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THE LOWER PENOBSCOT RIVER AREA RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN MAINE

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The Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics began deliberating upon rural development in early 1970. At that time the President's Commission on Rural Development issued its report, A New Life for the Country, and the Congress was considering various bills in support of better life for non-metropolitan residents. Two circumstances drew our attention.

It appeared likely that appropriations would be provided for new research and educational efforts in rural development. In spite of our urging communities and groups to plan we habitually react to new funds for research and extension activities after they are available, fitting our programs to appropriation guidelines rather than planning a program and then seeking financial support.

The other circumstance that made rural development timely was a current effort to define the Department's mission and goals. We stated that the Department's mission is to carry on teaching, research and public service programs to advance knowledge and to contribute to problem solving in the social science aspects of agricultural resource development, community development and natural resource development.

As we interpreted rural development, it is organized action to increase job opportunities, to improve community services, and to enhance quality of living for people who live in non-metropolitan areas of Maine. This concept provides specific goals that are compatible with the Department's mission so we set about planning a course of action.

The Department faculty engaged in a series of discussions that identified some ways in which rural development should differ from some past programs.

1. Realistic goals should be set and deliberate steps should be taken to evaluate progress throughout a project and to determine how well goals are reached at termination. We too often fail to specify intended outputs and assume that reporting inputs is adequate.

2. Concentrating resources in a limited area toward specified goals should be a major concern. We tend to develop programs by



individual areas of interest or disciplines in a fragmented fashion that fails to make the best use of economies of scale in using either financial resources or technology. It is more efficient and more effective to apply the efforts of several research and extension workers in collaboration toward a mutual set of specific goals than for the same number of individuals to operate independently even though in coordination.

3. With specific goals established it is necessary to direct research and education efforts toward reaching them. Any research or education sub-project should be selected on the judgment that it can contribute directly to reaching one or more project goals. Ideally it should be selected on the basis that the time of the researcher or extension educator will be spent more effectively than any alternative effort that he might contribute.

4. Rural development encompasses a scope too wide for any one discipline to have much effect. Problems to be encountered have social, economic, political, cultural and ecological facets. A rural development program must reach out to nurture collaboration among a variety of agencies, institutions and organizations as well as among various units of the University.

As these ideas emerged the Department formed a Rural Development Faculty with the purpose of developing an integrated program of research, education and action. The Rural Development Faculty provides a base for fostering rural development goals and an identifiable unit to take advantage of ear-marked funds for education and research. It also functions as a policy-making and coordinating body for rural development projects.

The Rural Development Faculty determined that it would attempt to make a significant impact (noticeable, that is) on rural development and to define the procedures used in delivering University resources to communities. It seemed obvious that concentrating on a limited geographical area would be necessary. The area selected was designated the Lower Penobscot River Area which includes twelve communities in two counties on both sides of Penobscot Bay. It has about 20,000 people. Rationale for selection included:

- a. Proximity to Orono makes access to University staff easier.
- b. It is located in the coastal zone which faces more urgent threats to quality of living than many inland areas.
- c. While income levels and employment opportunities are limited, the area's economic structure is obviously viable and offers potential for improvement.

d. Substantial base data is available as a result of the University of Maine Penobscot River Study of economic - social - political considerations in pollution control, and of the State Planning Office Coastal Zone Management Plan.

e. The communities show little capability for collaboration, yet share problems that are common to much of Maine and can not be resolved adequately by individual effort.

The project integrates research, extension and action efforts. The stated objectives are:

1. to improve the quality of living in rural areas of Maine
2. to synthesize a procedure for concentrating resources of the University of Maine in a cluster of communities so as to make a significant impact upon rural development
3. to plan, organize and implement research, education and action programs that will result in more job opportunities and better incomes, more effective planning and land use, better community facilities and services, and a better social environment for people living in the Lower Penobscot River Area.

Since these objectives were written, benchmark data has been collected to provide a base for evaluation at the end of the project. For instance we know that in the area:

635 enterprises employ 6317 people, of whom 456 work part time  
all 12 communities have planning boards  
4 communities have comprehensive plans  
none have subdivision ordinances  
228 social, fraternal and civic organizations serve the area  
2 sewage treatment facilities are in operation  
8 refuse disposal areas serve the 12 towns

A termination date for the project was set at June 30, 1976, to provide time to show effects and to avoid the tendency for self-perpetuation of such projects. At that time the change in such specifics as number of enterprises, jobs, land use controls, and community facilities will be measured. This is only part of the evaluation system, however, and a high value is placed on continual evaluation to ensure that economic growth is of a kind that is compatible with the local culture and with the natural resources of the area including the scenic beauty. Furthermore our efforts are directed toward increased citizen participation in controlling destiny through strengthening community structure.

