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The AAEA Should Create a List of Research Priorities  
by

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### INTRODUCTION

To follow Jim Nielson is rough but to espouse research priority setting during these periods when it appears that we are each tinged with anarchy is real tough. In the span of 10 minutes one could not really expect to exert much influence on the thinking of AAEA members. Actually 10 hours, 10 days or 10 months might bear the same harvest.

It is noted that goals and values, value judgments, positive and normative concepts have been set aside for a breath of fresh air i.e. subjective values where you sink your teeth without fear of empirical evidence. Throughout the historical record it is sprinkled with the edicts of men, women and groups of smaller or greater positions who issued prescriptions for specific forms of behavior. For example, in Exodus we note that one of the commandments was "love thy neighbor as thyself;" the famous frenchlady replied "let them eat cake;" in the classical economic system of Marshall and Smith free markets was the only way to organize for efficient resource use; and, more recently "we can fight a war, have butter and bread and not raise taxes to pay for it." All of these edicts have been violated but their total influence on our behavior has been immense.

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BODY OF REMARKS

The American Agricultural Economics Association should compile, publish and distribute among the membership and elsewhere a list of research priorities. The list should be prepared by a representative group of specialists within the profession and include the perspectives of researchers, teachers, extension personnel, clientele groups and administrators. The list should be reviewed and updated at least once every two years and transmitted to appropriate public and private offices as well as the AAEA membership.

The AAEA should assume this responsibility for a number of reasons, among which the following seem most relevant:

1. The AAEA is the predominant voice for the profession of agricultural economics and should be providing educational information to its members and to the public at large concerning the role of agricultural economists in the social and economic affairs of the nation. Obviously this includes information on the research activities of agricultural economists as they try to increase our reservoir of knowledge. Other associations have educational programs for purposes of explaining organizational activities and obtaining financial, political and moral support for members and the organization.
2. The AAEA should provide a research priority list as a selective good to its members to assist them in:
  - a) Retaining currency in problems confronting the profession.
  - b) Overcoming the lack of information about research areas beyond one's immediate project or speciality.

- c) Providing dialogue for those who do not regularly have interaction with other agricultural economists. There are places of employment where but one agricultural economist is located.
- d) Reassessing research activities they are currently conducting or contemplating in the near future.
- e) Maintaining a high degree of professionalism ... assuming such lists would eventually lead to concentration of efforts upon the most important research areas.
- f) Maintaining a clearer perspective of emerging problem areas.

3. The AAEA should provide a research priority list to assist in the allocation of research resources.

- a) Colleges of Agriculture and Departments of Agricultural Economics periodically review their research programs and projects. A research priority list could serve as one standard in the review and evaluation of research activities.
- b) As funding sources become more selective among the projects they support financially, it might add justification if the proposed project was located among the top five or ten research project areas of the research priority list.
- c) Public bodies provide support for research endeavors and a list of priority research should assist public officials in the most effective allocation of public funds.

To summarize, the AAEA has a responsibility to provide its members with selective goods and services. One such good should be a list of priority research. The AAEA also serves as spokesman for the profession and in this capacity should inform the public of the role agricultural economists play in the social and economic affairs of the nation. Again a research priority list would assist in this educational effort. The AAEA as the major professional association of agricultural economists should provide information to public officials for use in the decision making process concerning allocation of public resources, especially public revenues that will be committed to research activities.

It appears to this observer that we all should have some interest in reviewing a brief note of research priorities. It also appears to me that the AAEA is capable of providing advice and counsel to its membership, possessed of sufficient wisdom to take a national or world perspective and does have among its membership those who proclaim some knowledge of resource allocation. Finally, if the AAEA cannot delineate a list of research priorities then it ought not register complaint if some other group drafts such a list for our work agenda or allocates fewer and fewer research funds because our input at decision making time consisted of tirades against the development of such a list.