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Agricultural Economics Library

ARE WE ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?

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WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO A RESEARCHER? IT MEANS: ARE WE ASKING OURSELVES THE RIGHT RESEARCH QUESTIONS?

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO THE EXTENSION ECONOMIST? IT MEANS: ARE WE ASKING THE FISHERMAN, PROCESSOR, MARKETER, AQUACULTURIST, ETC. THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?

LIKE ME, MANY OF YOU HAVE BEEN STEEPED IN EXTENSION PHILOSOPHY. AT THE HEART OF EXTENSION PHILOSOPHY IS THE CONCEPT OF: ASK YOUR AUDIENCE WHAT THEY NEED AND THEN GIVE IT TO THEM!

WHEN YOU WALK INTO A STORE WHAT IS THE FIRST THING THE CLERK SAYS TO YOU? "CAN I HELP YOU?"

--"YES, HOW ABOUT A DATE?" OR "YES, COME MOW MY LAWN."

WE HAVE BEEN ASKING THE FISHING INDUSTRY WHAT THEY WANT FOR 10 YEARS. WE HAVE GONE TO THEM AND SAID: "HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?"

Fish
 THAT'S REALLY A DUMB QUESTION! WHY IS IT DUMB? LOOK AT THE KIND OF ANSWERS WE GET:

"YEAH, GET ME A CHEAP LOAN."

"YOU BET, GET THE PRICE OF FLOUNDER UP TO \$1.00."

"SURE, GET ME A NEW BOAT LIKE CHARLIE'S."

"YES, GET ALL THIS FISH SOLD."

"YEAH, GET RID OF THE FOREIGNERS."

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THE QUESTION IS DUMB BECAUSE IT ELICITS USELESS ANSWERS--USELESS ANSWERS IF YOU LISTEN ONLY TO THE WORDS.

I AM CONCERNED THAT WE HAVE BEEN TAKING TOO MUCH TIME ASKING THESE DUMB QUESTIONS, LISTENING TO THE USELESS ANSWERS AND MOST UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE SPENT A LOT OF TIME AND TAXPAYERS' DOLLARS RESPONDING TO THESE ANSWERS.

WHAT HAVE EXTENSION ECONOMISTS GIVEN THE INDUSTRY IN THE PAST 10 YEARS?

WE HELPED GET THE STERNMAN EXEMPTION ACT WHICH SET THE COMMERCIAL FISHERMAN APART FROM ALL OTHER SMALL BUSINESSES IN THE USA. WE MADE A FREAK OUT OF HIM AND PROBABLY HELPED KEEP THE COMMERCIAL FISHERMAN OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM OF AMERICAN BUSINESS FOR ANOTHER 50 YEARS.

WE HELPED THEM GET THE CCF, THE FVOG, AND HAVE TOLD THEM ABOUT CHEAP MONEY. WE HAVE CAUSED FURTHER MISALLOCATION OF MONEY RESOURCES IN THE ECONOMY AND PROBABLY HELPED INDIVIDUALS PROLONG THE AGONY OF FACING FINANCIAL REALITY.

WE HELPED THEM PUT OUT FISH RECIPES, ADVERTISE FISH AND PROMOTE FISH. WE HAVE TALKED UP COOPERATIVES, BARGAINING ASSOCIATIONS AND MARKETING ASSOCIATIONS.

WE HAVE GIVEN THEM RECORD BOOKS AND LOG BOOKS TO FILL OUT. WE HAVE GIVEN THEM TAX MANAGEMENT TIPS. WE HAVE SHOWN THEM HOW TO FILL OUT TAX FORMS, LOAN FORMS AND FISHING PERMITS.

THIS EFFORT HAS COST THE TAXPAYERS MILLIONS OF DOLLARS. IT HAS GIVEN US SOME ENJOYABLE WORK, SOME HEADLINES IN THE NEWSPAPERS AND A PAT ON THE BACK FROM INDUSTRY AND, I'M SORRY TO SAY, NMFS AND OSG.

WE HAVE ALSO GENERATED AN IMPRESSIVE STACK OF EXTENSION PUBLICATIONS.

BUT WHAT HAVE WE REALLY ACCOMPLISHED?

BEFORE I ANSWER THAT, WE HAVE TO LOOK AT THE ROLE OF A UNIVERSITY. EMERY CASTLE WRITES IN HIS REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT OF OSU ON THE COMMISSION ON UNIVERSITY GOALS THAT: "THE UNIVERSITY HAS A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO BRING ITS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES TO BEAR IN ASSISTING MAN TO LIVE IN HARMONY WITH HIS ENVIRONMENT."

V.R. POTTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN WRITES IN THE SCIENCE MAGAZINE THAT, "THE UNIVERSITY...HAS A MAJOR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SURVIVAL AND IMPROVEMENT OF LIFE FOR CIVILIZED MEN."

