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Progress in Agricultural Policy Education

By Tyrus R. Timm

This is the sixth annual conference centered on educational techniques for presentation of agricultural policy subject matter, a phase in which the state extension services have made substantial progress during the past few years.

Educational work in agricultural policy, for the most part, has sought to develop a clearer understanding and a better appreciation of the causes, nature, and effects of government participation in agriculture. In some states, emphasis has been given largely to local issues involving government action, such as the consolidation of schools and the building of farm-to-market roads. In others, major attention has been devoted to state-wide issues, such as state grants-in-aid and property taxes. In nearly all states, a large part of the extension effort has been devoted to national issues directly affecting farm people and occasioned by the participation of the federal government in agriculture. These issues include price supports, production controls, and the like.

The results of educational work in agricultural policy are intangible and difficult to measure. Yet the increasing personnel, improving subject matter, and more widespread interest within the land-grant colleges, and the growing support of farm and business leaders of educational work in this field, is very encouraging.

Since 1950, the 48 state agricultural extension services have issued numerous leaflets, bulletins, and mimeographed guidebooks on agricultural policy. Objectivity and directness of the contents, as well as the attractive format of some of these publications, have won nation-wide attention.

Economists working in this field have discussed important agricultural policy issues at many state meetings of general and commodity farm organizations.

The uneasiness in extension ranks at the outset regarding possible repercussions from educational work in this field has subsided.

In the beginning, many persons felt that county agents, in view of their limited training and experience in this field, would not be able to conduct policy discussions unless accompanied by the extension economist. Quite to the contrary, agents have conducted excellent demonstrations after receiving assistance from specialists. Training provided at extension summer schools has also stimulated the

interest and developed the confidence of county agents in this field. The interest of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents in agricultural policy is reflected in the programs of their national conventions.

Extension administrators have always been represented on the National Committee on Agricultural Policy. The attendance of directors and district agents at regional and national meetings planned by the National Committee is further evidence of administrative interest and cooperation.

As an adjunct of the expanding extension program in agricultural policy, the Iowa State College Press began publishing the *Farm Policy Forum* in 1948. Subscriptions for the *Forum* continue to increase, and today the quarterly publication is recognized as the "Reader's Digest" in agricultural policy. Extension economists play a major role in planning the subject matter published in the *Forum* and in promoting distribution and discussion of its contents.

The "Report of the Committee on Post War Agricultural Policy of the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and State Universities," released in October 1944, helped give impetus and professional stature to educational work in agricultural policy.

FEDERAL EXTENSION SERVICE

In June 1949, Director Wilson of the Federal Extension Service called a meeting in Washington of 18 extension economists. Invited, too, were 6 consultants, including Dr. John D. Black of Harvard University and Dr. Charles Hardin of the University of Chicago, as well as representatives of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Federal Extension Service.

For the most part, the conference group reviewed educational work being done in agricultural policy, considered problems encountered, and set forth some suggestions for further expansion of the program. These were spelled out in a handbook, "Educational Work on Public Policy Problems and Their Relationship to Agriculture," which was prepared by the Federal Extension Service following the meeting and distributed to the 48 states.

FARM FOUNDATION

The National Committee on Agricultural Policy, formed by the Farm Foundation in 1950, was composed of 12 men — an extension economist, a research economist, and a director of extension from each of the four extension regions.

Reports Published

This committee planned and assisted in conducting a public policy conference held in Chicago in January 1950 with extension economists from 38 states participating. The report of the conference, entitled "Educational and Methods Conference in Public Policy," was multilithed and made available to the state extension services by the Farm Foundation.

It also was decided at this conference to hold four regional conferences on agricultural policy in the fall of 1950 to acquaint more extension personnel with responsibilities and opportunities in this field. The following reports of these four conferences were issued by the Farm Foundation: "Proceedings, Western Region Extension Conference on Public Policy," "Report of Work Conference on Public Policy Problems" (Southern states), "Discussing Public Policy, a Report of the North Central States Conference for Extension Workers," and "Report on Work Conference of Public Policy Problems for Extension Workers, Northeastern States."

Since 1951, annual handbooks entitled "Increasing Understanding of Public Problems and Policies," containing the papers and discussions at each of the national conferences, have been prepared by the National Committee and published by the Farm Foundation.

In 1952 the Farm Foundation published a special report entitled "Turning the Searchlight on Farm Policy." This was not an official report of the National Committee, but was an outgrowth of its interest in this field. Twelve leading agricultural economists were asked to set forth conditions underlying the agricultural situation at the time and to develop recommendations for improving agriculture's welfare.

In the fall of 1956, another report was prepared and distributed by the Farm Foundation. Entitled "Agricultural Policy Issues," it includes selected statements from the previous annual handbooks on "Increasing Understanding of Public Problems and Policies."

Scholarships for County Agents

A major project inaugurated three years ago by the Farm Foundation was providing annually 100 scholarships of \$100 each for county extension agents to attend a three-week course in agricultural policy given at the regional extension summer schools. To date 341 county agents have taken advantage of this opportunity. Letters of agents to the Farm Foundation attest to their clear recognition of the importance of including educational work in this field along with assistance on the technical aspects of agriculture.