioned most by the women was credit in home purchase. Other topics were current economic issues such as inflation, foreign trade, and why are food prices so high.

Based on an average class size of 20 students, this program would involve about five sessions for the basic course, 10 sessions for home economists, nine sessions in production and marketing and 15 sessions in special topics.

Material Development Teams

After all the county visits had been completed and the decision made to develop course materials for the basic and intermediate courses, the

Economics Extension section was divided into four development teams with a chairman for each group. Each of these teams was assigned the task of developing detailed course outlines for a particular course. In each case, the teaching outline was designed to teach economic principles and concepts through a problem orientation. Practical application was stressed in all cases. A brief outline of each of the sessions is presented in the Appendix.

Teaching Teams

Teaching team leaders were selected from those staff members who indicated an interest in assisting with the actual teaching. The responsibilities of these individuals are to develop a teaching team from the staff for each individual training session (some individuals will teach in more than one training session). The teaching team leader in cooperation with the training coordinator has the responsibility to ensure that the material in the course outline is taught, that proper training aids are prepared and used and hand-out material is available.

Student Selection

A major objective of the program is to provide educational opportunities only for those who are interested in participating. Hence, the district chairmen and the training coordinator must work together in selecting county personnel to attend a particular training program. These are selected from the list indicating a desire to attend. Other factors such as current county program, other training opportunities, etc., must be considered before final selection.

Tentative Evaluation

In the spring of 1974 a session was held of the courses "Economics for Home Economists" and "Production and Resource Development." Each of these

courses was for a week's duration. There were 21 students in each session, three from each Extension district in the state. They were selected on this basis in order to ensure coverage throughout the state. At the end of the week each student was asked to complete an unsigned evaluation of the week's program. The general evaluation was excellent. Of particular interest was the response to the question, "Should these training programs be made available for additional Extension personnel?" In each case the answer was "yes." This demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Extension Economics staff that the combination of theory and problem application can be meaningful and will be helpful to the county staff in their future programs. In addition to the favorable comments received from the agents, there have been requests for assistance from home economists who had not requested it before.

The Administration has approved training sessions in "Marketing" and "Basic Economics" in September 1974 and "Economics for Home Economists" and "Production and Resource Development" in November. Plans are to teach each of these sessions twice a year as long as the demand exists for them. The special topics courses will be taught when the need arises. In September a three-day session of training in "Futures Training" will be taught. A total of 43 agents are enrolled. These are all individuals who indicated a desire for training in this specific topic, when they filled out their survey. This general approach follows the objective of developing training for those who want to be involved.

Summary

Will agents participating in this in-service training program gain a better understanding of economic principles, analytical techniques and

their use applications to pertinent problems? Will it strengthen the economic content of their on-going programs? Will it increase their ability to utilize more effectively specific subject matter training in economics? Will it help them to better identify the problems of their many and diverse clientele groups? Will it help them to give people an understanding so they can find their own answers?

Only time will tell. We are confident that the recipe for success is a combination of agents expressing a felt need for more competence in economics combined with a specialists staff and an Administration committed to such a program.

APPENDIX

In-Service Training Course Outlines

Basic

I. Introduction

- A. Goal of course
- B. Nature of economics problems
- C. Economics as a way of thinking

II. Price and Cost Theory

- A. Demand -- How much can I spend?
- B. Supply -- What should I produce?
- C. Price -- What determines it?

III. Aggregate Economics

- A. Aggregate fluctuations and forces
- B. Governmental policies and related factors

IV. Conclusions

Economics for Home Economists

I. Introduction

- A. The circular flow of goods and money
- B. Assumption about economic behavior

II. Consumer Choices and Demand Relationships

- A. Budget constraints and individual decisions
- B. Estimation of demand and elasticity

III. Business Firm Costs and Supply Function

- A. Cost concepts
- B. Supply relationships

IV. Role of a Free Market

- A. The "free" market -- What is it?
- B. Marketing margins
- C. Pricing
- D. Market regulations

V. Current Economic Issues

- A. Inflation
- B. Investment
- C. Ownership
- D. Foreign trade
- E. Devaluation of the dollar

VI. Economics of Environmental Quality

- A. Why do we have problems?
- B. Methods of financing pollution abatement

Production and Resource Development

I. Introduction

II. Cost Concepts

- A. Types of costs
- B. Public service examples of costs

III. Returns

- A. Diminishing returns
- B. Equi-marginal returns
- C. Average returns

IV. Budgeting

- A. Partial budgeting
- B. Farm enterprise budget
- C. Total budgeting (linear programming)
- D. Budgeting for public decisions

V. Comparative Advantage

- A. Individual and comparative advantage
- B. Regional growth and comparative advantage

VI. External Forces and Their Effects on Business Decisions

- A. Governmental farm programs
- B. Tax policy
- C. Variables affecting demand

VII. Math of Finance

- A. Interest and its effect on decisions
- B. Capital budgeting

VIII. Evaluating Business Performance

- A. Use of financial information
- B. Farm business analyses

Marketing

I. Introduction

- A. Comparative advantage
- B. Anatomy of a marketing system

II. Marketing Efficiency

- A. Supply, demand and market price
- B. Reasons for price differences

III. Institutional Arrangements and Market Power

- A. Market power through size
- B. Market power through collective action
- C. Market power through legislation

IV. The Marketing Pay-Off

- A. Individual marketing decisions
- B. Collective marketing decisions

V. Summary