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By Norbert A. Dorow\*

The American Agricultural Economics Association is comprised of a diverse group of professionals working in research, teaching, extension, business and industry. The official journal of the Association is the American Journal of Agricultural Economics. The issue discussed in this paper is how Extension economists view the Journal. The analysis is based on a survey of Extension Economists.

The Extension Affairs Committee of the Association conducted a survey during the winter of 1976-77 of Agricultural Economists whose appointments were 50 percent or more in Extension work. The purpose of the survey was to identify the attitudes and perceptions of Extension Economists concerning the Association, the annual meetings, the Journal, and other services. Two-hundred seventy one Extension Economists responded to the survey.

The survey questions related to evaluation of the Journal, its editorial policies and its usefulness to Extension, and suggestions for change and improvement. The responses and comments emphasized the wide diversity among Extension Economists as to their professional responsibilities, interests and expectations of the Journal.

#### Views on the Journal

In the survey, Extension Economists were asked to identify activities and services they expect from their professional association. Publication of a professional journal ranked first. This was followed by: sponsorship of annual meetings, symposia and special sessions; promotion of professional development;

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*Presented at AAEA / NAEA joint meeting,  
San Diego, July 31 - Aug. 3, 1977.*

providing employment services, and other services.

A large majority, 86 percent, indicated they see the Journal. However, as indicated by the following table, there is much dissatisfaction with the Journal. On the positive side, to the question: "Are the editorial policies of the Journal being followed in your opinion?", of those who responded over half said "yes". But, to questions on value to Extension, about three-fourths responded negatively. On the other hand of those who responded to the question - Can the AAEA serve Extension, research and teaching effectively through AJAE? - three-fourths indicated "yes". Apparently Extension Economists feel their needs are not being met by the Journal, as about 60 percent of those who responded think there is a need for an alternative Journal form.

Summary of Responses by 271 Extension Economists  
to Questions on the Journal

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Response</u>
1. Do you see the <u>Journal</u> periodically (even if not a member)?	233	26	12
2. Do you feel that there is a reasonable proportion of articles that are useful to you?	60	182	29
3. Do you feel there is a reasonable proportion of articles that are useful to Extension people when taken in the context of the scope of the profession?	52	176	43
4. Are the editorial policies of the <u>Journal</u> (stated in every issue) being followed in your opinion?	116	43	112
5. Do you think there is a need for an alternative Journal form?	126	87	58
6. In your opinion, can the Association serve Extension, research and teaching effectively through the AJAE?	163	58	50

Editorial Policies

As printed in the Journal, the editorial policy is: "The purpose of the Journal is to provide a forum for creative and scholarly work in agricultural

economics. Thus, acceptable manuscripts should have a relationship to the economics of agriculture, natural resources, or rural and community development. Contributions, methodological or applied, the business, extension, research, and teaching phases of agricultural economics are equally encouraged".

As shown in the table, about half of those who responded to the question indicated they think the editorial policies are being followed. However, many of the comments indicate that the articles are largely research oriented in comparison to business, Extension and teaching. Also, the comments indicated some disagreement with the policies.

Critical comments included: over emphasis on computer based methodology; applied research articles not accepted; too mathematical; reviewers do not reflect policies; implications of research are lacking, and there are few articles on business, teaching, and Extension.

Several respondents commented favorably on the Proceedings issue which had more articles of value to Extension and responded to the diversity of interests. Others suggested a need for more articles involving analysis of issues based on economic reasoning rather than mathematical formulae.

Generally, the respondents indicated that the Journal could be more responsive to Extension interests within the present policies.

#### Usefulness of Extension Oriented Articles

There was a mixed response to the question - "Do you feel that the Extension oriented articles are useful in a technical sense?" Quite a number questioned whether the Journal included Extension oriented articles. Other responses included positive and negative reactions.

Favorable responses indicated a variety of reasons, such as: demonstrates application of theory; analyzes alternatives for decision making; provides basis for discussion; are useful but must be adapted; helps to stay on top of current research; gives basic information on farm policy; and favorable comments on

specific articles.

Negative responses also included a variety of reactions, such as: methodology too sophisticated; very little on educational techniques; technically oriented rather than problem solving; of value only to math majors; and comments indicating they seldom found articles of interest.

A second part of the question was - "Do you feel that the Extension oriented articles are useful in a philosophical sense?" Responses were varied and mixed indicating the question was not interpreted uniformly. Some negative comments included: few Extension implications; too much midwest outlook; too esoteric; and not useful. Positive comments included: objective assessment facilitates use by Extension; may encourage graduate students to consider Extension; new insights on societal needs; and Extension staff need to keep up on current research.

As a general statement based on responses, Extension Economists feel that the Journal publishes little of use to them. The articles are research and methodologically oriented and are not on applied and relevant problems.

#### Review and Publication Process

Extension Economists responded with a wide variety of comments to the question: "Based on your experience, do you feel the submission, review and publication process is fair and reasonable?"

Several respondents indicated they had served as reviewers and felt the present process is satisfactory. Some felt the editors have encouraged Extension participation.

