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SUMMARY OF ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES REACTOR PANEL

TRANSITION OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY

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The transition of food and agricultural policy challenges efficiency and competitiveness as primary goals of agricultural and food policy. It could replace economic performance criteria with social or ethical criteria. In doing so, it would sacrifice efficiency, low food costs, and export competitiveness. Such tradeoffs have not heretofore been pursued although the political rhetoric often has indicated the contrary. For example, while family farm survival has been a stated goal of agricultural policy and moderate-size farmers have benefited more than large farmers from a survival perspective, this has not happened at the expense of efficiency. Moreover, the term family farmer has never been sufficiently defined in the law for lawmakers and implementers to determine whom they are trying to save.

Transition rhetoric suggests the future will be different. It suggests family farms and environmentally friendly (green) outcomes will be sufficiently tightly defined to satisfy a different set of goals. In the process, there will be many political battles over the distribution of farm program benefits, over private property rights, and over the degree of government regulation of agriculture. During this transition, public policy educators run the risk of becoming entangled in positions of advocacy and value judgments. Aside from describing the forces of change (the situation or what is happening), policy educators will best serve society if they continue to concentrate on policy options and their consequences in what Paul Thompson refers to elsewhere in this publication as performance criteria. Policymakers, not economists, are elected to make decisions on issues such as rights, appropriate conduct and desired performance measures/levels.

BUILDING HUMAN CAPITAL—REFORMING EDUCATION

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These remarks are limited to reforms in the K-12 system and are not intended to be comprehensive.

1. Defining the problem—how and who? The problem or issue is typically defined in terms of *performance*. School systems are perceived as failing or coming up short in their “mission.” Missions are most often seen as providing cost-effective education that meets the needs of all students and prepares them adequately for work and citizenship.

Who defines the problem? Professional educators, school boards, business and occupational groups, parent groups, taxpayer groups and state governments (executive and legislators).

2. How are alternatives defined and by whom? Alternatives for addressing the problem (or problems) often fall into three major categories and are given varying degrees of emphasis depending upon how the problem is perceived. For example, professional educators tend to pursue alternatives involving curriculum revision, graduation requirements, pupil-teacher ratios, teacher training, need for additional resources, etc. Taxpayer groups, politicians and, in some cases, the courts, pursue alternatives that address issues of equity (for both students and taxpayers), adequacy of resources, and efficient use of resources. Sometimes consolidation becomes part of the equation.

Others see the problem as rooted in the governance and control of schools and put forward alternatives designed to obtain more parent and citizen input, more organizational options (such as charter schools, vouchers, etc.) and more flexibility to meet the needs of diverse student bodies, openness to innovation, etc.

3. How are the criteria for choice determined and by whom? Professional educators, employers, and funders often push *measures of student achievement* such as test scores, dropout rates, success in college and adequate preparation for work. Funders and taxpayers use criteria such as a system of school finance that produces adequate revenue and is “fair” to taxpayers.

State governments, groups who feel disadvantaged, and courts look at consistency with state laws and state constitutions. Others use criteria that address degree of public participation and support (i.e., they look at the way decisions and policies are made. They put a high value on having all voices heard.

These issues have ethical dimensions, touch deeply held values, and are extremely contentious—they affect and impact our notions about family, country, culture and work.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ISSUES

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There is a plentiful supply of ethical issues and dilemmas in environmental policy problems. At the national level, there are many new value orientations and a broadened set of ethical criteria being used to define environmental problems and evaluate public policy options. For example, interest groups have brought management concepts, such as ecosystem and watershed management, and criteria, such as biological diversity and sustainability, to debates regarding the 1995 farm bill, Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act. The fact that “green payments” are being discussed as a policy option among some mainstream interest agricultural groups and analysts attests to the increasing role of environmental values in shaping the debate about national food and agricultural policy.

The national issues alluded to illustrate the pervasiveness of value questions in environmental policy. But how do these relate to public policy education and the state and local program level? The broadening of stakeholders and value orientations relating to environmental policy questions is occurring at the state and local levels as well as the national level, although faster in some areas than others. As this happens, the way in which environmental problems are defined, the way in which alternatives are identified and created, and the way in which the criteria for public choice are determined are changing. This raises at least three central questions for our educational programs and supporting research activities: 1) Are we effectively adapting to this change by broadening the stakeholder groups we involve and relate to in our programs? 2) Do we treat “new” stakeholder groups as having a legitimate interest and role in policy discussion related to agriculture and the food system? 3) Do we use policy education methods that are balanced and fair and allow new and different problem definitions, alternatives and choice criteria? From my experience, especially in working with state level faculty in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, I believe, more often than not, we are not being sufficiently inclusive in terms of the audiences we work with or balanced in the educational methods we use. Unless we make more significant efforts to adjust to the changing world around us, I believe we will be doing a disservice to our traditional audiences, new individuals and groups and, worst of all, to the future of extension as an organization that helps people address in a meaningful way the problems that are of utmost concern to them.

