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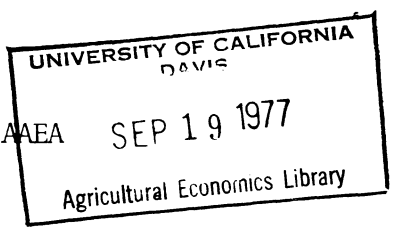
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*Agricultural
extension*

EXTENSION ECONOMISTS' NEED FOR AAEA

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When I accepted the assignment to discuss the topic, Extension Economists' Need for AAEA, I thought it would be a relatively simple task. However, as I pursued the topic, it became very evident that it is not now, nor will it ever be, a simple task to discuss this area of concern. I should mention, at the beginning, that my remarks are based upon my experiences during 15 years with an extension appointment; six years experience as a Department Head with administrative responsibility for the extension, research and teaching activities of the Department; and solicited comments from the extension economists in our Department.

Let me begin by stating the objective of the AAEA. "The object of the Association is to further the development of systematic knowledge of agricultural economics. As a professional organization, the Association shall pursue this object by facilitating scientific research, instruction, publications, meetings and other activities designed to advance and disseminate knowledge in agricultural economics." By definition, then, the AAEA should serve the needs of all agricultural economists. Let's look into this a little deeper and see if the Association, in fact, serves the "needs" of the extension economist.

What are the needs of the extension economist? I feel there are two broad categories of needs.

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The first need, and the one most often expressed by extension personnel, stems from the "problem solving" orientation of most extension economics programs. The need, in this case, is for research-generated information that will be useful in extension programs designed to resolve, or to develop means to resolve, problems which are generally already identified. Another way of saying this is that extension economists need research results that can be practically applied to help solve the problems of their clientele. Generally speaking, this need is not being met by the AAEEA. Much of the research reported in the Journal, and at the annual meeting, gives major emphasis to the development of research techniques and methodology rather than to solving industry problems. Further, some of the research reported is conducted on problems amenable to a given research technique (researchers have been known to conduct research centered around the use of a certain technique because they have developed expertise in this technique). In this case, the problems researched are not always the problems that industry feels to be most important or in most urgent need of solution. Finally, much of the research reported in the Journal, and at the annual meeting, is not in a form that facilitates ready conversion to practical use in extension education programs.

The second need of extension economists, and one which is often overlooked by the extension economist because he becomes so deeply involved with problem solving, is the need to keep abreast of new and changing concepts, philosophies, methodologies, analytical tools, etc., in the agricultural economics profession. It seems to me that the orientation of the activities of AAEEA is to this end, i.e., keeping the members informed of the profession. Here then lies the basic difference between what most extension economists express as their needs and what the AAEEA

is, and has been, doing to meet the needs of the agricultural economics profession.

Let's explore a little deeper the needs of the extension economist and what this means for the future orientation of the AAEA. As was stated earlier, the most expressed need of extension economists centers around the problem solving orientation of their programs. Hence, they express desires for applied research which has practical use in their programs. This is a legitimate need--but is it a legitimate function of the AAEA to provide for this need? Sources of this type of research are generally available through Experiment Station publications, departmental mimeos, etc., which may, or may not, be available to extension economists. Further, extension provides opportunity to become informed of applied research, program ideas, etc., through such activities as regional and national meetings, workshops and seminars, as well as regional extension committees. In fact, it has been my experience that the regional agricultural economics associations have met this need fairly well since research reported on is regional in nature and, therefore, generally directed toward regional and local problems. These meetings are generally structured to meet the direct interest of extension economists as related to their current programs and, as a result, generally meet their needs associated with the problem solving orientation of their programs.

The function of the AAEA as it now functions, however, is primarily to keep members of the profession current on new concepts, philosophies, methodologies, etc., in agricultural economics in general. One must admit here, however, that a majority of this effort is directed toward research. But, on the other hand, research does, or at least

should, form much of the basis for both teaching and extension activities. Hence, it seems to me that it is essential to be informed of new concepts, philosophies, etc., in research in order to do an effective job in teaching and extension.

In summary, it is my feeling that the AAEA does not meet the most commonly expressed needs of the extension economist. Papers presented at the annual meeting, and Journal articles, are not generally designed to provide ready made answers to problems of the clientele served by Extension. Rather, they are designed to keep members of the profession currently knowledgeable of agricultural economics. Since we, in the profession, are all educated as agricultural economists regardless of whether we choose research, teaching or extension as our major activity, we all need the type of service now provided by the AAEA.

The question that results from this line of reasoning is, should the AAEA establish a means, perhaps separate sections in the Journal or differently structured annual meetings, to complement the current services of the Association so that extension economists' needs are more fully met. I think it should for the following reasons: 1) Experiment Station publications, departmental mimeos, etc., do not have common formats and are, consequently, not always adaptable for extension education programs unless one spends considerable time and effort; 2) separate sections in the Journal will provide an outlet for applied researchers (most other disciplines have journals that are primarily reporting mechanisms for applied research); 3) typical extension meetings do not include researchers so the cross-fertilization of ideas, research, etc., does not occur; there is a need for extension and research personnel to come together to discuss common concerns; and 4) separate sections in the Journal will provide an opportu-

ity for extension economists to publish in the Journal (which is, whether we like it or not, one of the evaluation tools of today). There are many professional areas that extension economists could present in the Journal including critique of research as to its appropriateness to extension work as well as to its success as part of an extension program, analysis of current and future problems that require research, etc.

In short, I feel that the AAEA should reassess its primary function and consider broadening its overall purpose to include full consideration of the extension economist. In fact, if the Association is to survive, it must have the broad support of the profession as a whole--extension, classroom teaching and agri-industry as well as research.