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MODIFYING EXTENSION CRD PROGRAMS IN RESPONSE  
TO AGENT-IDENTIFIED NEEDS

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Introduction

Debate over how one "does" Community Resource Development (CRD) extension undoubtedly dates back to the moment the field consisted of more than a single practitioner. And the debate goes on. Gratto [4] recently outlined five roles the public policy educator can assume, ranging from one with a pure "process" orientation to one where the subject matter is everything. Another recent publication [5] describes six approaches to community development.

The literature seems to infer there is agreement that an effective program must include both "process" and "subject" elements, with the relative proportions of each a function of the style and preferences of the individual worker. Such apparent agreement would represent a reconciliation of what at times has been a dicotomization of CRD practice into distinct and mutually exclusive schools.

The extent to which reconciliation seemingly has occurred is reflected in the following statements. First, Long, et al., in outlining the six approaches, note "there is unanimous concern for dissemination of information and for group action, whereas differences revolve, for the most part, around sequence and/or chronological order and temporal emphasis" [5, p. 5]. Bennett points out that the ". . . (CRD) educator rarely acts purely as a helping individual or purely as an information giver" [1, p. 20]. Finally, Eldridge, referring to community resource and human development, points out that it is "a process, yes--but with a purpose!" [3, p. 832].

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<sup>1/</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of several of his co-workers on the Northeast Public Policy Education Committee. Special thanks are due Austin Bennett for providing a most insightful overview of program needs very early in the game. Finally, the penetrating comments on both the structure and content of several drafts of the paper by my chairman, Ronald Cummings are gratefully acknowledged.



The point that this paper will attempt to make is that the "process vs. content" issue has been a vacuous one. Extension agents' concerns are not and have not been over the nature of the role they assumed as they went about their work. Rather, it will be asserted that CRD field agents are much more concerned with a broad range of forces that act to enhance or inhibit their ability to carry out their programs.

Insights as to the multifaceted nature of the pressures felt by extension personnel came when the author surveyed a group of CRD workers as to the type of support they needed from their universities. Prior to conducting the survey, the author anticipated that rather narrow responses, relating to informational needs, would be forthcoming. However, wide ranging responses covering a number of concerns were obtained. It is felt that the nature of the responses have implications for many facets of the structure and scope of extension CRD programs.

The next section of the paper describes the nature of the responses obtained in the survey. This is followed by a possible explanation for the negative tone conveyed in the responses. Some ways of dealing at least in part with the dissatisfactions are offered in the final section.

#### CRD Workers' Concerns

To obtain input into a regional task force report [6] on rural development research needs, the author surveyed a group of extension CRD agents in the Northeast in mid-1973.<sup>2/</sup>

State, area (i.e., multi-county), and county level CRD agents were interviewed with particular emphasis being given to the agent's perception of his most pressing program needs. As the interview responses were reviewed, there emerged, at least to the author's eyes, a "pattern" or natural grouping to the responses. Admittedly, it was highly tempting to consider tabulating and analyzing statistically the response data. However, it is essential to remember that the survey was conducted with other goals in mind and without the appropriate experimental design to permit such an analysis. Thus, the concerns set forth below are qualitative in nature and highly impressionistic. They are offered as indicative of the heretofore unrecognized breadth of concerns and frustrations felt by CRD personnel.

The responses obtained have been sorted into the following four major areas of concern:

- a. Organization and administration of extension programs.
- b. Information retrieval.
- c. Process concerns.
- d. Subject matter concerns.

The scope of these concerns among the different levels of CRD personnel are indicated below.

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<sup>2/</sup> A profile of the persons surveyed is given in Appendix A.

State level personnel focused primarily on subject matter concerns. This group, for example, emphasized the need for more information on topics such as land use policy, taxation, community services, and local government finances. The need for better systems for retrieving existing information and putting it in useful form was stressed by some. Finally, some in this group focused on a topic entirely outside the four areas of concern, namely the matter of rural development research strategies and priorities. This last point, while of considerable interest in the planning of research programs, is not related directly to the structuring and operation of extension activities. For that reason this topic will not receive further consideration here.

A different response pattern was obtained from CRD agents who operate at the area and county level. It should be remembered that these workers differ from their state counterparts in that they usually are more directly involved with communities on an ongoing basis, and they are based away from the university campus and all its resources. Some examples of the major areas of concern of these agents are outlined below.

