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AN ANALYSIS OF EXTENSION NEEDS FOR AGRICULTURAL ECONOMISTS

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Whether we are to discuss Extension as an administered agency or as a type of work in which agricultural economists engage themselves must be clarified first. If the choice is to feature the needs from an administrative point of view, probably the real issues would be missed. Therefore, the choice must be meeting the agricultural needs for economics through Extension. There is something to say about Extension needs, however, from the administrative viewpoint, and I do plan to put an oar on that side of the question as well.

The major premise of this paper is that the demand for extension economists in the foreseeable future is assured, provided the economic needs of agriculture - or perhaps we should say in the rural sector - are understood and researched by agricultural economists. The product of such efforts and its pertinence to the structure of problems is the critical issue. If agricultural economists feel that the administration of Extension and its view of the need for agricultural economics is the issue, then the potential of an impasse exists.

Being reasonable and understanding persons, as we believe we are, the matter of objectively analyzing the two most influential factors underlying the entire field of concern is now in order. The two influential concerns are: (1) the definition of an extension economist and (2) the trends of extension. Fortunately, the required information for an overall analysis is available.

DEFINITION OF THE EXTENSION ECONOMISTS

If agricultural economics is what agricultural economists do, then extension economists do what is agricultural economics [12]. The definition, however, cannot be left there. Since 1960, many pages of the Journal of Farm Economics (later identified as the American Journal of Agricultural Economics) have been addressed to the subject of "what is agricultural economics?" Bressler says that agricultural economics is a field without its own discipline but instead it is a problem-oriented field concerned with economic matters [7]. Breimyer accepts the viewpoint that agricultural economics is a heterogeneous assemblage of subject matter and mission, but he questions Kelso's dual goal that agricultural economics should be a "science and a handmaiden of policy" [6, 8].

It would be inappropriate, at this moment, to enter the argument of whether agricultural economics is or can become a science or whether its true goal is to be a handmaiden of policy. It is clear that the term "heterogeneous assemblage of subject matter" is appropriate. Perhaps, in the past, a lariat has been thrown around too many subject matter areas with economic implications and, once done, the area is institutionalized and given a heading.

What needs should be analyzed? Bressler lists twelve subfields that make up the field called agricultural economics [7]. The Handbook of the American Farm Economic Association lists seventeen subject matter categories in which agricultural economists may submit research papers for Association awards [1]. Breimyer proposes to reduce agricultural economics into three categories by identifying its output as products: (a) management counsel to the firm, (b) guidance to the making of public policy, and (c) assistance in analytical methods to other disciplines [6].

The analysis so far suggests that agricultural economists are concerned with a wide range of subject matter areas, especially if one takes the seventeen categories as the subject matter base. It is true, I believe, that the agricultural economist is a self-professed professional, applying economics to agriculture.

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Breimyer deplores the fact that we do not have a formal canon of ethics as would be found in law, medicine, or the other professions.

A basic fact about the extension specialist, which must not be overlooked, is that the specialist cannot be any better than the quality of subject matter he dispenses educationally. Further, we must recognize that his subject matter sustenance comes from applied research. Clearly, then, his role is that of interpreting the applied research results in real life situations as found on the farm, in the community, in the marketing firm, and in policymaking actions.

With all the gusto of a fresh spring breeze, Bishop in his presidential address of 1967, securely nails down the point that rural social scientists have not perceived the significance of the growing urbanization of rural America [3]. He bemoans the separation of problems into rural and urban for analysis, and places emphasis on the point that the continued separatism of rural and urban in an increasingly urbanized rural America will diminish the effectiveness of agricultural economists. He appeals to us to direct our attention to location of economic activity and scale of community organizations, and to the interrelationships between farms and communities. I agree with Bishop, but caution that agricultural economists will need to be aware of the field of rural sociology. Some problems will arise in defining the line that separates the two fields.

