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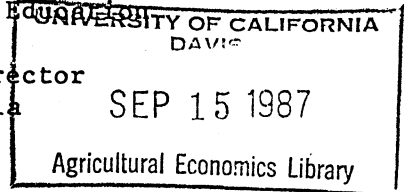
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Administrative Considerations Regarding Public Policy Education

August 5, 1986

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Public policy over the next decade will become a greater concern and importance in Cooperative Extension programs. Among the many issues facing citizens in the United States today, more are being decided in the public policy arena. Yet, public policy, both in terms of research and education, are largely misunderstood by Cooperative Extension administrators. It is the purpose of this paper to place public policy education programs in perspective from the standpoint of a Cooperative Extension administrator. There are two issues that a Cooperative Extension administrator must deal with as far as public policy. The first relates to public policy as part of the Cooperative Extension program and the second relates to land-grant University programs themselves as public policy issues.

A number of questions come to mind regarding public policy as part of the Cooperative Extension program. The first such question is, "What are appropriate issues for public policy education?" This question is not easily answered as anyone who has tried to tackle it realizes. However, it is one that will be forced upon Cooperative Extension administrators to address more and more in the future. Among the considerations that an administrator needs to look at is, first of all, identifying the needs of clientele groups that relate to the public policy arena. The purpose of an Extension education program is not to make policy, but to enable decision-makers to draft their own policy viewpoints from a more informed standpoint. Hence, it would appear that one important factor in deciding appropriate issues for public policy education is whether or not Cooperative Extension can do anything about the issue. Specifically, much as in other programs, Cooperative Extension must rely upon its research/knowledge base in order to be able to provide clientele groups and decision-makers with the appropriate knowledge so that they can make informed decisions. In some cases, this knowledge base may exist. In other cases it may have to be created if a well-constructed public policy education program is to be formulated.

One of the errors that concerns Extension administrators has to do with the controversy or conflict surrounding public policy. In the public policy arena there will be differing viewpoints over a particular issue. The classical approach to public policy, in order to avoid taking a stand on a particular issue, is to identify the alternatives surrounding a particular issue and then to identify the consequences of pursuing a particular alternative. This type of analysis requires that adaptive or problem-solving research be done when a public policy issue is identified. In this particular way, the risk or controversy surrounding a particular issue can be mitigated, but perhaps not entirely avoided.

It appears that, to most administrators, the avoidance of risk would be a better route than to subject one's programs into a controversial arena. However, by the very nature of its programs and its clientele groups, Cooperative Extension will be forced more and more into the public policy arena. Hence, the issue of how to avoid risk is an appropriate one. In addressing whether or not a particular issue ought to be undertaken, Cooperative Extension administrators

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must assure themselves that there is an appropriate research/knowledge base in place in order to make sure that the controversy and conflict surrounding a particular policy issue is objectively addressed and channeled into a positive educational approach.

Because there are numerous issues existing that have public policy overtones, it is important that the issues be prioritized. There are two dimensions to this prioritization. The first relates to the priority of the issue within clientele groups, framework and the magnitude or dimension of the particular issue involved. One could look at the economic, environmental and social consequences that surround a particular public policy issue in terms of deciding which has priority over another. However, this evaluation is only half of the question. The other half again relates to, "What is the appropriate knowledge/research base that Extension administrators can bring to bear regarding a particular public policy issue?" It may well be that the issue is of the highest importance to clientele groups but that Cooperative Extension neither has the research/knowledge base, nor has access to one in order to effectively conduct an educational program. Hence, the two dimensional decisionmaking approach to prioritization is important.

One great concern of Cooperative Extension administrators has to be whether or not staff, both county-based agents and campus-based Specialists, have the appropriate background and training in order to carry out public policy education. Specialists will obviously provide a link to the research/knowledge base, and in a sense will provide the focal point and leadership for public policy training within a state. However, county-based agents can also play a major role with respect to public policy education much beyond that of a facilitator. It is important for county agents to have a good background in terms of knowing what the public policy process is, knowing how to work with groups at the local level, and knowing what back-up and support can be obtained through the specialists and land-grant institution. It is paramount that Extension administrators look at the capability of Cooperative Extension organizations within states to conduct public policy education programs.

