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POLICY EDUCATION AND THE EXTENSION WASTE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

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The Extension National Initiative approach to educational program development, based on critical national issues, has quickly led to the identification of "waste management" as a new Cooperative Extension System national educational initiative. The goals, critical issues and program objectives of the waste management initiative contain numerous opportunities (some would even say requirements) for public policy education in waste management. Who will develop and deliver the waste management policy education program? What will be the community impact if waste management policy education is neglected?

Issues Programming in the CES

The Cooperative Extension System (CES) initiated a new program development approach, National Initiatives, in 1987 (Wadsworth). The Extension National Initiatives are to be developed in response to critical national issues. For extension, issues are defined as "matters of wide public concern arising out of complex human problems" (Extension Service, USDA, et al.).

The CES Waste Management Initiative

With this program development process in place, it was not surprising when the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) formally adopted "waste management" as a new Extension National Initiative in November, 1988, (Extension Service, USDA and ECOP, 1989). Few issues faced today by local communities generate more public concern, or are more complex in their cause and their potential resolution, than solid and hazardous waste management.

It is clear that a national revolution in waste management has begun. If this revolution is to proceed smoothly, the regulatory and enforcement functions of federal and state environmental agencies must be supplemented by waste management education for both consumers and community decision makers. Consumers and community decision makers must be able to make waste management decisions based on informed and unbiased analysis of waste management alternatives, considering the real costs and benefits of each.

The CES Initiative

To address the national waste management initiative, the CES will implement a comprehensive system-wide solid waste management education program. Local extension staff, with state specialist support, will help youth, families, farmers, small business, community leaders and public officials understand the complexities of waste management issues, alternatives for effectively addressing the issues and procedures for implementing local action programs. Educational programs will focus on management of household waste, including household hazardous waste and agricultural chemicals, and waste from other nonhazardous small quantity waste generators such as main street businesses (Extension Service, USDA and ECOP, 1990).

The programs developed within the national initiative will address three critical issues facing rural and urban communities across America. The CES is committed to increasing research-based knowledge, instilling attitudes of environmental responsibility, and stimulating practice change among individuals and communities. Educational programs in each state and territory will adopt a limited number of recommended objectives and related impact indicators and use recommended measures and methodology to assess effectiveness so that results can be aggregated system-wide. Other objectives may be added to address particular state or local concerns.

Initiative Goal

The overall goal of the CES National Initiative on Waste Management is to provide educational programs that enable consumers and communities to successfully change their waste management strategies. Individuals and communities will be able to implement cost-effective, integrated waste management systems based on maximum waste reduction, recycling and processing, and state-of-the-art engineered landfills.

Critical Issues and Program Objectives

Issue: Consumers are uncertain about which goods, services and practices constitute economically and environmentally responsible waste management decisions.

Objectives:

- Consumers will define for themselves specific concerns about the environmental consequences of goods, services and practices.
- Consumers will identify reliable sources of information for evaluating alternative purchases and practices.
- Consumers will make purchasing decisions consistent with environmental responsibility, including increased purchases of recycled materials.
- Consumers will report satisfaction in understanding the environmental impacts of the goods and services they purchase.

- Consumers will increase their use of nonhazardous and less hazardous materials.
- Consumers, as citizens, will be aware of the societal costs/benefits and public policy issues posed by waste management.

Issue: Communities are experiencing significantly increased costs for waste collection, transport, handling and disposal and are seeking unbiased information on alternatives for enhancing the positive environmental impacts of waste management.

Objectives:

- Community decision makers will understand federal and state waste management requirements, and will have information on state-of-the-art waste management technologies and equipment.
- Local officials and community leaders will receive assistance in initiating, supporting and implementing community waste management decisions at each stage of the issue evolution cycle.
- Local officials and community planners will have access to computer-assisted waste management budgeting and decision making aids.
- Community decision makers will increase their capacity for analyzing and implementing solid waste management options, including comparative costs and benefits, giving meaningful attention to disempowered socioeconomic populations.
- Community decision makers will be able to make informed decisions about the economic and environmental tradeoffs in the waste management technologies of waste reduction, collection, transport, processing, reuse, recycling, landfilling and incineration.

Issue: Communities are currently finding that markets for recycling post-consumer materials are very unstable.

Objectives:

- Community leaders will be able to identify market potential before committing resources to recycling programs.
- Community decision makers and consumers will be able to implement strategies that enhance marketing post-consumer materials.
- Community recycling coordinators will know how to find new markets for post-consumer materials.
- Communities will know how to form regional cooperatives or compacts to increase recyclable volumes and improve leverage in contracting to retain market access.
- Business and industries will “think recycling” when they purchase materials and produce goods or service.

Action Plan

The CES waste management initiative action plan includes an assessment of existing waste management education processes and materials; identification of additional materials needed at the county level; and establishment of a clearinghouse for sharing waste management materials to provide useful information and support to each CES office on a timely basis. Additional actions include developing comprehensive waste management education program materials as needs are identified; providing national and/or regional extension waste management staff development inservice training and follow-up support; and establishing effective partnerships and maintaining linkages with governmental, professional and business associations to better integrate CES educational programs into the larger process of comprehensive solid waste management.

Opportunities for Public Policy Education in Waste Management

Each of the three critical issues targeted by the CES contain numerous opportunities for public policy education in waste management:

- **Responsible Consumer Behavior**
 - Paper vs. plastic
 - Lawn and garden care and maintenance
 - Hazardous vs. less-hazardous household products
- **Local Government Decision Making**
 - Landfill or waste-to-energy incineration
 - Siting of landfill, incinerator, etc.
 - Compensation packages for affected communities
- **Recycling Post-Consumer Goods**
 - Mandated vs. volunteer programs
 - Curbside collection or source separation facility
 - Procurement requirements for public and/or private agencies
 - Can and bottle deposit laws

Conclusion

Waste management is clearly an issue whose "teachable moment" has arrived nationally. By their actions, ECOP and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Extension Service have instructed the Cooperative Extension System to aggressively initiate a waste management education program if one is not already in place. All state extension services have been asked to establish multidisciplinary teams, including public policy education specialists, to develop and conduct these programs.

Will these waste management education programs become a reality? In most states, yes, because of the urgency of the issue at local and state levels. Whether they will include elements of waste management policy

education or not was best expressed by Wadsworth in his discussion of the Extension National Initiatives (Wadsworth, p. 89):

The question we must face is whether faculties can be convinced that they should be involved in such programs. Will faculty (including policy specialists) be willing to work together to develop and conduct a policy program? Do we have faculty with the needed expertise in our colleges of agriculture? If not, do we have flexible resources to get access to the expertise we need?

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