A significant number responded that they had not submitted articles and do not plan to submit articles for several reasons, such as: the heavy research bias; too much time and effort required for the small chance of being accepted; Journal does not serve Extension clientele; publish in other journals, and find other means of getting articles published to reach their publics.

Many comments reflected a negative attitude toward the submission, review

and publication process, including; have submitted in past but rejected; an exercise in futility; Extension's Economists refrain from submitting because they feel the articles are not acceptable; Extension papers reviewed as research papers; editorial review comments have been rude and inappropriate, and some cynical remarks.

The responses to this question indicated some positive experiences, some negative experiences, and comments indicating that the Journal is basically a research publication with limited opportunity for Extension participation.

#### Suggestions for Change

The survey provided opportunity for Extension Economists to suggest changes in editorial policies or practices, comment on possible alternative Journal forms and how the Journal might better serve Extension.

#### Editorial Policy or Practices

The survey question was: If you are dissatisfied with the editorial policy or practices, how could they be changed to better serve Extension Economists? Respondents suggested a variety of changes that would make the Journal of more value to them.

Representative comments included: include section on short abstracts of applied research; allocate a part of each issue to Extension and teaching; use only abstracts of longer articles to allow for more articles; include a section for reports or abstracts on new or unique Extension programs; Extension articles on solving "real world" problems; explicit policy to invite Extension articles, particularly from younger Economists; more on public policy and community development; judge Extension articles by Extension criteria; more applied research and implications of research; and others with related suggestions.

The suggestions indicated a real concern for making the Journal better serve Extension Economists with articles more relevant to their work-a-day world.

### Alternative Journal Forms

The survey question was: Do you think there is a need for an alternative Journal form, in addition to the existing Journal, that would include materials such as "comments", research in progress, papers on current topical issues, description of successful programs, etc? - - - If yes, describe an editorial policy that would be appropriate to indicate your feelings on financing, subscription rates and page changes. As was shown in the summary table, nearly 60 percent of those who responded to the question favor an alternative Journal form.

Respondents were divided between suggestions to change the present Journal to include more types of material and suggestions for alternative forms. Financing was not a major concern. A number commented that present AAEA dues are low compared to other professional associations.

Those who suggested keeping the present Journal but altering it to better meet their needs included suggestions, such as: limit length of articles; include section on lists of new agricultural economic publications, circulars, etc. from previous quarter; include a section of each issue on research in progress, research results, current issues, Extension and teaching innovations; have an Extension section; and other comments in a similar vein.

Respondents who favored an alternative form included suggestions, as: provide a special issue once or twice a year on applied research, successful programs, pragmatic articles, Extension articles, etc.; a supplement on current review of agricultural economics; the regional journals illustrate the form needed; need an Ag. Econ. version of "Crops and Soils" that would help the profession serve industry and farmers; alternate journal on applied research and public policy; three phase Journal - (1) current issues, Extension programs, teaching, etc., (2) bulletin on members, etc., (3) research; and an additional issue on applied research and successful programs.

In financing the alternate journals, several suggested a subscription rate

of about \$20 per year. For the additional issue, suggestions included a \$5 charge. Suggestions on page cost were in the area of \$2.50 per page.

#### Journal Serve Extension Research and Teaching?

The survey question was: In your opinion, can the Association serve Extension, research, and teaching effectively through the AJAE? If yes, how? Of the 221 who responded to the question, 74 percent said yes. Many wrote comments on how this might be accomplished, but many of the suggestions had been included in response to previous questions.

Suggestions that seemed to be different from previous comments included:

Journal to serve as a central coordinator of information pertaining to interests of agricultural economists; sectionalize the Journal into separate sections for research, Extension and teaching; aim Journal at real problem solving and research useful for extending to public; better balance of articles for the interest groups; and articles showing cooperation between research, Extension and teaching.

#### Commentary

The survey of Extension Economists indicates that the large majority feel that the Journal has limited value to them in their profession. They view the Journal as oriented primarily to mathematically oriented research methodologies. A small minority indicated in their comments that the Journal publishes a "mix" of articles that is acceptable.

This paper includes a representative sample of the positive and negative evaluation comments and the suggestions for changing the Journal. There were many other comments that had little constructive value, but they indicated frustration, disillusionment, and no hope for change for the future. Many comments indicated a feeling of being disenfranchised in the AAFA and regarding the Journal.

A significant number of Extension Economists feel that the AAFA and the Journal



should serve all agricultural economists and not treat researchers, Extension staff, teachers and business economists as separate groups. However, the responses indicate that the policy makers and editors for the Journal should recognize the broad scope of the profession and that research methodology is only one phase of the work.

The Journal cannot meet the expectations of all agricultural economists with their diverse interests. However, a professional journal should serve to aid communication and cooperation between research, Extension, teaching and business economists, rather than being a divisive element. The Journal can be a forum for defining, and discussing the critical issues in agriculture and related sectors of the economy to encourage more productive work by all sectors of the agricultural economics profession.

The results of this survey can be a challenge to the Association, to officers and board members and to the Journal editors toward making the Journal more responsive to the needs of all agricultural Economists, in particular Extension Economists.