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THE SOUTHERN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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It is a privilege and pleasure to have the opportunity to present the inaugural presidential address of the Southern Agricultural Economics Association (SAEA). As I considered alternative topics which might be candidates for this presidential address, an intriguing question kept attracting my attention. Why are there regional agricultural economics associations and in particular why is there a Southern Agricultural Economics Association? What services does the SAEA provide to its membership that a national association such as the American Agricultural Economics Association does not provide? Or possibly it is not what services a regional association provides but how and in what kind of an environment the services are provided to members.

Delving into the history of the development and formation of the SAEA seemed like a reasonable starting point. The history of the SAEA does not necessarily provide a clear justification for its existence but it certainly provides insights about why SAEA exists. SAEA has a rather unique and fascinating history and I will attempt to share some aspects of it with you. In this address the focus is on three topics: (1) a brief history of SAEA, (2) a state of the association report on the present status of SAEA, and (3) some potential future challenges for SAEA.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

SAEA evolved from the Agricultural Economics, Marketing and Rural Sociology Sections of the Association of Southern Agricultural Workers (ASAW). The ASAW evolved from the Cotton States Association of Commissioners of Agriculture which was formed in Atlanta, Georgia in 1899 when the state commissioners of agriculture of the "cotton states" of the South met for the purpose of studying and taking united action on some of the common problems of the Cotton South (Shepardson). In 1905, the name was changed to Southern States Association of Commissioners of Agriculture. Activities at state universities and state agricultural experiment stations were soon recognized and these scientists began participating in meetings of the newly formed association. In 1907, the name was modified to include "and Other Agricultural Workers". In 1911, in Nashville, Tennessee the name was changed to the Association of Southern Agricultural Workers and in 1972 the association was renamed the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists (SAAS).

As early as the fourth annual convention of the Cotton States Association of Commissioners of Agriculture in 1902, economic topics such as cooperative marketing of fruit, truck, and farm crops; building up the sugar cane industry of the South; Georgia's industrial progress; and Torrens systems of land registration and its effects on values of rural properties were discussed (Peterson). For more than 20 years thereafter, there are bits and pieces of information available which indicate that economic topics were the focus of discussion of various sessions at the annual meetings of the ASAW. The Agricultural Economics Section was formed in the mid-1920's and was listed as part of the Association of Southern Agricultural Workers program for the 1925 annual meeting. Peterson (p. 40) provides a complete listing of the program of the Agricultural Economics Section for the 1926 annual meeting of the ASAW. It is as follows and with little or no modification, most would be appropriate topics for discussion at recent or even the current annual meetings:

1. Adjustment of Agricultural Production to Market Requirements in the South,
2. Future of Cooperative Marketing,
3. Problems of Rural Taxation,
4. Development of Economic Programs in Farm Communities of a State,
5. Information — A Basis of Economic Advantages to Farming,

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Scientific Article No. A-3771 and Contribution No. 6748 of the Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station.

6. Strong and Weak Points in Rural Economics and Social Research in the South, Past and Present, and
7. Conference on Research in Rural Sociology (panel discussion in rural sociology research).

Rural sociology became part of the Agricultural Economics Section in 1933 and the name was changed to the Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Section. In 1937, the Marketing Section was formed by agricultural economists and others interested in the regulatory aspects of marketing. The Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Section and the Marketing Section remained active sections of the ASAW until the formation of the SAEA in 1968.

FORMATION OF THE SOUTHERN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION

The SAEA was formed at the 1968 annual meeting of the ASAW held in Lexington, Kentucky. At a joint meeting of the Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Section and the Marketing Section, the constitution of the Association was adopted and the Marketing and Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Sections of the Association of Southern Agricultural Workers were disbanded. The first meeting as a Southern Agricultural Economics Association was held in February 1969 in Mobile, Alabama in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Association of Southern Agricultural Workers. Since then, SAEA has continued to meet with ASAW and SAAS.

There were 519 charter members of the SAEA.[1] Charter members came from 33 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and three foreign countries. Eighteen of the 33 states were outside of the southern region. The residence of about 9 percent of the charter members was outside of the southern region.[2] However, some caution needs to be exercised in interpreting these figures because some of the charter members outside of the southern region were individuals on leave and individuals pursuing graduate studies outside the southern region at the time the charter membership was being formed who returned to institutions and agencies in the southern region shortly thereafter. If these were also included in the southern region, the proportion of charter members from the southern region would have been even higher.

Article II of the Constitution of the SAEA specified the purposes and objectives of the Association and provided insights about the needs for a southern association and some justification of why it should exist. Quoting Article II, "The Purpose and Objectives of the SAEA shall be to: foster the study and understanding of agricultural economics and its implications to problems in the Southern United States; promote unity and effectiveness of effort among all concerned with those problems; promote improvement in the professional competence and standards of members; cooperate with other organizations and institutions engaged in similar or related activities, and increase the contribution of agricultural economic to human welfare". Article V provided for meetings of the SAEA and Article VI provided for publication of a journal. Both of these latter articles provided vehicles for the Association to fulfill its purposes and objectives.

