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NEW ENGLAND
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PROCEEDINGS
1968



UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DURHAM, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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JUNE 17, 18, 19, 1968

Discussion of Mr. Gidez's Paper
at Durham, New Hampshire, June 17, 1968
at the Annual Meeting of the
New England Agricultural Economics Council

by

J. B. Wyckoff

I found Mr. Gidez's paper to be of considerable interest and find myself in agreement with most of his comments. One of the things that bothers me relative to his idea of total development is the lack of what I deem to be definitive developmental goals. If the goals are not specified, it is not possible to optimize or maximize resource use. Thus the establishment of definitive goals are a prerequisite to effective allocation of resources.

It has been suggested by Dr. Eisenmenger of the Boston Federal Reserve Bank that the appropriate goal for New England is an increase of per capita real income. If this is the case, then it may be possible to do this while exporting both capital and people from the northeastern area. This is in contrast to the comments of Bill Henry who suggests implicitly that out migration is an undesirable characteristic in the Northeast. The characteristic of the New England economy which has allowed it to survive in spite of the many inherent disadvantages of its natural resource base, has been the specialization of its industry, particularly in those industries which are labor intensive. However, I might point out that there are some pockets of poverty in the New England area which have occurred because of excessive specialization in a given industry which has failed and subsequently left many unemployed people and unemployed, obsolete capital resources.

The major development in rural areas is the growth of rural non-farm population. The rural towns are serving as bedroom towns for the more industrialized centers. These people do not have a rural but rather an urban orientation and their problems and ideas are much different than the traditional rural population. Because of the difference of goals among these groups of people, it may be difficult to obtain development in these areas. Problems which have not really been solved are the determination of an ideal population density and the amount of open space that should be left in residential and urban developments. Until we determine some guideline or goal relative to this type of thing, it will be difficult to develop optimally. This sort of uncertainty also results in much land speculation in areas which are rapidly urbanizing. The use of zoning to control such speculation has not always been effective.

In addition to such things as open space, one of the major determinants of the desirability of living in various towns is the quality of the educational opportunities offered to the children of the families. Mr. Gidez has indicated that the educational opportunities seem to be the same in the rural-urban areas of Massachusetts. I have sometimes found myself in opposition to the programs of the USDA which have advocated keeping the people on the farms or keeping the people in the country. This is really asking you to keep people in an area

which has inferior social and cultural opportunities for schooling, for medical services, for dental services, etc. Under these circumstances, I do not think that out migration from the rural areas into the urban centers is undesirable. The general indication of declining agriculture in terms of number of jobs offered in agriculture, the number of farmers, etc., may be the proper thing if our objective is to increase the per capita income of farmers. We should take a very serious look at this problem before we advocate keeping people in the country.

The colleges of agriculture in the land grant universities have some soul searching to do in terms of the definition of total development. Traditionally they have been narrowly oriented towards production agriculture and have geared themselves to work successfully in this area. The types of problems we are presently encountering in community resource development tend to be interdisciplinary in nature and cover a broad complex of problems. If we are to work successfully with these problems, we will have to incorporate the capabilities of disciplines which are not traditionally found within the college of agriculture and perhaps not even within the land grant institutions. Thus a broadening of our orientation will be necessary to successfully participate in this sort of development.

There are also shortcomings in relating and coordinating efforts in dealing with the same problems. Dr. John Foster has recently contacted the Science Information Exchange for projects pertaining to the Connecticut River. He found that there are 125 projects currently in effect on the river. The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries has hired a full-time coordinator just to coordinate their work on the Connecticut River. Developmental efforts involving this number of people and agencies on projects must be coordinated if we are to maximize the use of our resources.

In terms of developing rural New England, we must also be conscious that there is a relationship between population centers and the cultural and social amenities available to the people. We have not yet determined the optimum size of population center to furnish the maximum amount of these cultural and social amenities without the externalities of too large a center of population becoming apparent. In Southern New England rural areas, this probably is not too much of a problem because of a close proximity to population centers. However, when we deal with Northern New England, we have a completely different sort of situation. I only hope that in trying to develop our economy in New England, we remember that we are developing it for the benefit of people and not for the benefit of development itself. If we keep this well in mind then I believe that we will be able to maintain the quality of life with development that has always been traditional in New England.