Staffing and organization of the project is loose and flexible.



The Rural Development Faculty has been composed of self-designated members interested in general policy and planning of the Department's activities in rural development. A more clearly defined work group has evolved through interaction of members having some specific function.

Overall administrative responsibility for the project along with all other Department activities lies with the Department Chairman Dr. Kenneth E. Wing. The author is chairman of the project and convenes Rural Development Faculty meetings, coordinates activities of the work group, and initiates extension and action programs in the project area. The research team leader is Dr. Louis A. Ploch, professor of rural sociology, who coordinates the research sub-projects and directs the data collection and processing for a socio-economic profile of the area. Forest M. French was employed as a community development associate to work full time on the project. He is now being shifted to half-time assistant resource economist on a research appointment and half-time community development specialist on an extension appointment. He assembles data for project researchers; maintains a Rural Development File; provides a communication link with local, county and state agencies and organizations and implements action. He is the key man with perspective on the total project and regular contact with the full range of related activities.

Four faculty members are principal investigators of research sub-projects:

- a. Dr. Donald M. Tobey, assistant professor, agricultural and resource economics; Evaluation of Potential for Development of Outdoor Recreation,
- b. Sherman S. Hasbrouck, community development specialist; Determination of the Relationship between Rural Housing and Sewage Treatment Methods,
- c. Dr. Raymond N. Krofta, associate professor, agricultural and resource economics; The Economic Structure, Activities and Interactions of the Lower Penobscot River Area,
- d. Dr. F. Richard King, assistant professor, agricultural and resource economics; Analysis of Waste Disposal Problems Related to Poultry Processing Plants.

A special effort has been made to offer extension agents in the two counties opportunity to become involved to any degree they choose while avoiding pressure to participate. While we may have refrained cautiously from persuasive tactics, all six agents have kept informed of the total project and Carl A. Rogers of Hancock County and C. Herbert Annis of Waldo County have been very active in implementing action, providing contact with local and county individuals and organizations, and assisting with data collection.

Base data was collected by field interviews and from secondary sources to develop a socio-economic profile of the area. The profile is intended to provide a better understanding of the characteristics of the area and to serve as a benchmark against which change can be measured. Data has come from two other important sources: the Penobscot River Study, a river management project of the University of Maine Center for Land and Water Resources which will publish a report this summer outlining alternative models of river management; and the Maine State Planning Office, Division of Coastal Planning, Pilot Planning Area. The latter has produced twelve maps of the area showing natural resources, such as hydrology of major water sheds, forest growth, and fisheries.

In total, the social, economic, attitudinal, and natural resource data probably provide more knowledge about the area than we can handle. However, the collection and assembly of it has led to a familiarity with the people, resources and dynamics of the area that is essential for recognizing feasible development opportunities. A fairly steady flow of the latter seems to be emerging.

An example may suggest the meaning of a development opportunity and what we do with it. It has become apparent that a major direction for economic growth lies in development of renewable marine resources and in enterprises related to the scenic, recreational and cultural resources of the area. Improvement of community facilities and services, more effective planning and land use, and a better social environment may be related to this direction as well.

Early in our investigations we were struck by the wealth of knowledge that marine scientists have about the nature and scope of marine animal and plant resources, cultural and harvest technology, and market potential. We were also struck by the absence of a system for disseminating and applying that knowledge. Scientists tend to share information among themselves, but are generally ineffective in interpreting it for public use.

The Maine Maritime Academy in Castine is the only higher education institution in the project area. We had several meetings with their staff to become acquainted. This led to understanding of the Academy's desire to broaden its program beyond the traditional training of merchant marine officers and especially to engage in continuing education or public service activities.

