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PLANNING, PUBLIC DECISION MAKING AND
REGIONAL ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

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This paper deals with an on-going project. The project has been designed to: (1) Provide analyses of economic flows with a specified geographic region; (2) project these flows within the area; and (3) consider the consequences of certain large resource use changes on the flows. Certain opportunities of Extension education efforts are discussed.

Setting of the problem:

The single mindedness of traditional Extension education programs has splintered into several focal points. Instead of only being concerned with agricultural production and marketing technology, Extension personnel are becoming increasingly concerned with resource development and use it as it affects all major components of society, not just farmers.

Population pressures, increasing incomes and increased mobility are major reasons providing increased time and ability for people to use resources more intensively and in a greater variety of ways than ever before. The general nature of, and interest in, resource-use problems has seldom been more apparent or widespread. More Extension personnel are asked to serve on planning commissions, tax advisory committees, state and county water boards, and advise irrigation districts than ever before. Old parameters of resource development have given way to new and rapidly evolving interrelationships between farm and non-farm demands for relatively fixed amounts of land, water and air space.

The need for objective data and analysis concerning resources by elected and appointed public officials and planners whose decisions affect local and regional resource development and use appear to follow an exponential function--the more that is known, the more one needs to know about each part of the previous "knowledge whole."

While these adjustments put pressure on land and water resources and the ways in which they are used, they also put pressure on county administrators responsible for allocating budget among a host of county needs and wants. As a direct result of these adjustments and pressures, some California Extension personnel have been involved in studying the economic base and resource development potential of certain California counties. The information collected and presented to county groups has, in many cases, directly provided an overview and outreach from the University that is not available from any other organization or agency in the region.

Selected economic and social data about the study region indicate the relative magnitude of the adjustment pressures. Over the last 50 years, population in the region made up of the five counties has trebled (in one county, population is nearly five times larger); median income in the counties more than doubled from 1950 to 1960; employment and school enrollment likewise almost doubled, while gross value of farm production has risen about 20 percent from 1950 to 1964.

The Five-County project:

In July 1966, we initiated a project to investigate and provide educational information on the economic structure of each of the five contiguous counties (Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa and Sonoma) immediately north of the San Francisco Bay

Area. Analytical emphases was on what impacts changes in the county and regional economic flows might have on land and water development and use in the area. In the first phase of the project, we want to provide information on inter-industry transactions between counties, as well as within them, and to provide an estimate of the regional economic transactions. In a second phase, we wish to project estimates of the growth of these sectors, their interrelationships, and the impact this growth might have on resource planning. Thirdly, we wish to explore the possibilities of major resource changes and institutional impacts on land use (i. e., changes in taxation, transportation patterns, water development and infarm organization).

Procedures:

The analytical tool most relevant for providing the needed information is input-output. The matrices forthcoming will quantitatively describe the relationships we need to attain the objectives of the first phase. Regression and common sense will provide "numbers" for the objective of projection estimates in phase two, while some programming may be used in addition to the other techniques described to obtain the objectives in the third phase.

The input-output matrix was developed in close coordination with Extension staff in each of the five counties, county and city planners in the area, and county administrators. In addition, advisory groups of citizens have been consulted, as well as subject-matter specialists throughout the University. At all times, there was a professional and "judgmental" give-and-take, so that the material, once developed, would be used by county personnel and citizens.

Most of the data for the sectors have been taken from secondary sources. In all cases, the analysis obtained has been, and will be, checked against the judgment and experience of the people in the area. Monthly meetings with Extension staffs of the counties involved have encouraged a two-way flow of information. To date, over 50 people, in one way or another, have directly participated on the project.

Project results:

The analysis resulting from this project is anticipated to supply relevant information to county personnel authorized to make decisions concerning the allocation of public monies and the disposition of resources (physical and institutional) affecting land and water use in the region. These people include county supervisors, mayors, county and city planners, and tax assessors. In addition, groups of interested citizens will have in their hands, readable material describing their local economy and analyzing the probable consequences of alternative courses of development.

Even though the project is approximately only half completed, there has already been an increased awareness on the part of county Extension staffs about their economy and the relevance of their professional disciplines to it. This awareness has resulted in some changes in county programs and emphasis of program. Several changes in staff program have already been made concerning activity priorities, applied research and data collection. Also, there has been an increased awareness among the county residents of the breadth, sophistication and potential contribution of Extension personnel. This has resulted in an increased respect for Extension and a definite change in the image that Extension holds in the area. Perhaps the most meaningful result that is evolving for both the Extension staffs and county residents is the operational integration of public service, research and informal teaching as the forces of professional discipline brings tools of analysis to bear on important regional economic problems.