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Agrekon

VOL. 11 No. 1

JANUARY 1972

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Articles in the field of agricultural economics, suitable for publication in the journal, will be welcomed.

Articles should have a maximum length of 10 folio pages (including tables, graphs, etc.), typed in double spacing. Contributions, in the language preferred by the writer, should be submitted in triplicate to the Editor, c/o Department of Agricultural Economics and Marketing, Pretoria, and should reach him at least one month prior to date of publication.

The Journal is obtainable from the distributors: "AGREKON", Private Bag X144, Pretoria.

The price is 25 cents per copy or R1 per annum, post free.

The dates of publication are January, April, July and October.

"AGREKON" is also published in Afrikaans.

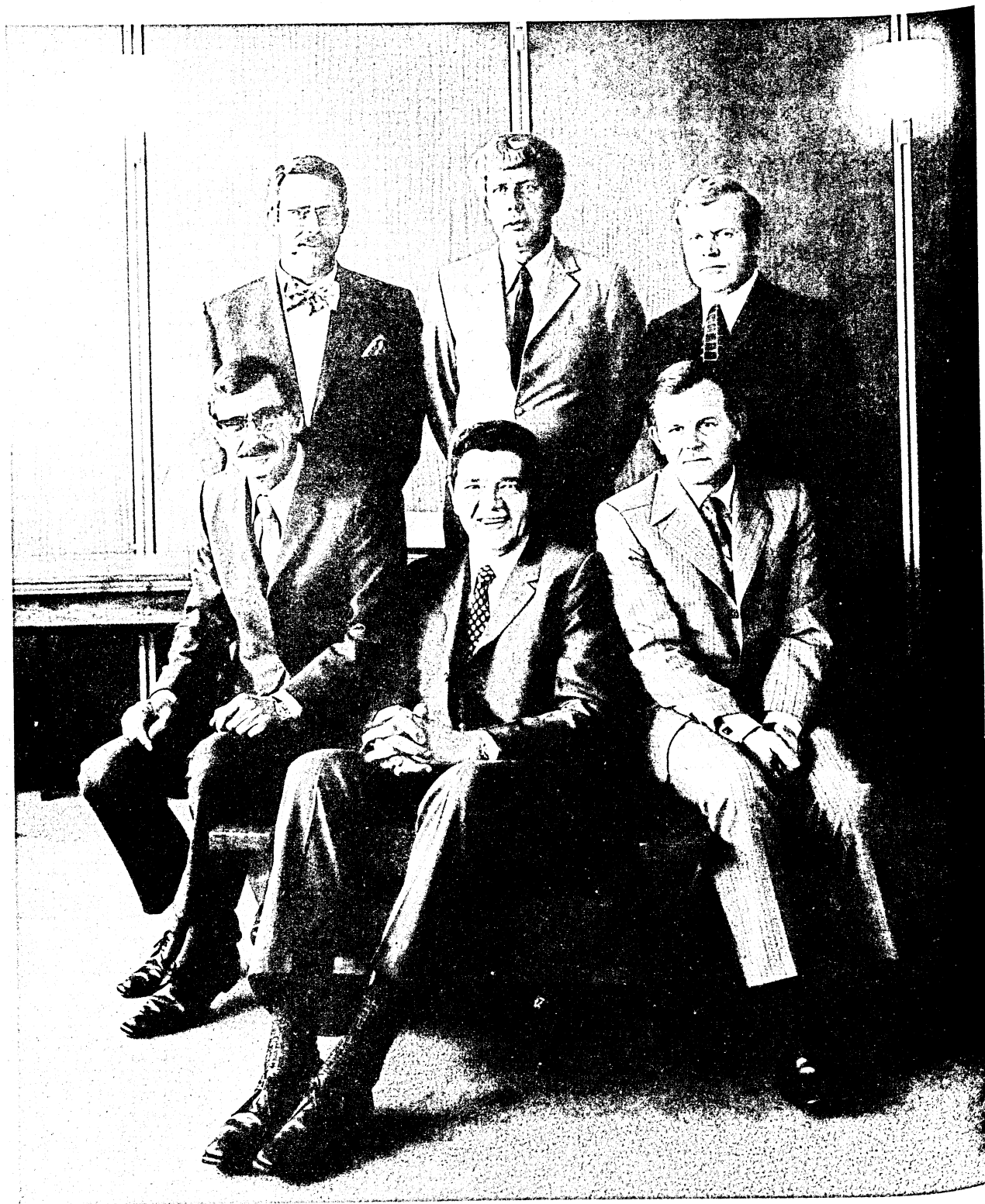
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1971



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Managing agricultural extension

by

C.A. MURRAY

Extension is of course one of the three very important complementary instruments available to any government for the development of its agricultural industry. The other two are the credit and price ones to which I will refer briefly at a later stage.