From those previously unrelated situations has grown a Renewable Marine Resources Development Conference which was held at the Academy in May. The conference objectives were to share knowledge about renewable marine resources, to identify problems of development, and to recommend steps to expand opportunity and provide new jobs in renewable marine resources in Maine. One hundred and twenty-five participants were invited from the fishing industry, other marine industry, educa-



tional institutions and government agencies. The conference budget (from Title 1, HEA) and plans provide for a task force which will prepare specific action plans to follow recommendations from the conference.

While the Maine Maritime Academy is the grant recipient and conference host, the entire project was planned, organized and managed jointly with the Research Institute of the Gulf of Maine, the Maine Department of Sea and Shore Fisheries, and University of Maine units: Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Cooperative Extension Service, and Darling Center Marine Laboratory. The establishment of working relationships among staff of these agencies and institutions is itself a significant product. The Extension agents, French and the author have been involved at all stages: originating the concept, applying for the grant, participating on the advisory committee, and were small-group discussion leaders at the conference as well as active in the post-conference task force.

This has been presented as one example of our development of an opportunity. There are others, even though the project is only one year old, such as work with planning boards and regional commissions, with home crafts production and marketing, and on a clam industry scheme.

The clam industry is an interesting example of under-utilized potential that seems to offer opportunity for economic growth fitting to the area's resources, culture and character. Our attention was caught by a statement of Robert Dow, director of research for the Maine Department of Sea and Shore Fisheries, that Penobscot Bay has a potential sustained annual yield of 100,000 bushels of soft clams. The clams are not being harvested because they are in polluted flats which are closed. We learned that special licensing to dig the clams can be given if they are treated in a depuration process. The technology exists; in fact, a small plant produces about 7,000 bushels a year in Penobscot Bay.

With this background Forest French has gathered and organized the information needed by a potential entrepreneur, including a 56,000 bushel plant layout, processing procedures, capital and operating budgets, and management analysis. We plan to follow through to expose the idea, find an entrepreneur, and help him all the way to the point that a plant is in operation.

C. Herbert Annis is an Extension agent in Belfast, the city of recent Newsweek notoriety. He has found that circumstances have developed recently which indicate an awakening of Belfast. He was a factor in the city's joining the Knox Regional Planning Commission. A local businessman has begun building a pier and marina. Other indications have formed Annis's opinion that a favorable climate exists for organizing a harbor development committee. Annis is going on a sabbatic leave in August and Harold Brown, another Waldo County Extension agent, will work



on harbor development. We plan to assign a student intern to help Brown facilitate the action.

These examples illustrate the pattern that is emerging as we find data and ideas that can be inter-related as we build acquaintance with the communities in the area and with the variety of regional and state agencies that have services of value to them.

We have encountered relatively few difficulties so far. One of the most serious is our inability to achieve ready access to resource persons throughout the University. We were not successful in effectively including faculty from outside our department in the early stages of organization and planning. Our attitude in the formative stages of the Rural Development Faculty was, "let's wait until we are organized before we bring others in." By the time we were organized it was too late. As a result the project is seen as the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics' possession. Something in the structure of departments and colleges hinders collaboration.

Even to get temporary or contract participation of faculty poses problems. Some faculty feel no obligation for public service and some customarily provide it only on a consulting fee basis. Administrative policy is not entirely clear; in one case we arranged to pay a consulting fee to a faculty team for an evaluation study and were not permitted to carry out the arrangement; in another case that appeared no different we were allowed to pay for contract services.

The Cooperative State Research Service ruled that the Experiment Station could not contract with the Cooperative Extension Service to provide services of personnel. A variety of barriers such as this hinder the building of a broad-based collaborative effort. We have found problems from different levels of University personnel working with different levels of state agency personnel with poor communications throughout. Such difficulties have not stopped us, but they do reduce effectiveness and efficiency.

In summary, the first year of experience in the Lower Penobscot River Area Rural Development Project has been exhilarating and encouraging. It is a long-range venture and can not be expected to achieve its stated objectives much before the end of the five years allotted. Yet some indicators of progress may be worth noting.

1. The Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics developed the project with a deliberate problem-solving procedure that is not always characteristic in program building.
2. An integrated program has resulted from eight department faculty members concentrating their efforts in a designated area toward mutual objectives with full know-

ledge and support of the whole department.

3. Already a basis for sound development of the project area has emerged - renewable marine resources.

4. The mass of information about the project area that has been accumulated should lead to analyses that will offer many more alternative courses of action to benefit the people of the Lower Penobscot River Area.