The Situation-Structure-Conduct-Performance framework developed by Schmid and interpreted by Thompson in his paper offers some potential for overcoming the barriers to improved understanding and relationships between educators from the social and physical sciences working on environmental policy issues. The “alternative-consequences” approach to policy education is a performance-based or more utilitarian approach to policy analysis. Social scientists are generally comfortable with this approach and the potential for balance and greater objectivity it provides. Many stakeholders in policy issues evaluate policies in terms other than, or in addition to, consequences, but also may place value on particular structure or rights and conduct. A number of extension educators trained in the physical agricultural production sciences, perhaps due to identification with farm and food system audiences for their work, tend to apply structure and conduct criteria, or performance criteria different than social sciences, when conducting policy analysis. The emphasis of social scientists on performance and physical scientists on structure or conduct may be an important reason why multi-disciplinary collaboration on environmental policy issues has been difficult. By allowing scientists from different perspectives to see the bigger picture, the Situation-Structure-Conduct-Performance framework may provide a vehicle for enhanced communication and cooperation.

REFERENCES

Schmid, Allen A. *Property, Power and Public Choice*, 2nd ed. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1987.

ETHICS AND TRADE ISSUES

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It is very common for ethical questions to be raised with trade-related issues. What follows is a list of such concerns stated as assertions. They are distributional in nature. Just as their appearance on the list is not intended to give credence in fact, neither is the order intended to suggest level of priority. Following the list of possible ethical assertions are four simple questions that one can ask about each assertion so that some filtering may take place.

1. Some businesses export “banned, damned or otherwise damaged goods” to a less discriminating world (e.g., the general practice of “dumping,” the sale of hazardous chemicals and weapons of war).
2. The government promotes trade practices and a philosophy that may unintentionally harm culture (Schumpeter’s destructive gales of capitalism).

3. We import a brain trust to the detriment of native countries (scientists, entrepreneurs, others from third world countries).
4. We exploit the natural resources of other countries.
5. We denigrate/re-direct the self-sufficiency concept, especially with third world countries (from production-based self-sufficiency to economic-based self-sufficiency).

Questions that one may ask of these assertions to determine their importance include these:

- A. Is the assertion “true” (noting how “truth” is defined, and whether “truth” is spelled with a small “t” or capital “T”).
- B. If so, is the practice ethical?
- C. What are the realistic options (both to evaluate and to respond to concerns deemed legitimate) and likely consequences?
- D. Who cares (*not* in a cynical way, but in a pragmatic manner)?

Ethics does matter in the practices of international trade. What is needed is to apply the value of ethics in a logical and constructive framework.

FINANCING EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL

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Social contract is defined as what a person would be expected to give and to get from the community or society to which the person belongs. Examples are the protection of property and the right to use it in return for paying part of the cost required to operate the services needed to protect and enhance its value. Another example is that my parents care for me as I develop to be a productive citizen; in their later life, I am responsible to care for them. A third example is the provision of education to the young so they may have more productive lives and a surplus to support senior citizens. I would classify all three of these examples under rights and duties.

The current difficulty in redefining the social contract is who should pay how much and in what manner, and who should receive which benefits? In order to have productive human capital, investment must be made. Do we spend the resources on cure or prevention? Should health care funds be spent on preventive care which reduces overall cost or curative care which is interventive for problems that develop for whatever reason? Should a high level of living be provided for those receiving transfer payments, or should funds

be utilized for education of young citizens? Should housing be subsidized for some while not for others?

As social contracts are being renegotiated, are we being ethical? Are our educational programs appropriate? What are the consequences to different parties of the social contracts that are being negotiated?

SUSTAINABLE RURAL POLICY

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Webster's dictionary defines ethics as a system of right or good behavior (moral principles). The discussion that follows is based on this definition.

The first ethical consideration is, who defines the rural problem(s). The common good or what is best for rural communities differs depending on whether national, state or local entities define the problems. The same is true when defining what is "rural." Consideration must be given to the composition of the definition and problem identification team(s). Every effort needs to be exerted to insure the inclusion of political and lay leaders, and residents in the process.

The definition of what is a "sustainable rural community" has ethical implications. Considerations must be given to what is the balance between the preservation of the rural environment (aesthetics), economic development, and increased opportunities for rural people. A sustainable rural policy must also define success criteria. Success criteria that evaluate the economy as a whole will render different results from those that target pockets of persistent poverty. Measuring success by aggregating economic and social well-being across rural economies or within pockets of poverty places a different focus on what is good and right.

Agricultural development's role in a sustainable rural policy has ethical overtones. Is agriculture the umbrella or a subset of rural policy development? The answer to the question could vary in results and, therefore, it is imperative that the common good of rural communities remain the focal point of all policy deliberations. A final point of ethical consideration is the rural/urban tradeoffs. Is developing a sustainable rural policy complementary or competitive to developing a sustainable urban policy? Policymakers will be required to deal with whether rural people are better off at the expense of their urban counterparts or if the improvements affect all people.

In conclusion, these are a few ethical considerations associated with developing a sustainable rural policy.

***Transition of Food
and Agricultural Policy***