Many of the public policy questions are increasingly becoming multi-disciplinary in terms of their contacts. Where public policy was the domain of the agricultural economist or the political economist, questions now cross over into other disciplines as well. It is not uncommon for agricultural scientists to become involved in terms of a particular public policy issue. In many cases, some of the public policy issues for example, in the Pest Management area, are in the science that exists in University laboratories. If the issue is, "What policies need to be adopted concerning a particular pesticide?", for example, much information needs to be developed by the agricultural scientist in terms of the impacts of that particular chemical. Hence, the questions are increasingly cutting across scientific disciplines in order that public policy decision-makers can make appropriate decisions.

Land-grant university programs themselves are becoming public policy issues. There are many dimensions to this particular aspect. The first probably has to do with declining resources that are available to land-grant institutions for agricultural research and Extension programs. In this context, it is well known that the investment of public dollars into agricultural research and Extension programs provides returns at a rate that is more than competitive with other investments of public dollars. Yet, agricultural research and Extension programs are continually being under-invested in the public arena. A

particular public policy issue that then emerges is, "What is the relevancy of agricultural research and Extension programs, and how much public investment should there be in these particular programs?" The land-grant university's role in agriculture's viability/societal well-being will continue and perhaps increasingly become more of an issue within the next decade. From that context, it is important that Extension administrators realize this is a particular public policy issue and that an educational program with clientele groups, as well as government decision-makers needs be undertaken that assure them that the investment they are making in agricultural research and Extension programs are providing appropriate dividends.

Also, of importance in context of land-grant university programs in public policy issues are some of the new research results. For example, increasingly the biotechnology developments are becoming a public policy issue. For example, in California, an agricultural scientist made a rather remarkable breakthrough in terms of modifying bacteria for frost protection. While the development itself seems to be less than controversial, it in fact did become the basis for controversy for a number of local community groups, as well as groups concerned with public health and safety. Hence, the land-grant institution fostering this particular research soon found itself involved in the public policy arena attempting to persuade public officials that the experiments needed to be field-tested. It appears that there is a role for Cooperative Extension in a multi-disciplinary approach to explaining to the public, concerned clientele, public interest groups, and public officials the risks, the benefits, the safeguards, and the consequences of pursuing particular research. It is in this context then that Extension administrators are facing a challenge to explain some of the consequences of agricultural research programs.

The decision of whether or not to become engaged in public policy education should not be controversial for Extension and administrators. The more appropriate question is, "How are resources, faculty, and programs organized in order to carry out appropriate public policy programs?" The first step, it appears, is to identify needs. Hence, the combination of a relevant needs identification system within Extension needs to be organized and enhanced so that issues of public policy concern are identified. This particular needs identification may take place in the form of advisory groups, feedback mechanisms from staff and frequent contact with clientele groups and policy decision-makers.

Once needs are identified, it is important then to relate them to any relevant knowledge or research base. While mentioned earlier in this paper, the relevant knowledge/research base cannot be underscored enough. Without the relevant knowledge/research base, an objective public policy education program will not take place. Hence, it is important that linkages are forged with research faculty and that the Experiment Station Director as well as the Extension Director are in concert in terms of the goals that they are trying to reach within a land-grant institution. What probably is particularly important is collaboration between the research and extension organizations. Hence, when an issue is identified, then the entire continuum is planned in terms of research, interpretation and adaptation, and educational efforts. In this context then the research education continuum will be followed and the best interests of clientele groups, public policy makers, and the land-grant institution will be protected.

The question of leadership always arises in terms of public policy education. Usually within the Extension setting, this leadership falls upon the public

policy education specialist. While the leadership focal point in the public policy education specialist is appropriate, it must be expanded to include the Experiment Station and Extension Directors, appropriate department chairs, other Cooperative Extension specialists and faculty who will form the core of a multidisciplinary approach, and other appropriate personnel who have a real interest in public policy education.