The importance of a journal to the Association is highlighted by the resolution passed unanimously by the Association at its second annual meeting in 1970.[3] The resolution expressed thanks to the Farm Foundation for its support and continuing interest in improving the agricultural economics publication media in the South. The resolution stressed the shortage of suitable outlets for publication of research results and for intercommunication among readers of the profession and emphasized establishment of the SAEA as an opportunity to broaden the availability of professional publication media.

In the remainder of this address focus will be on our track record to date, the present status of the Association, and on some potential challenges for SAEA in the future.

STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION

The number of members of SAEA has varied among the years since formation of the Association. Since 1980, the membership has been increasing. In 1983, there were 898 non-institutional members, 73 percent greater than the charter membership. The proportion of non-institutional members from outside the southern region increased from about 9 percent for the charter membership to 17 percent in 1983. Clearly the Association is attracting membership outside of the southern region. Also, in 1983 there were 163 institutional subscribers, and a total membership to 1,061.

The Association seems to have a respectable track record in fulfilling its purposes and objectives as spelled out in the constitution of the

[1] The names and state of residence of all charter members are presented on pages 169-172 of the December 1969 issue of the *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics*.

[2] The District of Columbia and Maryland were considered in the southern region.

[3] The resolution is presented on page 173 of the December 1969 issue of the *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics*.

Association; especially in fostering the understanding of agricultural economics and its application to problems in the Southern United States and in improvement in the professional competence of members. The Association through its annual meetings and through the *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics* (*SJAE*) and SAEA Newsletter has provided opportunities for members to increase their understanding and competence. It seems this is about all one should expect of any professional association. Whether the understanding and competence of members actually increased may be indicative of how effective the Association was in meeting its purposes and objectives, but it is also something for which the Association cannot be held totally accountable.

As one scrutinizes the program for the invited paper sessions during the past several years and also during the 50's and 60's, one cannot help but be impressed that the sessions dealt with critical issues in agricultural economics concerning agriculture and resource use in the Southern United States. Timely issues have been addressed and they have been important to research, extension, and teaching. Furthermore, at the annual meetings the invited paper sessions are complemented by selected paper sessions and this year by selected symposia. Both the symposia and selected papers focus on problems and issues that professionals who submit papers and symposia formats feel are timely and important. What is presented in the selected papers and symposia sessions depends on the membership and others who submit materials for presentation. This is a clear indication of the Association being responsive to its members needs and providing for its members a vehicle for the exchange of ideas. Responses to the call for presentation in the selected paper and symposia sessions and participation in these sessions at the Association's annual meeting suggest that the Association is fulfilling its purposes and objectives.

Over the years, emphasis on economic problems of southern agriculture has been the prominent characteristic of the *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics*, its predecessor the proceedings issues of the Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Sections of the ASAW, and the abstracts of presentations in Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Section and Marketing Section appearing in the proceedings of the ASAW annual meetings during the late 40's and the 50's. Nearly all of the abstracts published in ASAW proceedings in the 50's and late 40's dealt with production, marketing, policy, and rural development issues in the South. Considerable emphasis was on the lag in development of the South and the opportunities for the South to achieve development levels comparable with other regions of the United States.

In more recent issues of the *SJAE*, emphasis on problems in the Southern United States may not be as great as in the proceedings issues of earlier years, but a large proportion of the articles still have a southern orientation. In articles dealing with national or international issues, policy implications tend to be oriented to agriculture, resource use, or some market or economy of the southern region. Other articles deal with agricultural and economic problems in a southern state. Even papers which deal with methods tend to use a "southern example" for illustrative purposes. I hesitated to perform a formal statistical analysis of the "southern orientation" of articles published in *SJAE* because of the potential of generating large volumes of meaningless statistics that would be of little interest.

The *SJAE* has been sensitive to the needs of its members both in as an outlet for publication and in terms of demands of its readers. Because of the heterogeneity of interests of members of the Association, it is not possible to satisfy the needs and requests of all. A recent analysis by Broder and Ziemer suggests that *SJAE* is sensitive to the needs of agricultural economists and is servicing them fairly well. Based on responses from 246 agricultural economists at land grant universities, the *SJAE* ranked first among regional agricultural economics journals in personal usefulness, subscriptions, papers submitted, and participation in the editorial and review processes. *SJAE* also ranked as the second most improved journal among the 25 journals used by agricultural economics faculties at land grant universities.

A major change is being made in the *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics* in response to needs of the membership. Beginning with the July 1984 issue, the *SJAE* will be publishing refereed microcomputer software articles. The initiative for this change came with the appointment by SAEA President Calvin Berry and approval by the Executive Council of an ad hoc committee at the 1983 meeting. This committee had the responsibility of studying all aspects of manuscript review and publication of the *SJAE*. The ad hoc committee perceived a need for microcomputer software information from the readership and a need for a publication outlet for those in the profession working on the development of microcomputer software. The ad hoc committee and Executive Council moved ahead on this as rapidly as possible and a microcomputer software committee was appointed to establish rules, guidelines, and procedures for submission and evaluation of microcomputer software articles. With the approval of the Microcomputer Software Committee and the Editorial Council, one

microcomputer software article is included in this issue. The publication of the microcomputer software articles is supportive of the purposes and objectives of the Association.

