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SOME EXTENSION SERVICE FUNCTIONS IN ECONOMIC,
STATISTICAL AND MARKETING INFORMATION

by

L. R. Breithaupt
Oregon State College

Except in respect to farm management demonstration work, it was not until after World War I that serious attention was given to the development of extension project work in agricultural economics. Under the impact of the post-war agricultural depression, attention then was focused upon production and marketing adjustment problems. Many state extension services set up agricultural economics projects and employed specialists in marketing and general agricultural economics to increase such cooperative extension activities.

Oregon's agricultural economics extension project was approved in July 1922. During the first 4 years, major attention was given to marketing problems, particularly to cooperative marketing. In 1926, the work was broadened for the purpose of increasing extension work throughout the state, particularly in outlook information, agricultural statistics, and market reporting. What follows in this paper is based largely upon my experience and observation during the twenty years this economic information work has been under way. In the meantime, the cooperative extension project in marketing has been carried forward continuously.

In this paper we are dealing with types of agricultural information that must be handled on a current basis, subject to continual review owing to changes that are occurring constantly in physical, economic and political factors affecting the production and marketing of farm products. There must be a continual process of collecting economic, statistical and marketing information from numerous and widespread sources, within and without the state and the nation; and the analysis, preparation and dissemination of the information must proceed on a broad and timely basis to serve the practical needs of the people.

Nevertheless, I believe that we should hold the first objective in the utilization of current economic information to be the teaching of fundamental economic facts to rural people. Fortunately, the interest of the people in the current situation and the outlook opens the way for introducing much factual material that pertains to the current matter while also being of durable educational value. I realize that there may be those who feel that the market news function, for example, is performed when the people on the land have been told that the market was slightly weaker or slightly stronger today than yesterday on the commodity, and that quotations were so and so. Perhaps the market news function should end with the dissemination of spot market information under some circumstances. In the hands of a qualified extension teacher of agricultural economics and marketing, however, it may become a great opportunity for teaching. And so, I submit to this section of the conference for your consideration, the proposition that a great opportunity for teaching is being lost when ever the market news function is not performed in a manner that combines the teaching of marketing and economics while providing spot market information; and who should be better qualified to do this at the state and county level than the cooperative agricultural extension service?

I would expect fewer to contest this viewpoint as applied to the function of providing economic outlook information for agriculture. Certainly, here we cannot rest with mere assertions amply qualified.

We say that the purpose of outlook information is to assist farm families to judge the future better and aid them in planning their production and marketing business operations.

Certainly we have not performed this function well unless the current outlook material prepared for dissemination in the states and counties is made to serve as a useful vehicle for teaching basic facts that will equip outlook-minded farm people better for reaching sound conclusions in their own minds in the years ahead. Here again, the cooperative agricultural extension service certainly can function effectively. We have had that responsibility for a long time.

Foremost among the basic factual economic subject matter essential in outlook work comes statistics. Statistics of production and supply, and of demand, price, cost and income. The need for reliable statistical material is greater than has ever yet been met. It will be a long time before the needs are met, if ever.

A comprehensive job of outlook extension work requires that more emphasis be placed than ever before by the extension economist upon the utilization of available state, national, and international data; the function of gathering, preparing and publishing supplemental statistics related to the agriculture of his state, counties, and type-of-farming areas.

These functions of the extension service in economic, statistical and marketing information are being performed in variable degree throughout the Nation, but not adequately, even in the State of Oregon. The resources placed at the disposal of extension economists for this type of work have generally been but a minor fraction of the needs. It is time that the economists and the administrators arranged, if possible, for performing these functions much more adequately than ever before.

I believe that this fact will become very evident within the next two or three years as agriculture enters the real post-World War II adjustment period. Even doing our best, the agricultural aftermath of World War II will undoubtedly be hard enough to endure.

In conclusion, I will leave this question for your consideration. What is the outlook for outlook extension work, and for the dissemination of related economic information, including market reports and statistics?