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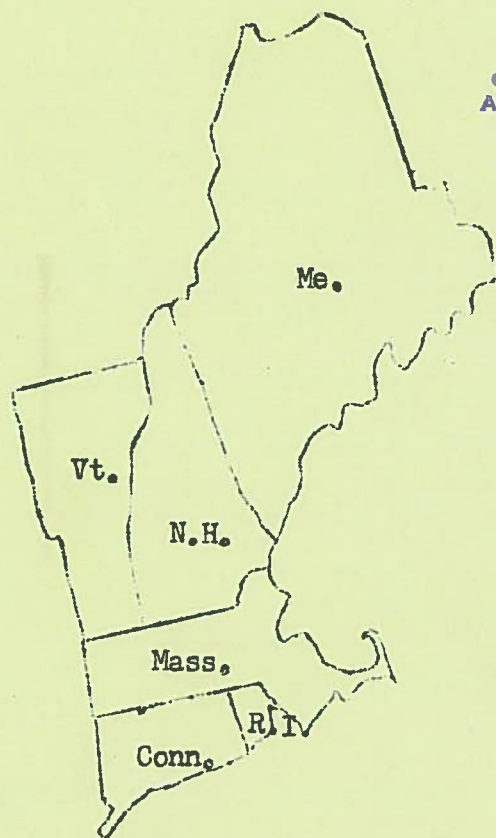
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CHANGING THE SIGHTS FOR EXTENSION 1/

Lawrence M. Vaughan
Federal Extension Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture

In trying to assemble my thoughts on this broad subject I ran across a statement in the spring issue of "Food Marketing in New England". It seemed to fit my situation perfectly—it was called "A Prayer for Speakers"—and read as follows: "Lord teach me where to begin—what to put in—how to omit—when to quit".

This might be a good guide to use at any time. In approaching this subject it was an absolute essential that one omit a large part of what could rightly come under this title.

For example, in recent years the Extension Service has been changing its sights, and expanding its contacts in many directions:

- Home demonstration work with rural non-farm, suburban, and urban families.
- Youth work with the children of these same families.
- Special county workers to assist with the garden, horticultural, and landscape problems of people with these kinds of problems.
- Management work with marketing firms.
- Merchandising work with the retail food trade.
- Food purchasing with urban consumers.
- Special agents to work on rural development in low-income areas.
- Educational work on public affairs with various policy-forming groups.

All these activities represent big advances by the Extension Service to meet the demands of the people. Much of Extension's efforts and resources must go in these directions.

But all of this I intend to omit in my discussion today—in order that I might concentrate on that part of Extension's program which concerns itself with the problems of the family-operated commercial farm. I will, therefore, discuss the "changing of sights" only as it applies to this phase of extension work.

Work with commercial farmers is not an expanding phase of extension work in the same sense as most of those just mentioned. It lacks the appeal of pioneering in new fields of endeavor with new clientele. It is concerned primarily with a change in approach and content, to better serve the needs of a reduced number of families, faced with problems of a growing and complex nature.

Irving Fellows 1/ in his paper last year at Orono gave us a picture of future New England agriculture:

- Larger farms, fewer families, fewer workers.
- Operators with a greater technical know-how and greater managerial ability.
- More capital requirements per farm, with cash expenditures representing a higher percentage of the total cost.
- More production for specified conditions under definite arrangements with a buyer.
- Increased competition from other higher-paying uses for the resources now in farming.

We don't need to enlarge on a description of the situation. You are more familiar with it than I. It means working with fewer farmers, relatively better informed, with bigger businesses, operating under conditions of keener competition and more rigid production requirements.

The title suggested for this discussion, "Changing the Sights for Extension," implies that the educational job ahead should be different from that of the past if it is to meet the new conditions. With this I agree. The question is what do we change and how.

