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HUMAN RESOURCES NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENT FOR EXTENSION

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"The mission of the Extension Service includes both technical transfer and human development components. Extension is a special type of education. It is oriented to the solution of problems and to helping people apply information on their farms and in their homes. Therefore, the mission of Extension should be broadly conceived as the development of people, even though the current situation may place a high priority on the task of increasing food production". These words were taken from a report written by Dr. Charles McDougall, Emeritus member of the administrative staff of the Federal Extension Service, Washington, D. C. and are quite relevant to what we are talking about today. The development of people (human resources) can be construed to mean both those who are disseminating the information and those receiving it. Because of time constraints I would like to address my comments to those who are disseminating information - the Extension component.

Human Resources Needs - The need for Extension personnel must be based on a genuine demand from the farmer for agricultural information and service. They should not be placed on the job just for the sake of making employment. This destroys the morale of the Extension agent and reduces the credibility of the Extension Service in the eyes of the farmer. Extension personnel must be viewed as friends of the farmer and it is important that they be free of the various tasks of government that are inconsistent with the educational mission or that could divert them from their assignment. Don't send them out to sell chicks or fertilizer, collect taxes, check acreage compliance or do other types of regulatory work. These are generally duties of the Ministry of Agriculture, not Extension.

No more people should be assigned to Extension for employment than can be equipped and effectively utilized.

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To maintain a form of continuity in the system it is important that staff turnover be held to a minimum and that important unfilled positions be taken care of as soon as possible. The investment that you are making in Extension could be given greater assurance of success by setting up a pay schedule or incentive program that will attract and retain the people needed to make it successful. A pay system will have to be adopted that is competitive with peers.

The Extension staff must be accessible to the farmer and vice versa with a reasonable outlay of energy. Extension personnel must be equipped with motorbikes or other vehicles so that they can cover all of their area quickly.

Training Needs - A very high priority must be placed on the integrity of the information carried by Extension. The farmer must learn from experience that Extension people can be relied upon to have accurate information or to admit when they do not know the answer. Of course, the accuracy of the information is the responsibility of the researcher. However, without proper education and training the Extension person will never be convincing to the farmer. New Extension employees should go into a training program before being assigned. The type and length of training will depend upon the assignment. There are several types of training, including:

1. Long Term: Usually six months or longer and intended to upgrade skills in a new technology or procedure. Can also be used for advanced degree work.
2. Short Course or Workshop: Generally in-depth training in a specific subject matter area. Usually one or two sessions per year at a training center or University.
3. Professional Improvement: A professional or highly technical meeting of experts where technical papers are presented.
4. On-the-Job or In-service training: One day sessions weekly at the district or area level.
5. New Agent Training: This form of training for newly hired field agents should be a combination of general training and specific remedial experience and should be a requirement for all newly employed staff members.

6. Internships: A program between the last two years of agricultural studies that would enable prospective extension employees to gain understanding of extension functions and their role in educating farmers.

The broad educational program conducted by the Extension Service requires that in-service training should be comprehensive and continuous throughout the professional life of the individual and designed to develop well informed and motivated personnel.

Evaluation and Reporting - Every staff member of the extension service should be aware of his reporting responsibilities. A system of reporting and regulations regarding due dates should be constructed for all professional staff members. Training of staff members to fully understand the reporting procedures, content and regulations should be done prior to inauguration of the reporting system. Reporting on program activities and their progress is one method of evaluating program responsibilities and progress of staff members.

An evaluation of all training programs should be established. Agent performance and the accomplishments and impact of program efforts based upon objectives are essential in determining the overall effectiveness of the Extension Service. National, district and local training programs can be evaluated based on the objectives of the program. Also, evaluation of personnel at all levels can be a basis for determining promotions and remunerations and a very good personnel development tool. Through the identification of problems and weaknesses, training programs can be devised and remedial counseling can be made specific.