



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

VISIONS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

J. W. Fanning

Many successful farmers in Georgia have observed and experienced over the years both good and bad times, and accepted these variations as normal in farming. Following a sharp down-swing in the stock market in October 1987, they were saying to their sons who had heavy investments in stocks, "We told you they could go down." Thus, two generations have come to a mutual understanding of down-trends that too often bring surprise and pain -- the father with experience and the son without experience.

While a student at the University of Georgia College of Agriculture, I came under the influence of Dr. John R. Fain, Head of the Department of Agronomy, who established Farm Management and basic Agricultural Economics as course offerings. Dr. Fain spoke to the National Agricultural Economics Association in the summer of 1920. He issued a warning to farmers of a severe down-turn in prices soon to come with devastating experiences for farm people. He foresaw the depression years following World War I. His forecast fell largely on unwilling ears, but it was correct.

Upon my graduation in 1927, Dr. Fain suggested that I pursue a Master's Degree. My thesis had to do with the out-migration of people from eight middle Georgia counties between 1920 and 1925. These counties lost almost two-thirds of their population within that period of drastic decline in prices and production of cotton. A cotton-centered economy fell apart with the advent of low prices and the coming of the boll weevil. By 1932, these counties lay flat on their backs economically and socially.

I know the people in these counties and observed them as they courageously dealt with their many extreme adjustments in systems of farming and life-styles. Over the years, they accepted change and did change. They have brought into being a new economy and a different life-style. They found change very difficult but they persevered.

My understanding of community development grew as I observed the struggles of the peoples of these and other counties in Georgia. I experienced a growing appreciation for responsible leadership as it responded to opportunities for building a new community.

I discovered an interest in cooperation across county lines. Those observations

focused my interest in regional planning and development. Along with others, I participated in the creation of 18 Area Planning and Development Commissions. The purpose of these commissions was and remains to influence and guide the building of new communities, both county and regional. I am not sure that those of us engaged in this endeavor fully realized that we were actually involved in a process of helping to rebuild rural areas and also contributing to the growth of urban communities.

An appropriate question relates to visions that shape the emerging rural community. Leaders, it seems to me, have a responsibility to help people catch a vision of their potentials and their options in development. Such leadership is a key in rural development.

There are vast differences among rural communities. There are those like Oconee county, Georgia with a close economic relationship with Athens-Clarke county. Oconee county is building a new community with all of its attendant problems of land use, and new roads and governmental services. It is becoming a suburban community within the Athens-Clarke county metropolitan area.

My wife and I live part-time on a small farm in Madison county, located east of Athens. Some 30 houses have been constructed on the 2.5 mile stretch of road where our farm is located. Almost everybody on that road depends upon the economy of Athens-Clarke county for their employment. At one time, Madison county had 3500 full-time farms. Today they are mostly part-time farms. Change has come and more change is in store.

Both of these counties differ significantly from Taliaferro county, Georgia which has no urban-economy from which to draw economic strength for development. It has suffered severe out-migration, leaving its school system with barely enough students to exist. The leaders of Taliaferro county have searched through many options for growth and continue to do so. Their economic problems are acute. Assistance is being given by the Central Savannah Area Planning and Development Commission. Presently, many retirees are finding the old homes very attractive and are purchasing them as their retirement homes.

It seems to me that responsibility weighs heavily upon the leadership within rural

communities, and those elsewhere in position to assist, to provide a vision of opportunities for rural development and also to bring to these areas an enthusiasm for development, that includes entrepreneurial options. This is no easy task, but it is a very rewarding one.

Agricultural Economics in its teaching, research, and extension activities has a key role to play in rural development. It has a significant leadership responsibility.

J. W. Fanning is Vice-President emeritus, The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.