Dr. Leo J. Guedry

Lifetime Achievement Award

A native of rural Louisiana, Dr. Guedry earned a B.S. in agricultural economics in 1963 from Louisiana State University (LSU); an M.S in agricultural economics in 1965 from the University of Illinois; and a Ph.D. in agricultural economics in 1970 from Oregon State University. His career at LSU covered 33 years; during that time he held positions ranging from Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness to Executive Vice Chancellor of the LSU Agricultural Center. His retirement became effective February 1, 2003.

Joining the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness in 1969, Dr. Guedry held a teaching and research appointment. During his career, his active research interest has been in the area of rural and natural resource development. Research initiatives in rural development focused on the provision of public services and industry impacts within rural areas. Much of this work concentrated on the development of iterative procedures using input-output analysis to isolate the impacts of industrial development on rural economies and identifying community-controlled factors influencing industry location. His research efforts in the provision of public services area resulted in the development of estimates and a model that was used throughout rural Louisiana to justify funding for the development of rural solid-waste disposal systems, allowing many Louisiana communities to meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act during the 1970s and 1980s. Dr. Guedry taught both undergraduate and graduate courses in the department. He was an active advisor of graduate and undergraduate students and undergraduate student organizations within the department and college. Dr. Guedry's interest in graduate and undergraduate education resulted in his being named the Outstanding Professor in the College of Agriculture in 1979 and appointment to numerous student-related committees in the College and University, including service on the following committees: Departmental Graduate, College Courses and Curricula, University Student Code of Conduct, and University High School Relations.

Professional activities included: Editorial Council of the *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics*; Editor of the *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics*; Southern Agricultural Economics Association (SAEA) Honorary Membership Committee;

SAEA Research Awards Committee; Project Reviewer, National Science Foundation–Behavior and Neural Sciences; Alternate, Universities Council on Water Resources; American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA) Employment Services Committee; AAEA Nominating Committee; AAEA Quality of Research Discovery Awards Committee; and Accreditation Review Team Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Texas Tech University. Professional recognitions have included corecipient of the AAEA Quality of Research Discovery Award and thesis advisor–AAEA Outstanding Thesis Award recipient.

Dr. Guedry spent a major part of his career in administrative positions. In 1981, Dr. Guedry was appointed professor and head of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, a position he held for almost 15 years. As department head he provided the leadership for the department to make significant progress toward improving its professional stature. One of the important legacies of his tenure as department head was the increased level of participation by faculty in professional activities. These activities include presentations at meetings of the various professional associations as well as service on committees and as association officers. During his tenure as department head, the department completely revised its undergraduate curricula and course offerings using a zero-based curriculum approach; established a graduate student organization and a faculty advisory committee; developed the first graduate handbook for graduate studies at the university; and established, through grant funding, one of the initial GIS laboratories in an Agricultural Economics department in the United States. He was instrumental in attracting funds to endow a visiting lectureship series and three professorships, the first such endowments in the College of Agriculture. In 1989, the department hosted the AAEA annual meeting on the LSU campus. In 1995, Dr. Guedry was appointed interim associate dean of the College of Agriculture, during which time he was responsible for the academic and fiscal administration of the college, as well as continuing to serve as professor and head of the department. He was appointed Associate Dean and Director of Academic Programs in the College of Agriculture in 1996, a position he held for a year before being appointed Vice Chancellor for Administration in the LSU Agricultural Center in 1997. In this position Dr. Guedry was responsible for the fiscal affairs and day-to-day administrative operations of the AgCenter, which included the statewide programs of the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station and Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service. Dr. Guedry was instrumental in establishing an information technology unit within the AgCenter and overseeing the development of a statewide computer network and distance education system to support AgCenter programs throughout the state of Louisiana. As part of this initiative, the computer infrastructure of the organization was dramatically upgraded, while extension and research faculty and support staff made unprecedented strides programmatically integrating these technologies as a functional component of their programs. In 2001, Dr. Guedry was appointed Executive Vice Chancellor of the LSU Agricultural Center. In this position he was given the responsibility to provide leadership for the organizational restructuring of the AgCenter to facilitate the interface between extension and research programs. The overall restructuring was completed in 2002. This initiative has resulted in enhanced coordination of all administrative, academic, and programmatic activities, elimination of duplicative administrative functions and positions, increased joint extension/research grant submissions, development of common faculty ranks between research and extension, and enhanced communication between extension and research personnel.