A question will always arise as to what is the applied research-education balance. Again, it is imperative that before any educational program is undertaken, that appropriate knowledge/research is available to apply to the public policy issue. Without the critical analysis that must take place in terms of evaluating the consequences of alternatives surrounding a particular public policy issue, no objective educational program can take place. Hence, it is imperative that appropriate capabilities be incorporated into any education program that will be able to draw upon research and knowledge applicable to a particular problem.

Experiment Station and Extension Directors need to be able to have available a number of means in order to provide flexibility in addressing public policy issues. In particular, teams must be brought together to be able to address a particular issue and evaluate the consequences of the alternatives that exist. Increasingly, as has been pointed out in earlier parts of this paper, this approach will be multi-disciplinary in nature. In addition to forming these particular teams, a budget must be provided in order that appropriate research can be conducted, and educational programs carried out, as well as travel of team members in order to formulate both applied research and educational approaches.

The role of county staff in relation to statewide staff and education is important. County staff have the pulse of local clientele groups. Public policy education may be relative, not only to federal and statewide matters but also, to local matters. Inasmuch as county staff serve in an important role as the windows and doors of land-grant institutions into communities, county staff need to be very much involved in terms of public policy education. In particular, they can be highly valuable in terms of identifying and evaluating public policy needs at the local level. In addition, with proper training, they can be instrumental in terms of conducting local public policy educational programs with the guidance and assistance of statewide specialists.

The appropriate question about increasing Cooperative Extension's role in the public policy education arena is, "Where do the resources come from?" One obvious answer is reallocation. However, reallocation can only go so far in terms of providing the necessary wherewithal of supporting public policy education. Another source is new monies. It may well be that a given issue in public policy may command the attention of legislators that they would appropriate new monies. A third source of monies can also be grants, as well as private sector involvement. Since much of the work will involve applied research as well as publications, educational video modules, etc., the use of grants and donations from both the public and private sector to adequately assess public policy issues may well be an appropriate route.

One of the great impediments to appropriate research and analysis of public policy issues relates to data bases. In this context, Cooperative Extension can well take the role in working with other public agencies, as well as its research counterparts, in terms of identifying public data bases. Obviously,

these data bases may well be in existence but need modification. In some cases, it may well involve the creation of new data bases in order to appropriately address a particular problem. In the context of research and Extension programs, the need to develop data bases must be considered, in addition to all of the other factors.

The role of administration in terms of policy education is very specific. Essentially the role of administration can be fourfold. The first is that administration can establish the necessary mechanisms whereby needs assessment is facilitated in the policy arena. In addition, administration will have to assist staff in terms of identifying priorities. Only administration can establish the necessary mechanisms and support where needs assessments are transferred into priorities for staff to begin to develop programs.

It may well be that structural changes in programs are required in order to carry out an appropriate public policy education program. Again, administration can be a facilitator in this process. Staff can identify certain structural changes that are needed, but it may well take the legitimization by administration to make sure that the structural changes are implemented. In particular, as public policy education needs to cut across multiple disciplines, and teams need to be formulated, Cooperative Extension administration will be the necessary motivator and facilitator in this regard.

Paramount of course, is the budget that is required for public policy education. While the participants in the public policy education process can go out and actively solicit grants to support programs, Extension administrators are the only ones who can establish the necessary policies to enable a particular program to reach fruition. In addition, Extension administrators are the only ones who can redirect resources into a given policy arena, as well as push public policy education as a priority issue within land-grant institutions as a priority budget increase.

Finally, Cooperative Extension Administrators can serve as active participants in education programs. Through this participation, Cooperative Extension Administrators lend credibility to the whole process, as well as enhance the image of the program in the eyes of staff and clientele groups.