From reading the Journal of Farm Economics and extrapolating the future from it, one must conclude that the intellectual environment of the field of agricultural economics is a bit cloudy at the moment. According to Schultz some of the factors which cloud the future include an overemphasis on the material, a neglect of attention to the value productivity of human agents, a lack of concern for the welfare of farm people, the political obsolescene of government institutions dealing with agricultural affairs, and a bad press for agriculture [12]. Ruttan seems to possess a considerable insight into the field of production economics as found in his 1967 journal article [11]. He is encouraging. He indicates that students are turning to the issues found in applied economics; to economic policy matters, such as agricultural economics development; resource economics; and to economics found in the public services, such as transportation, education, health, and recreation. If these topics were matched with the concerns expressed by Bishop, we would find much common ground [3]. With the handholds provided by Ruttan, some of the cloudiness begins to clear up.

Where does this leave us with the extension economist's position? The discussion among extension economists at the annual meeting in 1966 brought out several conclusions as they see themselves; for example, "We in extension must not get so busy with the best operators that we are open to criticism for overlooking a large and needy clientele" [5]. This conclusion resulted from a work group discussing farm management topics. A similar discussion group on marketing concluded that it should not separate production from marketing; they concluded further that the extension specialist must become better acquainted with the farm research done by commerical farms.

The discussions were concerned with the implications of change in agriculture for agricultural economics extension programs. These discussions recognized that industry more and more is using the extension education approach as a sales and service technique. Also, noted, and correctly so, was the trend that more agencies and most educational institutions are replicating the extension approach by offering services of all types to the same clientele groups now served by the extension economists [5, pp. 1593-1594].

Their discussion on regional plans of work with joint employment of specialists is an interesting concept which needs experience. The concept of a cooperative corporation financed by several universities to employ and supervise regional specialists in a new idea, but an unlikely occurrence unless procedures can be worked out wherein the controls on such a corporation are well within the university administrative mechanism.

Others have something to say about the extension economist's role. Reick says that extension economists should coordinate their subject matter with other disciplines for solving problems requiring an interdisciplinary approach [10]. Wyckoff makes a strong plea for joint appointments between extension and research [14].

Beer believes that farm management extension educational programs should be concerned less with providing answers and much more with providing understanding of the factors involved in reaching answers [2].

One learns at this point, in the analysis, that a wide variety of beliefs prevail concerning the extension economist position, and these exist in addition to the role confusion stemming from his proper subject matter paternity. Blalock adds to the problem by pointing out that the services of the specialist are dependent upon invitation by county agents, which he finds is an effective sanction over the kind of work done by the specialist [4]. At the same time, the specialist has relatively no control over the county program or the amount of county resources to be

allocated as his specialty. Personal experience tells me the specialist with a saleable commodity is always asking for additional assistance. This latter point, from an administrative point of view, is the more important.

Obviously, there are many complexities with which a specialist must work, but the extension specialist position is without parallel in other administrative systems of higher education, industry, or government. So-called specialists in other administrative systems, contrary to the extension position, are without the freedom to advise; they are under direct control of more narrowly defined administrative policy. And most important, they are without the same kind of backing by a research unit.

From my experience, the most telling criticism of the extension economist position is the failure by departments of agricultural economics to train men to be extension economists. Departments place stress upon teaching the methodology of research but not upon the methodology of disseminating its research results in practical uses. Too often, the department assumes that a good personality is the prime requisite for its extension specialist. Too frequently, the department chairman looks over the field of county agents, when a vacancy occurs, and selects one he feels has the potential of an extension economist. His associates in the department do assist in training him and he gleans enough principles to talk like an agricultural economist. As I read the Journal of Farm Economics, he is not, because he is not represented in the table of contents. This weakness really must be corrected if the extension economist is to take his place in a world of technology. But it means also that the department, in addition to specializing in the methodology of research, will need to concentrate on the methodology of extending its knowledge.

It is not my intention to alienate the extension specialist with a county agent background. Such a background is a great asset, provided he is also trained to be an agricultural economist.

