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AROUND THE WATER TABLE—A COLORADO PUBLIC AFFAIRS EDUCATION PROGRAM

*S. Kenneth Oakleaf
Community Education Specialist
Colorado State University*

THE PROBLEM

The general problem selected was to increase the awareness, understanding, and skills of Eastern High Plains citizens in developing and managing their underground water resources, particularly to increase their understanding of enabling legislation needed for underground water development and management.

In the Eastern High Plains area of Colorado, a continuing public affairs education program, known originally as the Agri-Challenge Program, was initiated in the fall and winter of 1959-60. As an outgrowth of various study-discussion programs, county and area development committees requested an educational program during the winter of 1964 to aid them in the development and management of underground water.

The leaders of these committees, particularly the Area Development Committee, recognized that problems might arise from rapid pump irrigation development in the area. They also realized that the time to conduct an educational program on underground water legislation and development was before individuals were adversely affected and emotions begin to rise.

The following underground water development and management program was recommended early in 1964 by the Northeast Colorado Area Development Committee:

1. An educational program for the entire area to increase the awareness of the High Plains citizens concerning ground water development and existing ground water laws.
2. Study committees to investigate legislation required for the protection and management of underground water.
3. Irrigation cost studies and irrigation plant efficiency testing.
4. Invitations to representatives from the remaining High Plains counties to participate in general information meetings early in the season. These general meetings were to serve a threefold purpose:

- a. To educate the leadership in the area.
- b. To upgrade the competency of the specialists and county extension staff in the relevant subject matter areas.
- c. To provide resource material and resource people for developing educational materials for the study-discussion program that was to follow.

The general information meetings in the area soon involved our own university engineers, political scientists, and economists, and other agencies such as the U.S. Geological Survey and the State Engineer's Office. All those involved were asked to provide unbiased information on which citizens could base their decisions. Special effort was made to include members of the State Ground Water Commission, state legislators from the area, members of the Interim Legislative Committee on Water, and members of the State Department of Agriculture.

The Area Development Committee's first positive action was presentation of a statement of need for enabling legislation on underground water, based on their level of understanding at that time. This statement, prepared by a subcommittee of the Area Committee, was presented to the State Legislative Committee at a hearing held in the area in August 1964. Let me quote one of the concluding paragraphs of the statement:

Before water development proceeds beyond the potential of effective management, we feel that now is the time to ask for enabling legislation to allow the people of the Northern High Plains the legal authority to establish such an area concept. Before taking the next step of developing the details, we would like to ask two things. First, counsel from you, and second, time to study the details and alternative methods of implementation with you and with the people of the High Plains area. If it is feasible, we would appreciate the opportunity for further audience with you as a Committee, or with individual members, as details for area measurements are developed following the enactment of necessary enabling legislation.

Several subsequent trips were made by members of the water subcommittee and other Eastern High Plains representatives directly to the State House to maintain communication with the legislature.

A more intensified study-discussion program was developed to provide support for the area leaders as they worked for the desired legislation. *No attempt was made to write rules and regulations;* rather public opinion was expressed in an educational, unbiased and unemotional atmosphere in the study-discussion program. Opinions were presented by the Area Committee to the legislators who drafted

the details of the enabling legislation that was passed in the spring of 1965.

WHAT WE DID

We capitalized on a two-way movement that was truly a public affairs specialist's dream. First, the Area Development Committee was maturing to the point of seeking an action program. It had considered farm management and transportation together with the water development program and had selected water development and management as its first priority.

Second, quite independently, yet almost concurrently, the Interim Legislative Committee on Water was being activated and was scheduling area meetings throughout the state. The Area Development Committee was not organized for the purpose of presenting statements at legislative hearings. It just happened to be their good fortune that the legislative committee was also actively discussing legislative needs for Colorado water resources.

Because I had been deeply involved in previous study-discussion programs, the Area Committee requested that I work with three of the extension agents in developing the total educational program.

My program leader and the district supervisor for the area endorsed the committee's recommendations and gave us the green light. To support the extension field staff, our extension program leader formalized an ad hoc multidisciplinary committee on the campus that included extension staff and nonextension staff people from the Economics, Engineering, and Political Science departments. There were three phases to the over-all educational program:

1. County-by-county two-day workshops concerning technical aspects of underground water and pump irrigation development, as well as the current legislative situation.
2. A two-year program of measurement of irrigation pumping plant efficiencies, financed by the power suppliers in the area.
3. A study-discussion program, conducted during the winter of 1964, prior to convening of the state legislature.

HOW WE DID IT

Objectives

Our over-all objective was to increase the High Plains citizen's awareness, understanding, and ability to make decisions concerning the development and management of underground water. The ma-

jority of the Eastern High Plains people did not understand that the supply of underground water is exhaustible. They considered it to be continuously replenished from the mountain streams.

There were three additional objectives for me:

1. To develop the program with a team approach. The extension field staff and the campus multidisciplinary committee proved to be a very effective team in carrying out this program. The area leadership is now asking for more educational programs that cross county lines.
2. To extend the public affairs program beyond the discussion of farm programs per se.
3. To involve and consult with key decision makers outside of the traditional commercial farm clientele. The area now has two newly appointed members on the State Ground Water Commission.

Situation Analysis

With an established program of study-discussion groups, we were able to concentrate on a cross-section of the entire community as well as special interest groups. The mechanisms through which the program was developed were informal ones. Even at this point, the Area Development Committee is not formally organized with specific subcommittee structure. However, over the four years the leaders have worked together so well that they have become a well disciplined program development group. They understand the importance of priority setting and are willing to proceed accordingly.

As a specialist I found myself wearing three hats. First, I was a subject matter specialist in public affairs, and I also had to increase my knowledge of geology. Second, the program planning was assigned to me. Third, I was the coordinator and organizer of the program resource people.

Program Concentration

This particular program has given the extension team experience in identifying issues related to specific problems and an opportunity to test ideas and methods for dealing with those issues. It will give us added confidence to move into more broad-scale programs in social and economic development.

Program Implementation

The study-discussion program was carried out in all of the counties involved in underground water development. The clientele was

carefully selected to involve a cross-section of the entire community. In fact, the people who were involved in the program planning, in the training, and in providing resources seemed to be more dynamic and envisionary than any we had worked with before. I would also add that this was a learning experience that broadened their perception of how a dynamic public affairs program can be undertaken. We feel that "Around the Water Table" provided the following specific educational functions:

1. Improved the understanding of the decision-making process by High Plains citizens.
2. Increased our understanding of ways to discover valuable public affairs opinions leading to constructive legislation.
3. Provided a means to pinpoint areas for further education and understanding prior to legislation or effective implementation of present legislation.
4. Demonstrated that public affairs programs do stimulate action programs for local people to help themselves.
5. Demonstrated that people are not apathetic to solving community and public problems.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this program resulted in:

1. Enactment of enabling legislation permitting the establishment of underground water management districts.
2. Establishment of an area extension irrigation specialist position.
3. Appointment of a new subcommittee of the Area Development Committee to recommend the boundaries for water management districts in the area and the approach for a relevant educational program.
4. Testing of over two hundred irrigation pumps for efficiency over a two-year period.
5. Recommendation by the Area Development Committee of fifty-three possible research projects for the area.
6. Recommendation by the Area Development Committee to

increase the number of educational programs that are conducted across county lines.

7. Recommendation by the Area Development Committee to increase the use of area specialists by the Extension Service.

If the interest of the leadership in the High Plains is indicative, Extension's potential in public affairs education is unlimited.