An appropriate question exists as to who are the appropriate participants in the public policy process. Another side of this question is, "Who should the public policy education programs be reaching?" Cooperative Extension has dealt with public policy issues in terms of its traditional clientele base since its early formation in 1914. Hence, the traditional public policy education will always relate to farm groups and allied organizations. However, the public policy agenda is greatly expanding. There are now other groups who are interested in public policy issues aside from our traditional clientele of farm and farm related groups. Increasingly, we have seen environmental groups, consumer groups, and farm labor, to name a few, who are also becoming participants in the public policy process. In addition, legislators themselves are increasingly turning towards Cooperative Extension organizations as well as the entire land-grant university as a resource base in order to guide appropriate public policy decisions. Hence, the appropriate participant list has been greatly broadened. It is important that administrators keep in mind that in developing public policy education programs, the participants will be broader than the traditional participants that they have been used to dealing with. While some may feel that this broadening is a threat, it should be treated as an

opportunity for Cooperative Extension to reach a much broader segment of society as far as the benefits of its particular programs.

The appropriate question is, "What is the role of general public in terms of public policy education?" It is debatable whether or not the general public will have the greatest impact in terms of a particular public policy decision. It is important to assess the knowledge base of the general public and the degree of concern that the general public has about a particular issue. Essentially, the general public's attitudes about a particular issue will guide priorities attached to the issue, as well as how urgent a particular public policy program may be. But, in the long run the general public interest can best be served through a general information program, and the real efforts of public policy education should be concentrated on the institutions and groups that have been formed to deal with the issue.

There are two aspects to dealing with groups relating to a particular public policy issue. The first is that existing groups need to be canvassed and identified as relevant to a particular public policy issue. Since these groups generally are already in existence, it is only necessary that appropriate contacts and liaisons be made with these particular groups in terms of identifying their needs and the appropriate educational program. However, as issues become more complex, it may well be that new groups, institutions, or coalitions may need to be formed in order to address a particular issue. The land-grant institution can be an instrumental factor in terms of the formation of these groups. Generally, the land-grant institution is looked upon as a source of objective and unbiased information. Hence, the educational effort may well provide a forum for the coalescing of diverse interest into a focal point for the eventual resolution of an issue. New institutions may be formed either to address a particular issue or address of a longer term nature. Inasmuch as land-grant institutions through Cooperative Extension have been instrumental in institution-building throughout its past history, the same may be true for emerging public issues.

The final concern that needs to be addressed about public policy education is, "What are the expected outcomes?" Paramount in every administrator's mind has to be an expected outcome from a particular program.

The first outcome that anyone should be concerned with is that whatever decision is reached where policy is formulated regarding a particular issue that it is an informed decision. Land-grant institutions through Cooperative Extension educational programs are in a unique position to bring research and knowledge to bear on particular problems. Traditional, throughout the course of its history, Cooperative Extension in particular has built its reputation on its objectivity and ability to bring about informed decisions. Hence, this parameter must form a keystone around which public policy programs are built.

Another expected outcome is the accomplishment of societal goals. The attainment of good policy will always further societal goals. Whether the goal is economic, environmental, sociological, or cultural or a combination of all of these attributes, a measure of the worth of a particular educational program will be the attainment of some goal that is of benefit to society.

Also, important are the accomplishment of group goals. Obviously, many groups get involved in public policy issues in order that they can further their own goals. It is important to realize and remember that the public arena is one in

which compromises take place. The ultimate goal is to promote a public policy so that all groups can walk away from the process feeling that they have gained something. Hopefully, a good public policy education program can help different and divergent groups achieve their individual goals in the policy arena.

Another outcome can be the resolution of private-public goals conflicts. This particular outcome is likely more difficult to obtain. This is not to suggest that the land-grant institution and Cooperative Extension serve in an arbitrator's role. However, by carefully conducting research and analysis, and in particular, to carefully analyze the consequences of particular alternatives to a public policy conflict, it may well be that the application of research and knowledge will provide a basis for private and public policy decision-makers to reconcile their conflicts.

Finally, through the application of appropriate research and education programs related to public policy issues, as well as treating research and Extension programs as a public policy issue, a likely outcome may well be the improved understanding and support for land-grant university programs. Such an outcome should not be the ultimate goal, but a spinoff from better public and clientele understanding of the role of the land-grant university. Public policy issues have a high visibility within the public eye. As land-grant institutions, and in particular Cooperative Extension, address these issues and bring about successful resolutions, it may well be that the support for programs may well increase. Extension administrators must well then understand the role of public policy education as a tool for addressing clientele and societal concerns.