1. Organization and Administration of Extension Programs
  - a. Lack of access to competencies not usually found in colleges of agriculture.
  - b. Need for greater support and advocacy of CRD programs by all administrative levels.
2. Information Retrieval
  - a. Because most informational needs are project specific, the primary need is for sources of technical data and case studies of similar projects.
  - b. Need for formalized means for tapping into existing information, including the mass of experiment station and extension publications.
3. Process Concerns
  - a. Lack of an adequate diffusion model for extending the university to people concerned about their communities.
  - b. Need for a "social action model" for agencies to exploit the synergistic potential inherent in combining the resources of the many community development agencies.
4. Subject Matter Concerns
  - a. Interrelationship of land use and tax policies.
  - b. Capital budgeting techniques for smaller communities.
  - c. Adapting community service systems, e.g., sewage disposal systems, to "fit" the extensive rural countryside.

The range and depth of concerns conveyed by the agents suggests that there is dissatisfaction with the tools and structure available for conducting extension CRD programs. The next section of the paper suggests some explanations for the source of the dissatisfactions.

#### Possible Explanation for Dissatisfaction Regarding the CRD Mission

In terms of the dissatisfaction with the mission of CRD, it is tempting to attribute such dissatisfaction to the philosophical debate over the



appropriate method for "doing" CRD, i.e., the "process" vs. "content" controversy. This writer suggests that much more is involved. To get at what is felt to be at the core of the problem it is necessary first to review the more traditional approach to extension as exemplified by extension programs for commercial agriculture.

Programs geared to agriculturalists generally have the following characteristics associated with them:

- a. Program direction is given by citizens advisory committees dominated by commercial producers (or retired commercial producers).
- b. College and program administrators reared, trained and wedded to land grant colleges of agriculture.
- c. An orientation throughout the college of agriculture research and extension areas consistent with that suggested, albeit in an overdrawn way, in Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times.
- d. A research program in the agricultural experiment station that has and does lead, i.e., stay ahead of, the extension program.
- e. "University support" of extension efforts is, for all practical purposes, synonymous with college of agriculture support.

This, then, is the tradition, and continues to be relevant to the organization of the extension programs as they exist at many land grant institutions.

Within this context, and it is argued that this is the context relevant to many institutions in the Northeast, let us look at the CRD worker.<sup>3/</sup> This person is out in the field, frequently without professional colleagues close by, seeking to extend something. A conceptual approach to community development that is sensitive to this need has been suggested by the author in collaboration with two of his colleagues [2]. The concept has been utilized by this writer to develop a subject matter oriented community development education program [7]. Suffice it to say here that sooner or later under present circumstances the agent comes to the realization that he has nothing to extend. Whereupon, he looks back to the campus--his home academic department, or the college of agriculture--for backup, only to find that research relevant to his needs is not being done. Whereupon he looks across the entire university for support only to find that the mechanism does not exist for him to tap into these broader resources.

One must conclude that few, if any of those aspects that contributed to the success of the agricultural extension agent, i.e., college administration and structure, research backlog and backup, are available to the CRD worker. Under such circumstances it is quite understand-

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<sup>3/</sup> Implicitly we are considering the field worker, though, depending upon size of program, etc., he may be designated as a member of a county staff, area staff or the state staff.

able to find CRD agents frustrated and dissatisfied. In fact, it is difficult to avoid the interesting speculation that a major stimulus for the popularity of the "process" approach is that the CRD worker has had little else to contribute!<sup>4/</sup>

#### Necessary Conditions for an Effective Extension CRD Program

Setting aside for the moment any possible process aspects of a CRD program, it seems logical that an effective CRD extension program requires no less--indeed, it will be argued more are needed--of structures analogous to those surrounding effective agricultural extension programs.

An extension program that outstrips the research available to extend is not a viable one. What is needed is a backlog of research on which to build the extension effort; that is, with CRD as with agriculture, "research must lead extension." But even more importantly, the scope of such research buildup must be very broad, requiring inputs from many disciplines. This argues for substantial changes in administrative structure, university backup, etc., given to extension CRD efforts.

The question that must be faced is whether the needed changes can be brought about at the agricultural college level. Much of the research needed by the CRD worker is being done (or could be done) in departments outside of the college of agriculture. For example, many of the problems confronting communities in the areas of land use regulations, fiscal management and provision of services require extensive inputs from lawyers, public administration specialists, and engineers. This would suggest the need for an effective mechanism for making content specialists from all parts of the campus available to extension field staff.