A final point regarding the state of the Association is that the Association is in a sound financial situation. Financial status of SAEA has stabilized and revenues are currently adequate for providing the present level of services. High levels of inflation or provision of more or higher cost services to the membership could alter the financial situation and require greater revenues for operation of the Association.

FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR SAEA

One of the most critical challenges that SAEA faces in the future is that of continuing to provide an effective media of communication among the membership through publication of the *SJAE* and the SAEA Newsletter and through the annual meetings or other special meetings. Effort will continuously need to be directed toward improving the quality and usefulness of the sessions at the annual meetings. Also, there will be a continuous need to devote attention to increasing the usefulness and the stature of *SJAE*. Emphasis on applications is one of the attributes that contributes to usefulness of *SJAE*. A special effort needs to be made to assure that *SJAE* continues being useful to members involved in teaching, research, and extension.

To foster study and understanding of agricultural economics and its applications to problems in the Southern United States is one of the objectives of the Association. As an Association, we do little to foster the study and understanding of agricultural economics for our undergraduates. Even our national association has done little for undergraduates in agricultural economics. Students in southern universities are key participants in the Student Section of the American Agricultural Economics Association. Establishing a student section in the SAEA is a challenging and rewarding opportunity which we cannot afford to overlook. Most of the annual meetings of the Association would be very accessible to undergraduate students and with some encouragement from faculty, a high participation rate could be expected. I am confident that undergraduates would quickly develop a high quality program of their own to complement their participation in the session at the Association's annual meeting.

Impacts that agricultural economists have on agricultural, food, resource, and economic policies seem rather modest and diminishing over time. Some of our members are frequently called upon for policy advice at federal and state levels. Each year some of the invited papers and selected papers at our annual meeting deal with important food, agricultural, resource, and economic policy considerations. We communicate among ourselves but we are not the ones who formulate these policies. Some serious consideration needs to be given to fostering the understanding of agricultural economics and its application to those who mold and shape our agricultural, food, resource, and economic policies. The Association may be overlooking an opportunity by not holding workshops for congressional aids, policy developers and lobbyists of farm organizations, and federal and state officials concerned with food, agricultural, resource, and economic policies. Such workshops could be held in conjunction with our annual meeting, before or after, and could draw upon agricultural economists participating in the annual meeting to conduct workshops. Some of those participating in the workshops might be interested in attending the sessions of the annual meetings. With the new food and agricultural legislation that will be forthcoming during the next couple of years, interest in this type of activity would be exceptionally high. If done well, this is a venture that would have a high pay off for a long time to come.

To promote improvement in the professional competence and standards of members is an objective of SAEA which deserves more attention than the Association has given it. The annual meetings and the *SJAE* and SAEA Newsletter contribute to this objective but do not exhaust the potential. The Association needs to consider sponsoring refresher courses and short courses for its members engaged in research, teaching, and extension. Such courses have finally been initiated at the national level but there is no reason why they could not be conducted as effectively at the regional level. Potential topics useful to the membership exceed the number that can be handled at the national level. Some of these courses could deal with topics and issues unique to the Southern United States.

The Association has done little in terms of facilitating the meetings of regional research, teaching, and extension committees. There are probably several in the audience who will be meeting informally at this annual meeting as a regional committee or a sub-committee of a regional committee. You may very well forgo some sessions to participate in your committee meeting. Your meeting is in conflict with the sessions of the annual meeting of the Association. Consideration should be given to ways in which the Association can facilitate the meetings of regional and other committees of its membership. These kinds of meetings could be planned for in the program of the annual meeting. It would seem that such meetings could be scheduled before, after, or among the sessions of the annual meetings of the Association and made an official part of the annual meeting.

Finally, with the fringe benefits at universities and other institutions continually being eroded, the Association needs to assess its future role in facilitating the provision of supplemental fringe benefits to its membership. In particular the Association could easily be the "group" for special and selected health insurances such as disability, cancer, dental, and optical.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The SAEA has an interesting history. Since formation of the Agricultural Economics Section in the mid-1920's, organizationally, the professional meetings of southern agricultural economists have been affiliated with the ASAW. The SAEA was formed in 1968 and since then the Association has developed into a highly respected professional association. The Association has lived up to its purpose and objectives. The Association has performed and delivered better on some objectives than others. The Association has provided highly useful and meaningful services through its annual meetings, journal, and newsletter. The Association faces a bright and challenging future. The key to the Association's continued success is the provision of relevant and useful services to its membership. As long as the Association continues doing this, what better justification is needed for its existence?

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