Dr. Guedry is married to the former Ann Vosburg. They have two children, Leigh and Gretchen, and three grandchildren.

Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics, 35,2(August 2003):205–208

Observing Agricultural Economics: What Now and Why?

Leo J. Guedry

I want to express my appreciation to the Association for this recognition. To those involved in nominating me, my heartfelt gratitude for their efforts and support. I am truly honored and humbled by my selection. I thank each who played a role in the process.

As I thought about this presentation, I reflected on the changes that have occurred in the profession during my career, reviewed some of the SAEA and AAEA presidential[1] and invited addresses, as well as the published remarks of previous recipients. In each presentation I noticed a commonality. Each provided observations suggesting implications for the future of the profession. Picking up on this approach, I will highlight some fundamental characteristics of agricultural and applied economics that I expect will serve us well in the future. In addition, I will point to a couple of areas that I feel need attention in the future to maintain our professional uniqueness. My observations, of course, are biased by my administrative experiences, which have included interactions with user groups, state and federal legislators, and public and private agencies and staffs.

Roots

In 1980, a former department head at LSU, Fred H. Wiegmann, in a white paper entitled "Roots" reminded us of the importance of the agricultural sector to our profession. Underlying his observations was the reality that as a profession, problem solving is at our core. To put it another way, the profession has been relevant because there has been a focus on finding solutions to problems of importance to users, either individually or collectively. Disciplinary contributions by the profession to applied economics and methodology have occurred because there was a need to fill a void relative to solving a particular problem. Based on my administrative experience, I can't overstate the importance this "solution-focused problem solving"[2] orientation has to our collective professional viability, particularly when justifying continued or new funding.

A couple of the characteristics associated with solution-focused problem solving within the profession are 1) effective problem identification, and 2) a conceptual framework that incorporates direct and indirect linkages between and within social, economic, physical, and biological systems.

Problem identification. The leaders in research, extension, and teaching, regardless of discipline, share a common characteristic—that of an "effective observer." In our profession, what you find is that the individual is or was an active participant with the user group environment, as a producer (farmer), trader, consultant, etc. The ability

[1] A couple of these I found to strongly agree with my biases and would recommend them to you for revisiting are Armbruster's AAEA presidential address and Harris' presidential address to this association.

[2] As used in this context, solution-focused problem solving is analysis of a particular problem that is designed to provide an answer or direction, given the best available data and methods. In addition, it also encompasses conceptual and disciplinary contributions that occur as a result of efforts by the discipline to provide a framework to address real world problems.

to see needs and issues requiring clarification or solution is what has led to the conceptual developments that have characterized the profession over time, contributing significantly to the general success the profession has enjoyed.

Linkages—Social, economic, physical, and biological systems. The historical origins of agricultural economics in the agricultural industry created a heritage deeply embedded in the profession. This heritage of addressing problems through the use of systematic analyses involving an understanding of physical, biological, economic, and social relationships has served the profession well. It also has been the basis for the profession's evolution into natural resource and environmental issues, rural and community development, policy, and many other areas that are addressed by the profession today. The breadth this orientation gives the profession makes agricultural economics unique within land grant universities, and state and federal agencies. As we look to the role and viability of the profession in the future, these two generalized characteristics will play a critical role.

Recipe for the Future

These characteristics and what is known about current and future societal demands provide guideposts for the profession. What is known about expectations of users? In general, users are not as concerned about academic or disciplinary polish as they are about quality of results. Are insights being provided to meaningful problems that make their world better? Are results available in a timely manner? Let's explore these within the context of what they suggest relative to future directions of the profession.

Solution focused. Solution-focused problem solving will remain a crucial element of teaching, research, and extension programs. Critical thinking and analytical reasoning within the context of a sound conceptual framework will continue to be important. Application of this framework to meaningful problems using appropriate methodologies will continue to be the characteristic that will ensure that the profession maintains its viability and uniqueness. To be successful will require that the importance of effective problem identification continues to be an integral part of undergraduate and graduate education.