The real challenge to Extension in their work with commercial agriculture would seem to be how to maintain an outstanding program of top technical leadership, and at the same time render a down-to-earth practical advisory service on the problems of individuals, local groups, and organized agriculture. One calls for specialization in order to be competent and to stay out in front concerning some specific segment of agricultural subject matter; i.e., to be a technological authority. In this role we think of the State specialist whether located in the field or at the college. The other calls for an ability to put things together, to observe conditions and appraise situations, to know and be able to apply a wide variety of information to specific problems, to evaluate alternative solutions, and discuss the implications of various courses of action; i.e., to be a management counselor, in the broadest sense of this term. In this role we think of the county agent. In a management approach it matters not whether the problem concerns the interrelations of the individual farm business, a specific problem common to a number of farmers, an area problem requiring group action, or a problem of the dairy or poultry industry, the approach is the same in all cases. The role of Extension is that of providing a resource person, and a leader in bringing about action based on careful analysis and considered judgment.

I expect that in the early days of Extension it was assumed that the combination of State extension specialists and county agricultural agents would adequately serve these two functions. In general, the record to date has borne out this assumption. But today and for the future many are wondering if we are properly aware of what it is going to take to

maintain technical leadership, and how far short we are of meeting the increased demands for problem solving and management counseling. Let us take a look at Extension organization and programming as we find it today.

The typical county agent program with commercial farmers, the same as for many years, is organized around segments of subject matter such as agronomy, dairy production, farm management, agricultural engineering, etc., which, in general, conforms to the departmental organization of the University. The typical approach of a State extension specialist has to do with promoting and securing identity, in the form of a program for the special phase of subject matter for which he is held responsible. Accomplishments of both specialists and agents are measured in terms of recommended practices and procedures carried out by farmers.

This type of organization and program procedure lends itself to encouraging an independent functioning of specialists with much more emphasis on technical recommendations than on management counseling. It does not prevent workers from getting together to cope with problems, and there are many excellent examples where this is being done. The setup, however, just makes it harder to do this, and provides an excellent excuse for not doing it. It tends to delay movement in the direction of greatest need.

It would seem to me that the events of the last 5 years indicate that Extension administration is aware of this situation. I have reference to their provision for:

- More on-the-farm advisory work with individual families (farm and home development).
- More planning of local programs around the problems of greatest importance to the people (program projection).
- More attention to total resource development in areas of low income from farming (rural development).
- More attention to gearing farm production to what the market will take (agricultural adjustment).

Also, one cannot read the "Scope Report" 1/ without being impressed by its emphasis on a "management-oriented" approach to extension work throughout its entire program. Yes, there is plenty of evidence of Extension's concern over the proper balance between its traditional role in technology and its growing responsibilities in management.

So, I have reached a point in my thinking where I am not as much concerned with "Changing the Sights" of Extension as I am with "Sighting the Changes" which are necessary to implement these intentions. In other words, it is the follow-through—the "how" and not the stated intent that seems most important to me.

To focus attention on some possible adjustments within Extension, I

would like to state a few thoughts of my own. They are personal judgments, and should be so considered. They come from one who has always functioned in the role of a specialist; i.e., the kind of person who finds himself somewhere between a State director and the local county staff, and therefore insulated from many of the forces that bear on both State and county administration. Consequently, you may choose to look upon what I have to say as "unbiased remarks from a specialist's point of view". They are four in number.

First—I would like to see more of our county programs and activities identified by what it is we are trying to accomplish rather than by the kind of information we have to offer. The people's problems do not follow subject-matter lines. To me there is quite a difference between a dairy forage program at the county level and forage production as a part of an agronomy program; or a dairy housing program and housing as a part of an engineering program; or a farm and home management program, and management as part of the economic program. One puts the emphasis on the problem, encourages the cooperation of specialists with agents, and brings together all information pertinent to the situation. The other puts the emphasis on segments of subject matter, encourages a competitive functioning of specialists, and leaves it largely up to the agent and the farmer to relate and apply the information to problems. In Extension I believe we spend a lot more time in identifying problems than we do in organizing our forces to work on them.

Second—and this is closely related to the first—I would like to feel that the major role of a specialist is to contribute, from a subject-matter area, to the planning and carrying out of various over-all programs of the Extension Service, and not primarily one of having to develop, promote, and sell a program of his own. This responsibility would be greater on some programs than on others, and a way must be found of placing varying degrees of responsibility on individuals, without developing the feeling by specialists of "exclusive ownership" on the part of some and "hands off" on the part of others. Programs should be tied to problems and not to specialists. I think this approach can be followed with no loss of professional status to those involved. It will not be too satisfying, however, if one is continuously asked—what are you doing in economics or agronomy or engineering—as if the time you spent on farm and home development, the poultry program, or dairy housing wasn't really what you were supposed to be doing. Much will also depend on whether we continue to measure progress by our ability to get people to adopt certain practices, or by our ability to develop a better understanding of their choices.

