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**FACTORS IN THE SUCCESS OF THE MISSOURI
SMALL FARM FAMILY PROGRAM**

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During the past four decades the Missouri Cooperative Extension Service has had three programs of major importance in its attempts to meet the educational needs of its farm families. These programs were in addition to the kinds of extension programs present in most states. The programs I refer to were the "balanced farming" program developed in the 1930's, the small farm family program in the early 1970's and the family farm development program of the late 1970's. The first two of these programs are of particular importance as we consider work with individual small farm families.

The Balanced Farming Program

Prior to the development of the balanced farming program the Missouri Extension Service taught individual farm practices as did most land grant colleges. However, the need became apparent for a system of farming that would tie all of the good practices together in such a way as to maximize net income consistent with the other goals of the farm family. Typically, the extension specialist from the University had attempted to help the farmer by teaching individual practices, leaving it to the county agent or the farmer to tie all these practices together. The observed need for involving and coordinating several disciplines in working with the individual farmer gave rise to an attempt to provide such an educational service.

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The new approach to developing a system of farming was called balanced farming (1).* The objective was to achieve a balance between the input and outgo of soil fertility, a balance between the type of soil and the crops they feed, a balance between the livestock system and the desires of the operator and the farm's labor supply, a balance between the net income and the needs of the farm family, and a balance between good planning, hard work and a comfortable attractive home. The extension administration attempted to provide an organization and environment within which all of the relevant disciplines could contribute to the task.

The procedure used in working with individual families included first, an analysis of the present farm and home situation; secondly, the identification of the needs, goals and desires of the family; and thirdly, the working out of a plan consistent with the resources available. In this last stage all of the relevant disciplines were called upon to provide some input. While the "balanced farming" program as such no longer exists, the experience gained with the program and the philosophy and methods used continue to influence Missouri extension programs.

The Missouri Small Farm Program

By the late 1960's it became apparent that the Missouri extension program was not reaching a large segment of Missouri farm families, particularly those living on small farms. In part, they were being neglected because they were not perceived as being viable farm operations because of their limited resources. However, in most instances their neglect was simply due to the fact they were not availing themselves of the services available. They did not attend extension

*Reference cited at end of report.

meetings nor did they ask for help. They generally believed the extension services, as well as other public programs, were for the larger farm.

At about the same time the Office of Economic Opportunity was promoting programs for low income families. A large proportion of Missouri small farm families had both small farms and low income, even when one of the family members had work off-farm. As a result, two of the OEO projects involved work with small farm families. The experience gained in these two programs proved quite valuable in the subsequent development of the small farm program on a broader scale. In these projects, along with others in education or nutrition, it became obvious that use of paraprofessionals could be helpful in reaching large numbers of families who were not reached by traditional programs.

A pilot effort to work directly with small farm families was launched in two Missouri counties in 1971 (5). The effort expanded to eight counties in 1972 and by 1977 the program was in 40 Missouri counties and approximately 2,000 families were involved. As with the balanced farming program, the individual farm family was the focus of the program. Attempts were made to identify the goals and desires of the family and assess the resources available. Once these things were accomplished, an attempt was made to bring to bear the appropriate changes in enterprises and technologies to improve their level of living.

Marks of Success

Has the Missouri Small Farm Program been successful? A number of indicators suggest it has. Among those which might be offered as evidence are:

- Growth in size of farm enterprises
- Changes in production practices
- Sources of information
- Contacts with other agencies and institutions

- Benefit-cost ratios
- Continuation of program

A study of the Missouri program was conducted in 1975 in which participants in the program were compared with a similar group who had not participated (4). The control group was selected from farm families who had been interviewed when the program was established but were not reached because of manpower limitations.

Results from the evaluation indicated participants had significantly higher farm sales. Over two-thirds of the participants increased farm sales from 1971 to 1973 while only one-half of the nonparticipants increased farm sales. The difference was even greater when 1974 was compared with 1971. Approximately one-half of the participants had higher farm sales in 1974 while only one-fifth of the nonparticipants had increased sales. The drop in 1974 from 1973 was because of sharply lower livestock prices. The participants also evidenced larger increases in number of beef cows and sows as well as larger increases in acreages of hay, improved pasture, and grain crops.