"Examples" have been one of the mainstays used to relate theory and application. But are examples enough to build the ability to recognize the linkages between social, economic, physical, and biological environments? Are we still using approaches that were developed when production agriculture and farm-gate marketing were the major focuses of the profession? During that time, most of the students and, ultimately, practicing members of the profession were reared on farms, accounting for the success of this approach. Now we use case studies in our expanded efforts in agribusiness. In addition, the bulk of the coursework taken in production agricultural subject matter areas such as animal and plant sciences was very applied in nature. Does that exist today? My observation is that the support courses are more technical in nature, and students are being required to take fewer of them. In addition, the scope of problem areas being addressed has expanded greatly and use of additional course work is not realistic. It is, therefore, even more important that ways are found to develop and enhance the understanding of how environments affect a particular issue or problem. Examples, case studies, internships, senior theses all provide opportunities here, but are there others?

As we all know, meaningful issues and problems are not discipline specific but are multidisciplinary in content. Who better than agricultural and applied economists to provide a leadership role in the development and implementation of multidisciplinary teams to address societal, individual, and industry problems? The breadth and scope of expertise exists within our profession to make an enhanced contribution to the well-being of our specific publics. It is incumbent on this pro-

fession to become more aggressive in initiating and leading such research and outreach efforts. To a great extent, we have the potential to be in the forefront of what is now being called the "engaged" university. To do so will require that the profession address increasing expectations of accountability and responsiveness.

Accountability. In the past, accountability in research was, by and large, documented through numbers of publications, citations, etc.; teaching, number of majors and graduates; and extension, number of contacts, or programs conducted. These are rapidly being viewed as inputs or outputs in the world of performance appraisal applied to institutions, particularly public institutions.

Performance today is focused on outcomes. In the case of research, what difference did it make in the lives of the targeted audience? In teaching, how successful have graduates been? In extension, have those contacts changed their behavior? To some extent the profession is ahead of the game because of the returns to research and extension work in the last 20 years. However, it appears these outcomes are being demanded with increased specificity, such as not the return on investment measured in dollars, but how many producers benefited, number of jobs created, etc. This is another opportunity for the profession to take a lead role, particularly at the state level where there continues to be increasing competition for funding. This provides an opportunity for the profession to incorporate such outcomes within various multidisciplinary efforts as these evolve and become more common.

Responsiveness. I don't think anyone would argue with the observation that the public, whether individuals or user groups, expect quick responses to questions. This can be expected to increase in the future. However, more than just quick answers to a question, responsiveness involves our ability to shift our resources from one endeavor to another in a more timely manner, how we define what we do, and how we deliver information. As much as any group, we are in the information business; therefore, it behooves us to take advantage of all the tools of the information age. There is a tremendous amount of quality work being done; however, much of it is written for a professional audience. The unfortunate reality is that a considerable amount of this work does not find its way to a more general readership, despite major efforts on the part of professional associations and others. This is due partly to the use of disciplinary jargon and rigor, lack of resources to constantly survey large amounts of technical results, and limited ready access. The advent of web-based access and delivery, such as content management systems, offers increasing opportunities for delivery. Effective use of such delivery systems will require direct input by those who develop the findings. Why? Who better to provide an executive summary of the salient points of the study than the individual(s) who developed the results? Coupled with this will be a need to learn how to write for a general readership so a larger audience can appreciate the significance of the work. Such statements could be linked to the fully documented study for those having interest in further study details.

Affecting Agendas

I have touched on only a few characteristics of the profession and factors that will, in my opinion, be important to its long-run viability and uniqueness, that is, if my crystal ball is not too cloudy. My observations suggest that no other disciplinary component of the nation's university, government, or industry base that deals with agricultural and natural resource issues is better prepared to assume a leadership role in setting the agenda for the future. My challenge to each of you and to the profession in general: Seek the opportunity to assume a leadership role within your unit and organization. You can affect their respective agendas.

Finally, but not least, let me again express

my appreciation to the Association for this recognition. It is an honor and privilege to have been selected.

References

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