Another weakness in the extension economist's position is the shift occuring in the research output of the departments. The main strength of the extension economist, as previously noted, is the backstopping of information resulting from applied research. Except for his knowledge of economic principles, upon which he must rely in too many instances to resolve problem situations, he has to depend upon his own observations, upon mimeographed progress reports, and unpublished studies. These are good, but he needs more - much more. Fortunately, in the last several years, the Journal of Farm Economics is providing more such assistance than it did in the period 1960-65.

In addition to these sources, however, department chairmen and their colleagues must, if they wish the extension economist's position to flourish, consciously provide more applied research-based information taken from studies on relevant problems. The real uniqueness of the extension specialist, to repeat my self-ad nauseam, is the power of applied research. Once he has to depend upon commercial research, on his own observations, or on the extension director, his role is lost. His prospects for a future will disappear.

THE TRENDS OF EXTENSION

The second factor of importance to the topic is found in the trends of Extension. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 established an extension service to insure that pertinent information of agriculture, home economics, and related subject matter areas was taken to the people of the United States. It locked the Extension Service into the land-grant college system to insure that the disseminated information was practical. As it turned out, "practical" meant information generated out of research into the problems experienced by rural people on farms. The oft-heralded triangular relationship between research, extension, and lay leadership remains today as an unchallenged formula for effective impact on economic systems. The basic model is as good today as it was half a century ago.

It is one of America's greatest and most saleable contributions to the world, which has served to dull the validity of geometry of the Malthus theory of population growth in relation to sustenance.

Unfortunately, a John Dewey has not emerged to capture the agricultural extension concepts and to arrange them into a coordinated body of theory. Instead, thousands of Seaman Knapps throughout the United States are more than willing to demonstrate the application of scientific knowledge to practical situations.

It may come as a surprise to the agricultural community of land-grant universities to learn that the Cooperative Extension Service is not the only means of carrying out or financing extended educational activity. True, if this occurs, there would be some gnashing of teeth, but that would be short lived and might cause some healthy readjustments by all concerned.

There is a widespread belief in the agricultural community of the land-grant system that CES is abandoning agriculture for greener pastures. It is true only to the extent that CES does not feature agriculture as the sole subject to teach as it once did. It is true also that colleges of agriculture have not developed the competence needed to backstop the broad

range of rural community problem-solving needs, which now are considered as appropriate concern for CES by the community leaders and by the leadership of CES.

Cause and effect analysis is often difficult. Some of the unhappiness found in the colleges of agriculture with CES, in a way, is a natural result of the sequence of events occurring over the past decade and a half. Let's look at some of the general forces affecting change, because all of them have had some influence on the present direction of Cooperative Extension. Before we do, we must recognize the most current study of Cooperative Extension, which was made by a joint USDA-NASULGC Committee [13]. It represents the embodiment of the direction Cooperative Extension has been going. The report points out that Cooperative Extension should center its concern on (a) the American community, (b) balanced economic growth, (c) a troubled society, and (d) international peace and economic development.

Let us proceed to analyze the cause and effect factors over the last decade and a half. In the first instance, without indicating any priority of importance, experiment stations have been under great pressure to shift their research programs in the direction of basic research. In doing so, concern with applied research problems has been minimized as such work is of limited value to the professional status-seeking researcher. I observed, firsthand, the applied researcher in the animal sciences scrambling for discipline identification and reorientation of his research projects to earn grants from the National Science Foundation, National Institute of Health, and the Atomic Energy Commission.

Another contributing factor was the farmers after they recognized the importance of scientific knowledge to their business operations. They bypassed the generalist, called the county agent, and oftentimes the specialist, and went directly to the researcher for his information. As one can easily deduce, such activity would cause county agents to move quickly to other problems demanding their competency.

Still another factor was the huge success of applied agricultural technology. It resulted in the number of farmers declining substantially, with the result that influence with the ballot declined similarily, and extension workers observed their programs needed to be changed to meet the shifting base of power.