The evidence on changes in production practices was not as clear. Farmers were asked about changes in production practices during 1974. It may well have been that farmers in the program had made changes earlier. Participants did make more changes in hog and crop production practices but nonparticipants actually made more changes in selected beef cattle production practices.

Information sources changed considerably from 1971 to 1974. Extension and magazines became the major sources for participants while the order was reversed for nonparticipants. While extension was becoming more important as a source for participants, it was being replaced by magazines as the most important source for those not participating in the program. The attitude

toward extension as a source of information is further emphasized by the actual number of farmers indicating extension as an important source in 1971 and again in 1974. Whereas only 22 indicated extension as an important source in 1971 the number doubled by 1974. On the other hand, the number actually declined for nonparticipants.

Participants in the program also became more aware of other agencies and institutions which could be of assistance to them. For example, this is evident in the greater use of PCA's and FHA as sources of credit but also carried over to contacts with other agencies such as ASCS and SCS.

Results of benefit-cost analyses generally supported the success of the program. Because of variability in prices and production from year to year the results were quite variable. However, the results from the control group study suggested highly favorable benefits compared to costs of the program.

A final indication of the success of the program is its continuation into the decade of the 1980's in spite of declining concern for the problems of small farmers at the federal level and tight extension budgets at the state and local level. The program reached its peak with the employment of 40 educational assistants in 1977. The number has declined to 33 in 1983 but the decline is not as great as the reduction in total extension employees.

Factors Contributing to Success

Those familiar with the Missouri Small Farm Program suggest numerous factors contributing to its success. For discussion purposes these have been divided into those which are general to most educational programs and those which are somewhat unique to this program.

The factors general to most educational programs are:

- Timing

- Administration support
- Support from county and state staff
- Research support
- Program planning and evaluation
- Training program for educational assistants
- Preparation of educational material
- Identification and publicity on accomplishments

The timing of the Missouri program was right from the standpoint of political, social and economic conditions. There was considerable attention being given to the need for greater emphasis on programs to help small farm families. The General Accounting Office called attention to the ineffectiveness of traditional extension programs in reaching this clientele. The agricultural establishment was under attack from such diverse points as the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, Nebraska and the Agricultural Accountability Project in Washington, D.C. Jim Hightower's Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times had considerable impact. At the same time there were those within the establishment who felt some redirection of efforts was warranted as evidenced by statements in the USDA-NASULGC publication A People and a Spirit.

Economic conditions in agriculture and the economy were also quite favorable at the time the program was initiated in 1971. The decade of the 1970's was fairly favorable toward the improvement of living conditions—even on small farms. Showing such success in the early 1980's would have been much more difficult.

Administrative support was crucial to the success of the program. They said the effort was important and provided the needed resources. State and county professional staff were rewarded for their effectiveness in implementing

the program. This was crucial to the expansion of the program and involving more professional input. Our area farm management specialists who supervised the program had to do a balancing act between this program and their on-going programs with larger farms and hence had to be convinced their efforts would be rewarded.

The program was supported by professional extension workers at the state and county levels. One state specialist in farm management spent approximately one-half time coordinating a campus committee and the program out-state. Farm management specialists who had educational assistants devoted a portion of their time to the program. These specialists at the state and area level were responsible for planning the program, preparation of materials, and training educational assistants.

Research faculty were also involved in the program from the beginning. Their input was helpful in initiating the program by helping identify the clientele, in identifying profitable alternative enterprises and systems of farming for small farms, and in evaluating the program.

Procedures for planning and evaluation were developed and made available to area specialists responsible for supervision of the program at the local level. These included survey forms for identifying potential clientele, procedures to use in hiring and training educational assistants, and maintaining the records and data necessary for evaluating accomplishments.

Since paraprofessionals were used as educational assistants, a training program was essential. A period of the educational assistant's time was spent each week in training. One thing learned early in the program was that paraprofessionals do not respond well to classroom instruction but if the training could be related to problems or questions faced in the field they were receptive

and quite capable of assimilating the material and transferring it to the small farm families.

Educational material was prepared at the state and local level for use in the program. For example, simple budget forms were prepared for use in planning the farm business. Special guide sheets were developed to provide information on technology appropriate to the small farms involved. Efforts were made to lower the "fog index" on these guide sheets so they were easier for both the educational assistant and the smaller farmer to understand. To the extent possible, educational assistants were involved in deciding what information was needed and in some instances actually helped prepare the material.

