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OPPORTUNITIES FOR EFFECTIVE EXTENSION POLICY EDUCATION

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At the National Policy Conference two years ago, we had a session on the future of public policy extension. Jim Hildreth gave an insightful paper on that subject. He talked about the demand for and supply of public policy extension. He said the demand for policy extension was a function of concern about public issues as well as the perceived ability of Extension to deliver useful public policy education programs.

The demand for public policy extension is growing — at least the concern about public issues is growing. Why? Because people now find themselves living in a more complicated and interdependent society. It is harder for the individual to influence his or her own destiny. More of the decisions affecting individual well-being are being made in the public arena.

Hildreth talked about the supply of public policy education as a function of the knowledge base (is there something there to extend?) and, of course, resources (people and dollars available for public policy education).

It's interesting now to look at this framework of demand and supply for policy education in today's setting. Obviously, there is not one demand and one supply of public policy education. There are many demand/supply sets. There is a demand for farm policy education. There is a demand for energy policy education, for nutrition policy education, and so on. There is a demand for farm policy education in Minnesota and another demand in Florida.

It follows that the supply of public policy education involves a decision not only about how much to allocate to policy education versus other educational programs, but how much to allocate to farm policy education, nutrition policy education, or natural resource policy education.

What influences that decision? Hildreth says it is influenced in part by the administrator's perception of the demand. It is also influenced by the administrator's perception of the effects of fund allocation on future levels of funding, not only for public policy education but for all of extension. Too much farm policy education

relative to other kinds of policy education will raise questions in the minds of those concerned about other policy issues. Too much non-farm policy education will raise questions among those who have been the traditional base of support for Extension. So I think we have an interesting link between policy extension and Extension policy.

Now, I shall make an assertion. If the supply of public policy education is going to increase to meet what we generally perceive as a growing demand, we need to break out of the vicious circle that has long characterized the relationship between Extension programs and Extension's support base. We need to look seriously at two questions: How can Extension keep its old friends while it makes new friends? Should Extension help to develop support bases for public policy education in those areas where the knowledge and competency are present but the base of support is limited or absent?

I think Ogden and Rosenbaum are telling us to update our perception of what is happening in the power clusters. We need to recognize what Ogden shocked us with a few years ago — that we are not detached observers. We are indeed a part of a power cluster. There are old friends of Extension in the power cluster. There are also some potential new friends in the cluster. We need to talk with them. Some don't know that Extension exists. Since moving to Washington I have talked with people in a few interest groups who said no one from Extension ever bothered to talk with them before.

There are new people in the Department of Agriculture who do not fully understand Extension. We make a mistake assuming they do.

I think we also need to de-emphasize the competition between Extension programs for limited dollars. We ought to be talking more about their supplementarity and complementarity. When we talk with people in farm organizations, for example, have we erred by going along with the notion that everything is in competition with agriculture? Rural development is not, in my judgment. Extension programs for consumers in urban areas may benefit farmers as well as consumers.

In the so-called Farm Bill of 1977, there is a requirement that Extension be evaluated. I see this as a real opportunity. If we continue to mumble about this support-base issue and go along with the past emphasis on competition, I suspect we will lose a lot of this opportunity. If we decide to face this transition realistically, I believe both the demand and the supply of public policy education will grow substantially.