MARTIN TROW WRITES DAEDALUS THAT THE IMPORTANT FUNCTION OF A UNIVERSITY IS THE "CULTIVATION OF AESTHETIC SENSIBILITIES, BROAD HUMAN SYMPATHIES AND THE CAPACITY FOR CRITCAL AND INDEPENDENT JUDGMENT."

THESE ARE ALL LOFTY IDEALS. THEY SEEM TO ADD UP TO THE FOLLOWING: IF A UNIVERSITY STANDS FOR ANYTHING, IT STANDS TO HELP MAN SHAPE HIS OWN DESTINY. THE UNIVERSITY DEVELOPS THE HUMAN RESOURCE SO HE CAN MAKE MORE INTELLIGENT AND RATIONAL DECISIONS, CAN BETTER CONTROL THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENTS WITHIN WHICH HE LIVES AND CAN BETTER COPE, ON HIS OWN WITH THE WORLD AND INDUSTRY WITHIN WHICH HE OPERATES.

HOW DO OUR ACTIVITIES STACK UP AGAINST THIS LOFTY GOAL? NOT VERY WELL.

WE ARE SPOON-FEEDING INFORMATION. WE ARE CHANGING THE SYSTEM TO FIT THE MAN. WE HAVE TRIED TO MAKE LIFE EASIER FOR PEOPLE IN THE INDUSTRY.

THESE SEEM TO BE A LONG WAY FROM THE UNIVERSITY'S GOALS.

SOME WILL ARGUE THAT WE NEED TO BABYSIT AND SPOON-FEED IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH THE LARGER GOAL OF DEVELOPING THE HUMAN RESOURCE. THE ARGUEMENT GOES: YOU HAVE TO GAIN THEIR TRUST, YOU HAVE TO ESTABLISH RAPPORT AND TO DO THIS, YOU HELP THEM FILL OUT FORM 1040C, YOU BECOME THE SECRETARY FOR THEIR ASSOCIATION AND YOU GIVE THEM A BULLETIN LISTING LOAN SERVICES.

THIS MAY BE TRUE, BUT EVEN IF BABYSITTING AND SPOON-FEEDING IS A JUSTIFIABLE

MEANS TO AN END--DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMAN RESOURCE--ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME WE GOT ON WITH THE END AND LEAVE THE MEANS BEHIND?

TEN YEARS IS MORE THAN ENOUGH TIME TO ESTABLISH RAPPORT AND CREDIBILITY. TAX TIPS, FISH SELLING TIPS, ETC. DO THE OPPOSITE. THEY MAKE THE FISHERMAN, PROCESSOR, WHOLESALER, ETC. MORE DEPENDENT UPON OTHERS, MORE DEPENDENT UPON THE EXTENSION ECONOMIST, MORE DEPENDENT UPON SPECIAL REGULATIONS AND MORE DEPENDENT UPON SPECIAL TREATMENT BY PUBLIC BODIES.

IT IS TIME FOR A NEW DIRECTION. IT IS TIME FOR EXTENSION ECONOMISTS (WITH THE BACK-UP OF RESEARCH), TO HELP INDUSTRY PEOPLE BECOME BETTER THINKERS, BETTER DECISION-MAKERS, BETTER PLANNERS, BETTER ANALYSTS, BETTER COMMUNICATORS, BETTER LEADERS AND BETTER FOLLOWERS. THIS WILL REQUIRE DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF PRINCIPLES, NOT THE MERE DELIVERY OF INFORMATION.

WE OFTEN DECRY AND HEAR OTHERS DECRY THE LACK OF FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT THE FISHING INDUSTRY. I CONTEND THERE ARE MORE FACTS AND FIGURES NOW THAN 90 PERCENT OF THE INDUSTRY PEOPLE CAN USE EFFECTIVELY. THEIR SKILL LEVEL MUST BE GREATLY EXPANDED TO MATCH THE LEVEL OF FACTS AND FIGURES NOW AVAILABLE. OTHERWISE, WE WILL CONTINUE TO DILUTE AND SPOON-FEED RESEARCH RESULTS FOREVER, OR MORE LIKELY, SHARE THOSE RESULTS WITH THE LESS THAN 10 PERCENT WHO CAN USE THEM EFFECTIVELY.

LET'S STOP ASKING DUMB QUESTIONS. LET'S WATCH AND LISTEN MORE CAREFULLY.

WHAT SKILLS, WHAT TALENTS, WHAT NEW KNOWLEDGE DO THEY NEED TO BE BETTER ABLE TO COPE WITH THE WORLD AROUND THEM--AND THEMSELVES?

TEACH THOSE SKILLS, DEVELOP THE NEW KNOWLEDGE. CHANGE THE PERSON--DON'T PROTECT THE PERSON.

TEACH MANAGEMENT, SCIENTIFIC METHOD, STATISTICS, MARKETING. PROVIDE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT.

DEVELOP THE HUMAN RESOURCE.