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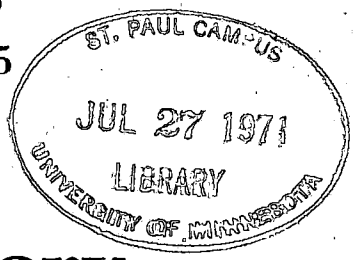

Contemporary Problems in the Economics of Agriculture—1964

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GROUP 8. EXTENSION

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The main theme of discussion concerned the role of extension in the current context of a rapidly changing world agriculture.

The 'disparities in pace and form of rural development' which have occupied so much of the time of this conference were seen to present a particular challenge to extension. If farm people were to be helped to achieve their goals, attention should be given to the need for changes in educational programmes and adjustments should be made in the relevant planning and organization.

This need was considered to exist in all countries in varying degree and character, but the group thought that the following lists of causal factors for 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' countries distinguished their respective major concerns.

Main causes of extension needs in developed countries

1. The high and increasing rate of technological change.
2. The disharmony between rates of output and prices which had raised policy problems, particularly with regard to the allocation and mobility of resources.
3. The low incomes obtained from small farm businesses.
4. The special needs of young farm people for education and guidance.

Main causes of extension needs in underdeveloped countries

1. The frequent dearth of research information and technical supplies.
2. The barriers to progress set by traditional methods of farming.

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3. Institutional barriers such as small size fragmentation and inequitable tenure systems of holdings; the money-lender system and the lack of suitable production credit to support extension advice.
4. Illiteracy and inadequate communications.
5. Poorly developed markets.

The current response of extension to changing needs

Rapid changes in extension methods and the resources employed were taking place in many countries, but the huge scale of the task in some underdeveloped areas meant that progress was very slow. Even in the developed countries, it was not fast enough to meet the need.

By contrast with the underdeveloped countries, in which the pressure for improvements in extension was coming from consumers through a pressing need for food, the group noted that in developed countries it came from producers. Many farmers were riding hard on the heels of extension workers and sometimes even had greater technical knowledge.

In some countries, indeed, farmers had begun to take matters into their own hands by engaging private consultants or employing their own professional advisers through farm-management clubs, or accounting and budgeting groups. Since this movement was fairly widespread in varying forms, it seemed to indicate that extension could acquire a commercial value in most countries as their agriculture developed beyond a certain stage, as incomes rose and as demand for extension tended to outstrip the resources of official agencies. However, it did not seem likely that such a trend would ever meet more than a small part of the total need.

Further adjustments required

The group felt that developed countries could make worth-while improvements in extension in many directions.

More research within the field of extension itself offered promising rewards. For example, more work was needed on the criteria for evaluation of extension programmes, and greater knowledge of the behaviour and motivations of farm people would lead to more effective contacts between advisory officers and their clients.

The problem of coping with the increasing flow of technical and economic information and helping farmers to arrive at management decisions could be met by several means including:

1. Reorientation of formal training courses towards the need of extension.
2. Intensifying in-service training for extension staff.
3. Increasing the ratio of specialist to general workers.
4. Strengthening the links between research and extension staff through reorganization of the administrative structure and more effective communication systems.
5. Closer involvement of rural people in the extension process.

The group held that extension should be flexible and should try to cater for the future as well as for present needs. It should be carried into new fields of endeavour, including work among urban people to tell them about agriculture and thus to secure their support for the programmes of public expenditure in which they would be asked to participate as taxpayers. Rural communities, too, needed to be told more about the state of agriculture, and both sectors should learn more about the national economy and prospects for world production and trade.

Turning to the less-developed countries, it was felt that they should be urged to profit from the experiences of the developed countries if they were to catch up in the general movement towards higher living standards, they would have to develop at a faster rate. For example, they could encourage the adoption of formal farm-management criteria at a much earlier stage than the developed countries had done —as was being planned in India, for instance—they could mobilize physical, financial and human resources for a crash programme designed to promote a rapid advance.

Even more than in the past, it seemed clear that agricultural economics had an increasingly important part to play in extension. In both the more- and less-developed countries it could help the extension worker to co-ordinate the efforts of all contributing disciplines and thus to become a more effective agent aiding farm people.