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EXTENSION PROGRAMS
IN
NATURAL RESOURCE ECONOMICS

by

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During the several years of existence of the Policy Education Committee we have spent much of our time in the debate of issues and problems of natural resources use. Of course we give attention to agricultural policies and programs, for they impact our farmers and ranchers too. But we probably give more emphasis to issues of land use, problems of water quality, concerns about minerals extraction, and protection of vegetative growth than do our eastern colleagues. For we live in an area with a rather fragile environment, e.g. a semi-arid climate, a geologically young landscape, quite limited vegetative cover, and potentially destructive natural events (floods, fires, earthquakes, avalanches, droughts, etc.). We have a keen awareness of natural resources and their significance to us.

Let me turn quickly to the questions which each of us were to address in this session.

1. What is natural resource economics? My colleagues and I think it is the application of economic theory and thought to the questions and problems of natural resource uses.

2. What is "applied" natural resource economics? Because there is no body of resource economic theory, there is no "applied" natural resource economics. Natural resource economics is (as noted above) the application of economic theory to real world problems of development and use of natural resources.

3. Who is the audience (the users) of natural resource economics? I can think of few persons in the West who are not logically a part of the audience, if one interprets users as beneficiaries of good economic analyses as well as analysts of natural resource problems. I hasten to admit that there are developers and users of land, water, minerals, and vegetation who prefer not to apply economic principles and concepts to their special projects or uses, or they apply their own brand of economics to their cases. But the natural resources of the West are so scarce, and we are so dependent on them that we all are the audience. But to cite a few particular users of economics let us recognize the Forest

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Service, numerous lumber companies, the Bureau of Land Management, a few hundred ranchers, the National Park Service, a few million recreationists, the Bureau of Mines, several dozen mining companies, the Bureau of Reclamation, a few thousand operators of irrigated farms, and the Environmental Protection Agency, plus a few million citizens concerned about protection of resource quality. Hold a public meeting about grazing of public lands, mining in national parks, burying hazardous wastes or damming a scenic river and note who comes. A good cross section of the West will show up, and they will vigorously express their interests. Some will even come with respectable economic analyses to lay on the table.

4. What are the goals of an Extension program with respect to this audience? I think all of us in the West would attempt to serve the audience with the best available information about the issues or problems being debated. This is our traditional responsibility--to develop and extend good, objective information about issues, whatever they are. But some of us would attempt to organize seminars or symposia, to provide forums for the debate of issues or problems of resource use. This is a more difficult kind of service, requiring a keen awareness of issues and a sensitivity to the points of view of various persons and groups. The Extension economists at Oregon, cooperating with other subject matter specialists, did this a few years ago with respect to a half dozen issues. This was a special project funded by the Federal Extension Service, and it came off very well. Those of us who participated learned a lot about managing a public debate--getting input of factual information and allowing the expression of opinion by opponents.

In my judgment, we should unhesitatingly proceed to develop good, factual information about issues and problems of policy, and we should find means of extending that information to all interested parties. But we should also find ways to facilitate the public debate. We should, with the assistance of colleagues within and outside the Extension Service, create the forum for the debate of issues. It can be successfully done, and we should feel the obligation to do it.

5. How do you reach this audience? Extension of information can be accomplished in our usual ways, i.e., newsletter, radio and TV programs, newspapers and magazines, etc., and by unusual ways. One of the latter is noted above, i.e., the seminars and symposia organized by us to address issues. One can introduce facts as well as allow the expression of opinions in such public meetings. And there is another approach which I believe is very useful. We should strive, by our hard work and unbiased efforts, to establish credibility with those elements of our audience whom we wish to and should serve, so that we can serve them as consultants. In recent years I have been invited to meet with boards of directors, resolutions committees, and other small groups within three of our four general farm organizations. With our marketing specialists I have also served some commodity organizations. We have created an atmosphere within which candid discussions of issues and problems can be held, with little or no concern that frank expressions of concern, or doubt, or opinion will be repeated outside the meeting room. We can be very helpful when we serve as a consultant, if we will understand our clientele, get our facts in order, and carefully guard our opinions and

judgments. We may not get any loud, public acclaim for such efforts, but we can be pleased with the confidence in us that is evident and the thanks that we get from friends.

6. Where do you get the substance of what you deliver to this audience? If we're fortunate we have colleagues in our respective universities who support us with their research. We have the output of their work and the possibility for direct interaction that is so productive of information. We have also the opportunity to read the considerable volume of publications that usually arise with significant issues of resource development and use. It may be useful to recognize two kinds of publications: the academic, relatively objective papers which usually have some research as a basis, and the less objective statements of opinion or position which are published by participants in a decision process. The latter we should read to understand the positions of interested persons or groups. The former we must read to know the facts of the matter or the implications of various courses of action. These are the "meat" of our educational program.

I am personally convinced of the desirability of joint appointments, which allow the Extension specialists to engage in research that is relevant to their programs. One-quarter to one-third of one's time can be profitably spent in applied research. This activity will allow one to produce directly some information he can use, and to stay in touch with the literature and the community of researchers that is important to him. In the West such an appointment is unusual, and I think there are unfortunate communication gaps among researchers and Extension specialists. Such is not the case at Colorado, where specialists are integrated into departments and joint appointments are not unusual.

7. How would you recognize "success" with respect to your resource economics programs? Traditional ways of evaluating Extension programs, i.e. counting participants in a meeting, recording phone calls, and counting addresses on a mailing list, are not very useful. Such numbers tell us little about the improved knowledge of issues, programs or policies among our clientele. We learn little about their involvement in decision-making processes. So if we aren't using other evaluative mechanisms we don't have good measures of success.

I have little to suggest and much to learn about evaluation of resource economics programs. I have used "before" and "after" tests in connection with workshops to measure change in information levels among participants. But I have not followed through to measure change in involvement in decision processes, change in the extent of participation, or difference in the votes of participants. I will be pleased to learn from all of you the mechanisms for evaluation of behavioral change.

I'd like to end my comments with an expression of my personal bias relative to the role and the methods of the resource economist. I long ago repudiated the "great man" approach to Extension education. The specialist is not an extraordinarily wise man who needs only a hall, a microphone and a crowd to teach something. Rather he is an educator, who helps people to acquire information, to participate in decision processes, and to cope with the outcome of group decisions. As such he

will ordinarily be rather unobtrusive, quite cooperative and responsive to needs of clientele. He will give assistance that is genuinely useful but often he will not be appropriately recognized for his effort. The consequence will be however a credibility among his clientele that is deserved and satisfying, a knowledge that he is truly useful to his ultimate employers, and a good number of associates whom he can call his friends. Such are the rewards of the natural resource economist who is an educator.