Several means for achieving these ends suggest themselves. None is without its limitations, but all may contain kernels of useful approaches. The most simple, of course, is the informal alliance between individuals across departmental lines and based on mutual interests. These work best, or perhaps only, when they spring up spontaneously. Administrative decree cannot create them and therein lies their major weakness--their unpredictability. Their creation is a random event, so having the proper combination of talent available at the needed moment can neither be predicted nor counted upon. Exciting things can happen when such alliances occur, but they will not serve as a major answer to our problem.

A slightly more formalized version of the structure suggested above involves formal contractual arrangements across departmental lines. Fre-

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<sup>4/</sup> Further, we must face the question of why Ph.D. level agricultural economists are hired to implement process oriented CRD programs.



quently such combines are formed for the purpose of soliciting grant funds. In those cases the commitment to a specified goal is considerably higher than in the first case, while still attracting many of the participants on the basis of scholarly interests. As examples of this approach, one might wish to examine the "Local Government Program" sponsored jointly by the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations and Cooperative Extension at Cornell University. This project coordinates a public service program of research and extension education, involving faculty from several disciplines and funding from at least four different sources.

Some major institutions have created university-wide extension divisions under the direction of a separate vice-president or dean of extension as a means of broadening the scope of their adult education programs. Programs of this type can be found, for example, at Iowa State University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute. These programs have at least two limitations. First, researchers in relevant fields are not always readily accessible. This deficiency can be overcome at least partially through split appointments between research and extension. A second difficulty arises when Cooperative Extension is maintained as a separate entity within the university-wide program. In these instances, access to resources outside of the colleges of agriculture and home economics remains difficult. Seemingly only firm commitment to effective campus-wide programs at the highest administrative levels can overcome such problems.

Finally, for the small or "limited resource" cooperative extension programs that abound in the northeast, and especially in New England, there are two interesting approaches, both of which have received limited trial. The first involves cooperative regional research and extension efforts among states. The "northern" states of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont have had some experience with this approach in several extension programs. When you consider that as you sit here in Kingston you are approximately 60 miles from Storrs and 125 miles from Amherst, such cooperation should be explored and encouraged.

Another variant of this idea is the exchange of state specialists in subject matter areas not available locally. Rhode Island and New Hampshire have carried out such exchange quite successfully with home economics specialists. CRD program leaders should explore this possibility also.

#### Summary

General agreement seems to exist that effective CRD extension programs must combine "process" and "content" elements. A survey of CRD personnel in the Northeast revealed that confusion, uncertainty, and frustration exists among these workers over how to carry out their programs.



Appendix A. Profile of Extension Personnel Surveyed

1.	<u>Highest Degree Held</u> -----	<u>Level of Extension Activity</u>			
	<u>Degree</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>County</u>	
	Bachelors	2	-	4	
	Masters	4	9	1	
	Doctorate	2	1	1	
2.	<u>Field of Concentration</u> --	<u>Most Recent Studies</u>			
	Agricultural Sciences	2	-	1	
	Agricultural Economics	3	-	-	
	Community Development	-	3	-	
	Education (all options)	2	5	4	
	Planning	1	2	-	
	Political Science	-	-	1	
3.	<u>Years of Experience in Cooperative Extension and CRD Work</u>				
		<u>Area Staff</u>		<u>County Staff</u>	
		<u>CES</u>	<u>CRD</u>	<u>CES</u>	<u>CRD</u>
	2 yrs. or less	3	3	-	-
	2+ to 5 yrs.	2	3	1	2
	5+ to 10 yrs.	2	4	1	4
	10+ to 15 yrs.	-	-	-	-
	over 15 yrs.	3	-	4	-
	Mean of ungrouped data (years)	7.6	4.4	14.0	6.5
4.	<u>Agents Whose Cooperative Extension Experience Has Been Solely in CRD Work</u>				
		<u>Area</u>		<u>County</u>	
	Number	6		2	

Setting aside those workers who would work exclusively within a process context, it is hypothesized that the major source of dissatisfaction arises from lack of access to a broad range of subject matter competencies and the materials which they could supply. Several approaches for reversing the "research lagging extension" condition are suggested and evaluated. It is concluded that means for channeling a wide range of competencies into CRD programs can be achieved, given strong administrative support and institutional flexibility.

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