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Opening Remarks

By J. Carroll Bottum

We are happy to welcome you to this Fourth National Agricultural Training Conference in Public Affairs. More states are represented at this conference than at any other that we have held. The committee has arranged an excellent program, and I believe this conference has the possibilities of being much the best of any that has been held. I say possibilities, because all through this program we have left considerable time for the members to participate. Therefore, how good a conference we have will depend not only on what the speakers put into it but also what each one of us as participating members puts into the conference.

The requests of the Secretary of Agriculture and the attitudes of the administrators of land-grant colleges and the farm organizations provide a stimulus at the moment for more and better work in this field of public policy. They provide an excellent backdrop for this conference.

I should like to go back and philosophize with you concerning education in this area of public policy. It seems to me that we have gradually had technological, social, and economic changes which make the need for education in public policy much greater than in the earlier days. These technological, social, and economic developments have forced greater interdependence upon each individual in our society. As we have increased the interdependence, we have increased the number of social and group problems. As we have increased the number of social and group problems, we have increased the need for education in this area.

Today on many issues, there is a great gap between the position of the educator and the average layman concerning nearly any problem. Sometimes the educator cannot understand why the layman takes such a position and the layman cannot understand why the professor is so peculiar. I mean this seriously, because I hear it on every hand. I myself think it is because the educator looks at the problem over the long run and tries to appraise the long-run implications of certain policies, while the layman looks at the short-run and immediate implications. The problem is one of educating both the layman and the college professor and bringing them closer together.

We have a serious problem to solve in developing the procedures and methods for presenting information to the public in the public affairs area in such a manner that it will be accepted the same as our knowledge in the technological areas. I hope at this conference we shall constantly be appraising what methods and techniques we can best use in presenting public policy information.

As many of you know, my own individual thinking on this problem, which has grown out of my experiences, leads me to the conclusion that the educator's job is to analyze the problem and to set forth the alternative solutions and consequences, but to be careful not to force our opinion of what is the best course of action upon the public. I know all of you do not share this viewpoint, and I think we should examine all the approaches very carefully.