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Extension Economists' Need for AAEA

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First of all, I compliment the Extension Affairs Committee for its survey and for initiating this symposium. As well, let me recognize the interest of the officers and directors of the Association in supporting this effort and in considering further adjustments to help better meet the needs of agricultural economists with responsibilities in Extension.

My view is that professional agricultural economists compose a diverse group with certain areas of interest in common but also with differing interests according to their subject matter areas of specialization and/or functional areas of responsibility. This is an age of professional specialization; agricultural economists are not exempt. Thus, there is a resultant need by the Association to accommodate a heterogeneity of interests.

With respect to areas of common interest, one of the most critical needs of all agricultural economists is a forum for informed discussion and debate on broad and current issues related to agriculture. It is my view that the association should be on the "cutting edge" with respect to anticipating issues and sponsoring discussion and debates thereto, via annual meetings, journals or other appropriate means. Such discussions and debates on current issues would, I believe, contribute greatly to the maintenance of professional competency of all membership.

I generally concur with the survey responses of numerous Extension economists concerning the apparent heavy emphasis on methodological approaches to issues dealing with research on agriculturally-related projects while

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no doubt appropriate to the interests of certain researchers many of these papers have generally been of less value to Extension programs even though the Extension economists may be interested in the problem being researched. It is my view that in both the invited papers and particularly the journal articles more emphasis should be given to selecting those in which the application of research results had received important consideration during the project formulation; and I would suggest that where possible more attention be given to the application of results in the journal article or paper presented. In my mind this would contribute to better interchange and working relationships between those engaged in research and in Extension. As importantly, I would suggest that more research of an applied nature be included in the annual meetings. Applied research is a critical component in educational programs. Good applied research requires professional competency as does research utilizing more rigorous methodology and I suggest that it should receive substantially greater Association attention.

Also, it is my belief that additional emphasis might be given to the development of major papers which would combine related research results in a certain problem area; such papers would require advanced planning in identifying the priority areas and making assignments to those who could develop what might be regarded as benchmark papers. These would, I believe, be very valuable to Extension in strengthening programs in those specific problem areas. The papers could also be regarded as "benchmarks" for researchers as to what is and is not known and might give guidance with respect to research needs and priorities.

A particular area of debate concerns the scheduling of workshop type sessions at annual meetings for agricultural economists employed in Extension to review program directions, progress, needs, and exchange information in specialized areas. I do not suggest major emphasis given this, but it appears to be of sufficient importance to a number of Extension economists to warrant recognition. Given the number of specialized program areas, a rotational arrangement might be established for including areas represented by specialists who presently feel that the Association has little to offer them. One principal role of our Association is as a medium for professional cooperation and exchange across state and regional lines. For some the annual meeting represents the sole or at least one of the few opportunities during the year for interchange with counterparts in other states and regions which interchange could contribute to strengthened educational programs.

The strength and vitality of AAEA is affected by the participation and interaction among all groups of agricultural economists. Membership, of course, is voluntary for most and I applaud the officers and directors for striving to better meet the needs of its present and prospective members. As it does so, adjustments will be needed and it occurs to me that perhaps a survey of the other groups of members would be helpful as well. Obviously, the Association cannot fulfill all of the needs of each member. But, I believe that the recognition of diverse membership interests and this discussion today of the needs of the Extension segment of the total membership represent a further step forward.