



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

ENVIRONMENT POLICY EDUCATION

Charles P. Gratto

*Associate Professor of Food and Resource Economics
University of Rhode Island*

The environment is the aggregate of all the external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of an organism. For most organisms, the effects of environment proceed in one direction only.

Organism \longleftrightarrow Environment

Whatever social behavior such organisms manifest is adaptive, not a method of purposeful manipulation of the environment.

People, however, have a more complex relationship to their environment.

People \longleftrightarrow Physical Environment
 $\swarrow \quad \searrow$
 Social Environment

People shape and in turn are influenced by their physical environment. People organize, and in turn, are conditioned by their social environment. The social environment influences the physical environment; the physical environment affects the social environment. The sum of these forces as they act on the human organism constitutes the human environment.

It is not very fruitful to view the People \longleftrightarrow Environment relationship at the aggregate level; aggregation obscures the structure of the relationships. It is the workings of the intricate structure that result in what we call problems. It is in the purposeful manipulation and adjustment of that structure that we will find solutions to problems.

A problem is the difference between what a system is supposed to do and what the system actually does. We specify what the system is supposed to do by knowing what the goals of the system are. The choice of goals and the choice of ways of reaching goals are, of course, up to the people in the system. Thus, manipulation of the system is not exogenous; it is done by the people themselves.

Extension public policy education is a specialized form of education geared toward helping people define and solve problems. In that sense, extension public affairs programs have always been in the area

of environment policy, for they have: (1) assisted people to understand problems and (2) helped people choose among alternative solutions to problems. Relatively greater emphasis has been given to helping people understand alternatives than to helping people choose goals.

In designing a program in environment policy education, the emphasis needs to be changed. The process of helping people and groups of people form goals will be relatively more important because the examination of alternative goals and the trade-off of possibilities among goals has not received the attention necessary for accurate definition of environment policy problems. What trade-off possibilities exist between: (1) air pollution levels and levels of gross national product, (2) noise levels and spatial efficiency, (3) efficient highway design and natural landscape features, (4) residential site space and salt marshes, and (5) mining operations and clean water? If the coefficients of substitution were known, what would be the appropriate mix for now? What would be the appropriate mix for the future? Questions like these remain largely unresolved and are the stuff of which environment policy issues are made.

Programs in environment policy education rest on: (1) greater emphasis on helping people in their attempts to choose the kind of environment they want, (2) greater reliance on outside help in exploring policy alternatives, (3) greater emphasis on the concept of treating the People \longleftrightarrow Environment relationship in its totality. The instructor in environment policy will need to be a generalist relying on specialists in fields ranging from anthropology to zoology to provide the detailed information required by the clients.

Programs in environment policy education should begin on a small scale and rely on treatment of an issue with which people are vitally concerned. In addition to the usual materials, the specialist should present materials on: (1) concepts relating to goal setting in a democratic society; (2) concepts relating to facts, values, and beliefs that have relevance to the general goal setting process; and (3) the structure of the problem and alternative solutions as seen by specialists in disciplines other than agricultural economics and rural sociology.

Extension's role in environment policy education calls for: (1) more emphasis on goal setting, (2) more use of outside help, (3) the policy specialist becoming less a subject matter specialist and more of an educational generalist, (4) a broader view of the nature and structure of problems, and (5) continued use of proven techniques along with a liberal infusion of innovations.