Another factor we must not overlook was the failure of experiment stations and extension services in assisting farm families to adjust as they were squeezed out of farming as the primary income source by scale economics. The failure has been equally great in aiding rural communities to adapt to the onrush of urbanization. The time is late, but not too late to correct these oversights.

Some consequences which can be identified and related to the above factors are worthy of recognition: (a) Coordination between research and extension is not as close as it was nor as is presently desirable. My experience dictates that this situation needs to be corrected. Improvement does not necessarily lay in relating research and extension within colleges of agriculture but also within the general university community. (b) While university presidents express themselves enthusiastically about the needs for off-campus type educational activity, the system of faculty rewards still lies primarily in the areas of scientific research and "scholarship" activities. The point can be reinforced by reviewing the table of contents of any professional journal; research methodology is legitimate - extension methodology is not. This makes it particularly difficult for departmental leaders to steer their principal faculty or good students into extension work. (c) Over the years, colleges of agriculture have developed large departments of animal husbandry and agronomy, and only a few have kept pace with large departments of agricultural economics. Thus, the extension framework was oriented primarily toward production. Now the call is for added emphasis in the social sciences. (d) Other types of extension activities developed within the universities have served as a challenge to Cooperative Extension and, thus, have caused it to adjust away from the strict agriculture orientation; for example, Title I - Community Service and Continuing Education of the Higher Education Act of 1965, the State Technical Services Act of 1965, Titles VIII and IX in the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1966, the massive Regional Medical Program, the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, and the comprehensive legislation found in various programs of Health, Education, and Welfare, and others pending. Cooperative Extension was forced to shift, and it did. (e) The effort by presidents of land-grant universities to consolidate the extension services into one common mold creating either a vice-presidency or a deanship is also a development which must not be overlooked. Such consolidation has occurred in twenty-one states, and each year several more are added. The long-time effect of this move will materially influence the dominant position colleges of agriculture have had on CES.

Several years ago the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges established "The Council on Extension." The intent in establishing the Council was to provide a mechanism whereby all extension activities could be brought together and discussed at the annual meeting of the association. There are problems here, but eventually it will become the discussion center for extension-type activities by the association.

Whether the above factors and consequences are causes or effects is immaterial. Neither are they criticisms to be debated as to "whose fault was it." They may have been the logical consequences of the external forces dominant in our time. The consequences have been seen by some university leaders as featuring an untenable dichotomy of rural and urban. Bishop, Ruttan, myself, and others have expressed these concerns with the hopeful expectation that agricultural economists would give more attention to the community problems in the countryside [3, 11, 9].

A fresh look is upon the land with the report of the joint USDA-NASULGC Study Committee on Cooperative Extension [13]. In addition to the priority problem, as previously listed, this report sets forth four program categories for major emphasis on the future; namely, agriculture and related industries, social and economic development, quality of living, and international extension. The report goes into some detail as to the manner in which the agricultural aspects of the total problem could be handled by Cooperative Extension. It emphasizes the need for marketing, economics and business management, and de-emphasizes the need for husbandry and production information. It stresses broad scale educational effort for assisting low income farmers, especially improvement of the quality of living. International extension is an important aspect of the report and one in which extension, in general, has failed to find a method of surrounding the need.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the title of this paper, as given, emphasized analysis, my effort has been aimed at bringing out factors of relevance as contrasted with concentrating on recommendations. My analysis of the factors runs something like this: (1) There is a great need for specialists trained in extending agricultural economics. In a world where specialization has become the rule, emphasis on training of such specialists is paramount. (2) Departments of Agricultural Economics could strengthen their impact to a marked degree by encouraging their research and teaching faculties to become more involved in the development and marketing problems of the rural community. This means economic treatment of the broad issues and community structures so important in these days. (3) There are many positive signs in agricultural economics. The trend in agricultural and the universities, in general, to recognize an increasing need for applied research information, an increasing tendency to consider extension needs in central decisionmaking, and recognition by university presidents of Extension as an academic function should expedite matters of interest to extension of agricultural economics. (4) Extension has yet to find the way for meeting the challenge of the international extension dimension.

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