The extension service I intend dealing with is the one usually provided by government through its department or ministry of agriculture. Apart from the advisory and other services provided by it to the farmers, it should also be responsible for co-ordinating with its own the very necessary and extensive advisory services provided by the private sector, including the co-operatives and quasi-government organisations. This co-ordination should be done in such a manner that the various efforts will be complementary and thus unnecessary duplication and overlapping reduced to a minimum.

If an extension service is to be effective - in other words successful - it must be dynamic, inspired and adequate. It must have the necessary research and specialist support and it must work with and through the people concerned. These requirements are to me a *sine qua non* for success and I would like to elaborate on them very briefly.

The service must be dynamic. There is no room in an extension service for complacency and for those who spend most of their time in an office. Even senior officers, at all levels, must spend not less than 50% of their time out in the country guiding and inspiring not only their own staff but also farmers at committee, group and other levels. Extension workers must be given an absolute minimum of administrative and regulatory work and spend no more than 20% of their time in an office. There must always be a sense of urgency at getting things done. The entire approach should be dynamic, aggressive.

The service must be inspired. Extension workers must not only like the work but they must also believe in what they are doing otherwise they will not be successful. They must have the spirit of the missionary. They must be crusaders. They must get the inspiration (not frustration or procrastination!) in the first instance from the top and secondly from the satisfaction derived from the creative work they do.

The service must be adequate. My experience in Southern Africa has been that one field officer working among too large a number of farmers can achieve little more than try and catch the proverbial fly in a dark room. Among our more sophisticated farmers one extension worker cannot

handle effectively more than 100 to 120 farmers. Among our less sophisticated ones whose holdings are very small and close together, the number can be as high as 300.

When I mentioned these figures on another occasion I was immediately told that it would never be possible to find sufficient professionally qualified staff. The staff problem I believe can be overcome without much difficulty. To be constructive I offer the following suggestions:

- (a) We must make better use of existing staff.
- (b) There must be an improvement in salaries for professional and technical men in government service.
- (c) The private sector itself must have trained more officers to meet its own requirements rather than take them in large numbers from government departments.
- (d) We must eradicate the idea that only four, five or six-year graduates can do good extension work. What is of first importance in an extension worker is the "man". He must be of good personality and must possess qualities of leadership, organising ability and the ability to get on with others. He must be fond of hard work and believe in the cause he is serving. As a "man" he must be above average.

It has been my experience that good young men (who possess the characteristics just mentioned) with a 3-year degree in agriculture or pure science or a 2-year diploma in agriculture, make excellent extension workers. We should not hesitate, therefore, while we cannot get sufficient professional staff with the necessary human qualities, to use carefully selected human material from among these categories of men and, if we cannot get a sufficient number of these men, use one year diploma men or even outstanding young men with good farming experience only, provided we give them in-service training according to their needs and the necessary supervision and guidance.

I would like to say here that I believe it is essential to give all extension workers in-service training via short (1-14 day) courses according to their individual needs in subject matter and methodology. This training must be organised and done at regional level by specialist training officers attached to the regions.

It is also my experience that extension workers, at all levels, irrespective of their qualifications

and experience, must get close and constant supervision, assistance, guidance and encouragement from their immediate superiors.

The service must have the necessary research and specialist support. The responsibilities of the research worker to the extension man are clear. He must supply him with new and better information as it becomes available and with answers to his problems. This information should be passed on via the subject matter specialist. He should, reasonably frequently, get out among the farmers to see for himself what is going on, be shown the problems by the field staff and even assist with their identification.

The subject matter specialist has an increasingly important role to play among our more sophisticated farmers. He must serve full time with the extension service. He should be au fait with what is going on in his field of work in his area. He must all along take the initiative and not sit and wait for calls for assistance from field staff or farmers. His most important duty is to give in-service training in his subject to all extension staff in his area. He should assist them with problem cases and bring back to the research workers problems for investigation.

