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*Agric - Econ Aspects*

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WHAT I WANT FROM MY COUNTY AGENT

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My subject, "What I Want from My County Agent," can be discussed only after one has set forth his position on two basic questions:

What does a farmer want:

What is a County Agent's field of responsibility?

Failure to first answer these two questions would leave no common ground from which we might project this discussion.

What does a farmer want? He wants what each of you want.

Personal pride - a feeling that his home, his business, and his community efforts are contributing to the long-time good of his fellow man.

Happiness - a congenial atmosphere in the home and community embodying a minimum of distracting tension.

Income - a financial reward in an amount and with a continuity of availability sufficient to provide a continuing incentive to strive for success.

Now for our second question: What is Extension's field of responsibility?

Let me first say that to many farmers the term Extension Service means County Agent. Therefore, I am limiting my remarks to only the County Agent's area of service. I recognize that the 4-H work and, to a lesser degree, the Home Demonstration Agent's work is directed to a generally acceptable area of service.

When we ask, "What does the average farmer want from his County Agent?", the answer is "Everything". Why? Because Extension has, since its inception, taught farmers that "if you want help, go to your County Agent".

When farmers' first concerns were with problems mainly of production, seed improvement, plant food, sprays, and so forth; county agents were truly at home being everything to everybody.

Since the first settlers came, agriculture like industry and society in general has been changing. One reason why changes of recent years seem drastic is because we are experiencing them. Those of years ago are to us history and unrealistic. Our society is becoming increasingly complex so that the problems, economic or otherwise of a particular group, are more involved and less responsive to simple individual or group action.

With this accelerated trend toward complexity, there has come an increasing necessity for any public service group to recognize its limitations of money and brains. It is no longer possible to be everything to everybody.

Extension has sometimes tried to rationalize its adherence to generalization by pointing up the needs of the family-size farm versus the commercial-size farm. Let me hasten to add here that this splitting of farm people into commercial farms, family farms, part-time farms or what have you is completely unrealistic. True, there are farmers who are doing more than others because some have more finances, more ability, more energy, more knowledge, and even more good fortune than others. Their need for specialized information is the same although the way and the extent that they can use it differs.

I want my County Agent to be a top-flight authority on a few subjects, and I want him to know what these are and that he is an authority. I want him to be given an opportunity to, and to be expected to, keep abreast of current information on his speciality subjects. I want him to know who is an authority on other subjects. I am particularly interested in him and his associates having a knowledge of how to present information and the aids helpful in reaching people desiring to understand and apply this knowledge. I want my County Agent to spend enough time on farms working with individuals upon specific matters about which he is an authority, to assure me that he remains in close touch with issues and the application of his knowledge.

I want my County Agent to hold district meetings, each dealing in detail with a specific subject about which there is real information needing telling. I don't want, because I have an interest in my County Agent and his work, to feel under an obligation to attend small community meetings to participate in a generalized discussion of a half-dozen subjects about which there are no new facts and there is no constructive action likely. I want my County Agent to be systematically concerned with the quality of his work because to do otherwise, he is wasting much of both his time and mine.

While I recognize that the factors of pride and happiness are of vital importance to farm people, I would rule these out as fields in which a county agent has direct responsibilities. His field is that of income which I would subdivide into the subjects of production and price. I believe that maximum use can be made of the abilities and resources available to County Agents if they limit their efforts to this area. Helping farmers to produce high-quality products efficiently and to market them as profitably as possible is a major assignment.

In conclusion, let me again say that a farmer's major concerns have to do with Pride, Happiness, Income.

I want my County Agent, and the Extension Service which he represents in my area, to limit itself to problems of income falling in the grouping of production and marketing. I want him and each of his associates to devote their time to learning and teaching basic and current information which is of major importance in my area. I want him to be prepared and to know how to present this information so as to make the maximum accomplishments with a minimum of my time and his. I want him to better know his area of activity and what is not in that area.

He has an important service to render to people whose need is great. I want this done because it is a job needing doing. I want my County Agent to excel not as a statistician or writer of reports. I want him and each of his associates to excel in some phase of production and marketing.

I don't want my County Agent to be everything to everybody. I want him to be the best there is in a few important fields and to know who is the best in the others.