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COMBINING THE RESOURCES OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIC AND HOME ECONOMICS AT 1890 & 1862 LAND GRANT INSTITUTIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION: THE KENTUCKY EXPERIENCE

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Extension is involved in three types of public policy education. One is the traditional area of agricultural policy. Another is the training of extension staff and lay leaders in the policy process. Although this has always been done to some extent, changes in the political climate make it necessary for all staff, regardless of program area, to function in the political arena. New staff especially are likely to need training in basic skills such as conflict management, conducting open meetings, preparing testimony (and when not to), or contacting legislators.

The third area is providing educational programs for citizens who are becoming more active in the political process. Government policies affect nearly every area of a family's life. Energy policies affect the quality of the environment as well as employment opportunities for several regions in the country. Environmental decisions in one state can affect the food supply for the rest of the country. The emergence of single issue politics is one indication that citizens are demanding a voice in decisions and are seeking ways to become part of the process. As budgets are cut for programs at all levels, it can be expected that there will be even more citizen activity to determine how tax dollars are spent.

Using a Specialists Team

Using the team approach has been an effective way for Kentucky to meet the increased demands for public policy education. These efforts in no way compete with the traditional role of the agricultural policy specialist but rather are a means of expanding the subject matter and audiences involved.

The exact composition of the team on any one project would vary depending on the subject matter and intended audience. However, a specialist from each program area and/or institution should be des-

ignated as a contact person to simplify program planning and serve as a liaison between the areas.

Home economists are becoming more involved, because of the increasing number of public affairs issues families must face. These tend not to be what is thought of as "women's issues" but include such concerns as energy, the environment, water quality and supply, employment opportunities, inflation, transportation, and food supply.

Working as a team capitalizes on the strengths of both program areas and/or institutions. Agricultural economists have established their expertise in the public policy process, an area in which few home economists are well trained. However, the home economist adds strength in other areas. Because of structured programs such as EFNEP and Homemakers Clubs already in place, the home economist has access to and expertise in working with very diverse audiences. Home economics programs operate in urban and rural areas and cross all income and education levels. Home economists also can provide the expertise in a variety of subject matter areas and are familiar with outside organizations and agencies that might be involved. In addition, each specialist adds his/her own professional contacts and talents to the program.

1890 institutions have their strengths. Since the programs are relatively small they may focus on a specific geographical or topical area. As a result, 1890 staff have a great deal of expertise in their area which can be utilized in other extension programs. Because of the federal mandate for 1890s to "reach the hard to reach," there has been experimentation with methods of reaching nontraditional audiences. These same groups, inner-city, rural, and minority limited resource families, have not traditionally been politically active but are becoming more so as they feel the effects of policy decisions.

Kentucky's Program

Public affairs education is not a one time thrust that can be emphasized one year and laid aside the next. Issues may change but the process remains the same. The objective was to train fieldstaff, process then provide updates on issues as they arose.

Initially, a 4-H, home economics and agriculture agent from each of Kentucky's 14 extension areas was chosen to attend a three-day workshop. The idea was adapted from Michigan's PACE program but completely revised to fit the situation in Kentucky. The planning team included a specialist from agricultural economics, sociology, and home economics. The program covered the public affairs process, conflict management, and a few current issues. This core group of agents then became the nucleus in their area to plan training for their colleagues.

To maintain the interest in public affairs, PACE was used on a variety of follow-up materials. The Updates on Current Issues fact sheets were designed to get general information about an issue out quickly and cheaply. Counties with interest in a specific topic could request more detailed follow-up. The newsletter for Homemakers Club citizenship chairmen carries the PACE heading and lists materials on particular issues as they become available. Data on emerging issues were sent to home economics agents for use in program planning.

During Kentucky's 1980 General Assembly session, information on the status of selected bills was entered on the experimental Green Thumb computer system which was accessible to 200 families. Since the General Assembly only meets for 60 days every two years, providing current information quickly is a challenge. Although this was a very limited experiment, it has some interesting possibilities and also some liabilities.

Both institutions support the program efforts by providing specialists' time, travel costs, publications, agent training, and other services as needed. This has been on an informal basis depending on the resources available.

Potential Problems

Some issues may arise if a team approach is used extensively. Most of these issues, outlined below, are administrative concerns rather than programming problems and will vary depending on the organizational structure in each state:

1. It is difficult to evaluate public affairs programs in general: it is even more difficult to identify contributions by individual institutions or departments. With the emphasis on accountability and cost effectiveness, this is an important concern.

2. Each program area or institution has its own method of operation and set of priorities. This can make planning and scheduling difficult.

3. Specialists from different areas may be evaluated by different administrators with different criteria. This is especially likely to occur between institutions.

4. Funding sources — Which department or institution pays for audio-visuals, printing, special materials?

Advantages

From the experience in Kentucky the advantages of working as a team far outweigh the disadvantages. Among the advantages are:

1. Specialists share their expertise, resources, and interests to provide a stronger program.

2. Combining two program areas or institutions can expand the audiences reached.

3. Agents have the opportunity to become acquainted with specialists in other fields.