I now want to say a few words about one specialist field that we have badly neglected in the past. I refer of course to the management one. A lot of the information passed on to farmers in the past by extension staff has not been economically sound. Farmers have been given hardly any assistance and guidance in the very important field of financial planning and management of their affairs - their major weakness. In other words, we have had our priorities wrong. This weakness must be remedied without delay - in the first instance by stationing at each region a sufficient number of experienced agricultural economists and they must be attached to the extension service.

At this point I would also like to put forward a plea for a complete change of approach by our extension services. For too long have we had the "soil conservation" approach. This horse is now dead. We have often and over and over told farmers that "conservation farming pays". We have largely failed. Let our approach be a "profitable production" one; or let us say "conservation through profitable farming". Once a farmer makes money, soil conservation problems disappear. This will mean that our extension services must be "management" orientated and this must be done without delay. I am pleased to say this is happening in Rhodesia. May I ask that all of us here, wherever we come from, give dynamic and aggressive support for the reorientation of approach I have suggested.

Lastly I would like to emphasize that the extension service must work with, and through the people concerned. With modesty I would like to say that I believe in Rhodesia we have, for our conditions, the ideal organisation for this purpose. We have the Country divided into Intensive Conservation Areas. Each area consists of approxi-

mately 100 farmers. The farmers of each area annually elect a committee responsible for sound land use in their area. The committees are responsible to an independent Natural Resources Board.

To assist the committee the Department of Conservation and Extension attach an experienced extension officer to each committee. He is technically and administratively responsible to his Department but works very closely with and through the committee which look upon him as their officer to assist them and their farmers in their area. Similarly, the link is such that the officer feels that the committee is his committee aiding him to assist his community of farmers.

To summarise again, for success an extension service must be dynamic, inspired and adequate. It must have the necessary research and specialist support and it must work with and through the people concerned.

I would now like to say a few words about the second important agricultural instrument viz the credit one, which is as essential as the educational one for the development of agriculture. I am sure we all appreciate that it does not make sense to give a farmer sound technical advice if he cannot obtain the necessary finance to purchase the means of production to implement the advice given. But we know that most of our farmers are unfortunately not able to apply sound financial planning and management to their enterprises, which is perhaps the main reason why they are not successful and find themselves in serious financial difficulty. They unfortunately just do not appreciate the importance of financial management, and also intensely dislike maintaining simple records and submitting them monthly. These are the two principal reasons why so few are interested in participating in, or making use of, farm management advisory services. It seems to me that the easy way of minimising or overcoming this resistance is for the major lending organisations to make the granting of credit to certain farmers conditional upon their participating in a farm management advisory service and, when necessary, implementing the advice given. For this service, guided and co-ordinated at government and organised farming levels, and which could be provided at a cost of from \$70 to \$100 per annum, the farmer should, I believe, pay and the charge could be considered as part of his loan.

Here again we will have the problem of getting the necessary professional staff to operate these services. A solution to this problem is also possible. Unfortunately time does not allow me to give you details of how to overcome it.

To repeat myself, in so far as credit is concerned, I can think of no better way of raising the profitability of our individual farming enterprises than by providing those farmers in need of it with supervised credit, in close co-operation with the extension worker. Those not in need of supervised credit should nevertheless be encouraged in every possible way to participate in a farm management advisory service. There is no doubt that such participation will increase their profitability substantially.

Dealing lastly, and very briefly, with the price instrument, I am sure we all accept that it is of very great importance. I believe it is highly essential, for a variety of good reasons that the farmer, and I refer here to the average farmer whom I look upon as reasonably efficient, should have security and prices at levels which will enable him to farm his land well and enjoy the good things of life at more or less the same level as his urban counterpart. There are no more powerful incentives or aids to the farmer to learn and practice good, permanent and profitable farming than reasonable prices for his products.

To summarise, I would like to say that there is no magically easy and short cut way of getting

farmers to adopt worthwhile findings of research and develop an agricultural industry on sound lines. Outstanding research services by themselves will not have much effect. Neither will lavish extension services. Credit by itself, even with supervision in certain cases, will not achieve much - neither will reasonable prices by themselves.

What we require is the determined, wise, co-ordinated and dynamic use of the three important instruments of extension, credit and prices along the lines suggested. Should this be done I can see nothing but success ahead for our farmers and the agricultural industry.