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Improving Farmer Understanding of Economic Policies

By J. Carroll Bottum

In connection with this problem two questions were raised for discussion:

1. How should we organize economic information for presentation?
2. To what groups should we devote our major effort?

After some preliminary discussion the conference group was divided into four groups in order that they might discuss and analyze these two questions.

Under question 1, consideration was given to: (1) whether the economic information to be presented should: (a) be limited to background material or (b) be directed toward analysis to reach the most appropriate solution; and (2) whether the discussion should be: (a) organized around a problem or (b) based on some other method of organization.

Under question 2, the groups were asked to consider whether the major effort should be devoted to working with: (1) county agents, (2) farm community leaders, (3) all groups (through mass media such as the press, radio, and television), or (4) some groups.

After discussion in separate groups, reports were presented to the general conference by reporters from each group.

While many points were raised with respect to question 1, there seemed to be general agreement that economic information in the policy area should be organized around a problem. Therefore, the first task is to delineate the problem, the second task is to set forth the alternatives, and the third task is to analyze the consequences. It was pointed out that naturally some modifications had to be made in the organization of material depending on the nature of the group and the time available.

On question 2, there was a much wider difference of opinion. A considerable number felt that major emphasis should be given to

working with agricultural leaders, recognizing that the end objective is to get the information to all groups. Others felt that mass media methods are most effective in reaching all groups. Still others placed emphasis on working with county agents. The difference of opinion in many cases arose from differences in the organization of extension work in the states and the amount of manpower available for public policy work.

It was evident from the discussion that much progress had been made in methods used in the public policy area. Much less concern was expressed about the difficulty of dealing with controversial questions than in the earlier meetings.