Third—I would like to see an expanded and continuous in-service training program designed to meet the apparent deficiencies in basic training needed to carry out a "management oriented" extension program. If the formal training of a county agent, for example, has been largely in plant and animal science, a good on-the-job training program should place greater emphasis on what he now needs and does not have than on what he is already relatively well-qualified to handle. Probably the biggest handicap that agents and specialists have in using a "management-oriented" approach to problems is their feeling of inadequacy to counsel

helpfully with farmers on business and financial matters. Unless more is done to correct this, the feeling of inadequacy may grow as farm businesses become bigger and more complex.

Fourth—I would like to see more attention given to anticipating problems, new innovations, and major adjustments in farming. Through the cooperation of specialists we should be able to do a better job of leadership in considering with farmers what's ahead, and appraising the likely economic significance of the changes just around the corner. What is likely to happen in regard to the automation of farm operations, specification buying, vertical and horizontal integration, milk concentrates, etc., is important to farmers who must commit their resources for a long period of years. This type of educational work may call for some short-time "service research" by extension workers. It may call for investigation trips to areas where some of these things are farther advanced. Whatever it takes a way must be found to do it if we are going to be effective in attaining the same leadership as management counselors that we have attained in technology.

This is what I mean by implementing our intentions. It is first necessary to change our sights, and this I feel we are doing. The bigger and more difficult job is that of changing the internal working relations of an already well-established pattern of operation in order that faster progress can be made in line with intentions. It just won't happen without special effort and follow-up.

In a sense, the four points mentioned represent choices in approach and emphasis faced by all extension services. The issues can be more fully appreciated when these choices are stated in their extremes. For example:

1. We can have county-developed programs based on local situations and problems or an adaptation to local conditions of State-sponsored programs.
2. We can have joint participation of specialists in support of local programs or independently featured subject-matter projects.
3. We can have special training emphasis in accordance with county needs or an "Equal Time" approach based on the interests of the professional staff.
4. We can have leadership through the anticipation of problems or educational work done on a service and request basis when trouble develops.

What we have will depend on how willing we are to go through the same steps in management we are suggesting to farmers—of evaluating alternatives, making decisions, taking action, and bearing responsibility.

To some it may seem that I have overemphasized management in relation to technology. This may be true, but I would hasten to add that it is difficult to be strong in management without also being up on techno-

logy. Management is an application of technology to problems. On the other hand, it is very easy to be strong in technology and completely overlook management. You come nearer the right proportions when you stress management.

It is only fair to say in concluding that there is much evidence in New England of changes along the lines I have presented. Also, I can add that considerable thought has been given to this matter by one group of specialists with whom I work regularly, namely, the Northeast Farm Management Extension Committee. At their meeting last October, there was general recognition of three major functions in their present role as farm management specialists:

One—Training and equipping the county staff to better handle their increased load of management work, with emphasis on the basic requirements of analysis, evaluation, and decision making.

Two—Participation in developing and servicing extension-wide programs designed to strengthen Extension's role in meeting major farm problems.

Three—Direct educational work in certain specialized fields of economic information, in accordance with Extension's professional responsibility to the people.

This reference to the thinking of one group of specialists may clear the air a little as to what I am driving at. It is not a matter of dropping one approach completely for another, but one of recognizing a broader role, and a need for establishing a proper balance between its various parts.

1/ Presented by L. M. Vaughan, Federal Extension Service, USDA, in a panel discussion of "Needed Adjustments in Research and Extension" at the Annual Meeting of New England Agricultural Economics Council, University of Massachusetts, AEP-98 (7/59)

1/ Developments and Future of New England Agriculture--1958 Proceedings of New England Agricultural Economics Council.

1/ The Cooperative Extension Service.....Today. A statement of Scope and Responsibility--April 1958.