Accomplishments in the program were identified and publicized. Annual progress reports were prepared from data provided by the small farm families enrolled in the program. Quantitative as well as qualitative information was collected. Early in the program data was also collected from a control group of nonparticipants so that comparisons could be made. Publicity was given to the program and its accomplishments at local as well as at the state and national level. News releases, radio and television programs, extension publications, research bulletins, and congressional hearings were among the avenues used to inform people about the program and its accomplishments. Favorable reaction to the program at the local level as well as interest displayed by extension personnel in other states did much to maintain enthusiasm for the program among administrative personnel.

Some factors in the success of the program were more specific to this program. They included:

- Objectives which were reasonable and attainable
- Selection of a homogeneous clientele

- Selection of interested professionals
- Selection of an effective teaching method
- Selection of educational assistants
- Development of educational packages
- Work with other agencies.

The objectives of the Missouri Small Farm Program were relatively modest (3). They were essentially limited to improving the level of living for the small farm family by making somewhat better use of the agricultural resources available. The objective was not one of making the farms into full-time commercial farms. Had this been the objective, the program would have been doomed to failure with the resources available on the farms involved. However it was not too difficult to identify some changes which could enhance the income available to the families.

Small farms are many and varied. In addition to size, they vary with respect to age, off-farm income, resources available and farming objectives. It would be very difficult to design a program which would meet the needs of all small farm families. The Missouri program limited its efforts to those families who had some agricultural resources, who needed additional income and who wanted to expand their farm operations.

Another important factor in the Missouri program was the interest shown by the professional extension personnel. Not all extension personnel are interested in working with small farms. Their potential is typically not great; the management may not be highly motivated; they may not follow suggestions readily; they may not be willing to make commitments of time, labor, or capital; and they require much more personal attention. A key to the Missouri program

was starting small with personnel who were interested in helping small farms and expanding as other professionals saw the opportunities.

The method selected for working with small farm families was effective. It made use of paraprofessionals who worked in their home county. These were individuals who were familiar with agriculture in the area, who had time to contact and work with individual farm families, who had a concern for the needs of families living on small farms, and who could approach small farm families in a non-threatening way. Many of the families needed help in thinking through their goals for the farm and identifying strategies to use in improving their farm operation. Others needed to be shown how to actually carry out particular practices. An educational program oriented to small farms almost necessitates a tutorial approach until the families can be helped to see their potential to participate in the more typical extension programs.

Success was in part due to selection of very capable individuals to serve as educational assistants. As the program expanded into new areas of the state a survey was conducted in each county. Several potential paraprofessionals were hired to do the interviewing and this served as a screening device in selection of educational assistants. By the time the survey was completed it was usually fairly evident who had a real interest in the problems of small farms and who could relate well to such families.

As educational assistants began to work with small farms and discuss their families' problems with the professional extension personnel providing their training, the need for specific kinds of educational packages became obvious. This often involved preparation of written material (guide sheets) on specific production technologies or marketing practices for enterprises deemed feasible on small farms. Extreme care was exercised in encouraging production of only

those enterprises with a high probability of success as most of the families had a high aversion to risk and could hardly afford failures. The educational material prepared was written at a somewhat lower level than the more typical extension publication and covered technologies or practices which would be appropriate for small units.

Finally, a key factor in the success of the Missouri program was the assistance provided by other agencies and institutions. This often required accompanying the small farm operator to the agency as a starting point in developing the working relationships. In most instances, once the initial contact was made, the direct participation of the educational assistant was no longer needed.

Summary Comments

The Missouri Small Farm Family Program has been successful. Families involved have increased their agricultural production; adopted improved production and marketing practices; used new sources of information; increased their contacts with other agencies and institutions; and in general experienced benefits exceeding the costs of the program.

A number of factors contributed to the success of the program. Important factors were the timing of the initiation of the program, administration support, support from professionals in research and extension, selection and training of paraprofessionals, procedures for program planning and evaluation, preparation of educational materials, and identification of reasonable objectives. The program also concentrated on families with real needs and involved concerned paraprofessionals who were effective in assisting the families in the program.

Success in working with small farm families does not come easy. The number involved poses special problems. Their complexity is also great. To

increase income it is usually necessary to intensify but in what and will there be a market? Motivation to change may be lacking and there is often an aversion to risk. The Missouri program has achieved some success but much remains to be learned.

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