

Extension's future will depend on professionals who can help clientele deal with change in the social, economic, and political environment.

Lifelong Learning in Extension Education: A Viable Choice for the Future?

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What Has Been?

The Land Grant University System has been hailed as one of the greatest achievements in American education. The system has provided higher education to the masses through educational programs based on research. These programs have been extended to rural America through the Land Grant University's outreach program, The Cooperative Extension Service. The Extension Service was established with the passage of the 1914 Smith-Lever Act, which authorized federal funds for the support of statewide extension systems. From the inception of the Extension Service, the mission of this organization has been to help people help themselves. This legislation, as amended, defines an audience, general subject areas, and educational approaches for the Extension Service. This charge has been simply stated in the Act (National Association of State University Land Grant Colleges [NASULGC] Committee Report, 1983):

... to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to Agriculture ... home economic, and rural energy and to encourage the application of the same ... extension work shall consist of the development of practical applications of research knowledge and giving of instruction and practical demonstration of improved practices on technologies, in agriculture ... home economics, and rural energy and subjects relating thereto to persons not attending or resident in said colleges in the several communities, and imparting information on said subjects through demonstration, publication,

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and otherwise and for the necessary printing and distribution of information. . . .

As stated in the NASULGC Committee report, "The Cooperative Extension Service was thus created as a dynamic institution, one with multiple audiences, subject matters, and methodologies. By its very charter, Cooperative Extension was established as an entity that would modify its programs and outreach in response to such factors as new knowledge, changes in its clientele's needs, and alterations in the socio-economic landscape. And, over the years, Cooperative Extension has changed in accordance with changing surroundings."

What Is Now?

A national study conducted recently by Paul Warner and James Christenson (1984) indicated that 11 million households use the Service annually and 22 million households have used it in their lifetime. Over 66 percent of the Extension users were urban residents, 23 percent were rural residents, and only 10 percent were living on farms. When respondents were asked if they were satisfied with the service they had received, 95 percent responded positively. Eighty-eight percent responded that the Extension Service should receive at least as much financial support as they had in the past.

The record the Extension Service has built over the years has been quite impressive. The Extension Service has been a vital link in an educational system which has helped the American farmer to produce not only the food and fiber needs of this nation, but provide for many others around the world. In a recent USDA Bulletin (1986), it was said that Extension's unique relationship with the federal, state, and local governments has helped a cadre of professional and volunteer staff plan and perform several key functions in the national interest. The Cooperative Extension Service:

- Provides nationwide leadership in adapting and transferring science and technology.
- Anticipates and responds educationally with educational programs for critical national issues affecting the food and agricultural system.
- Mobilizes resources to respond to natural disasters and catastrophes.
- Initiates targeted educational programs necessary for effective and timely implementation of federal regulations and policies.
- Develops a body of volunteers prepared to serve the nation, the state, and the community.

What Are the Criticisms of Extension?

Is Extension's past record sufficiently impressive to carry it through the next decade? This question comes from many sources, including some from within Extension, especially when they consider the staggering changes in American society. When the Smith-Lever Act became law in 1914, the United States was an agrarian society; now less than three percent of the population are farmers. The demand for quality agricultural products was then intense; now oversupply has been the rule. The demand for primary and secondary educational facilities was the ruling force; now many schools stand empty. Once Extension had the major role in rural adult education; now competition from many other public and private organizations have diluted this role. Critics of the Extension Service claim that the Service is no longer needed. They cite as an example the low number of farmers compared with the increased cost of Extension. Others say that Extension has lost that component which

made it great—flexibility. Extension programs, successful in the past, are outdated by the rapidly changing community. Lambro (1984) claims that, "maintaining extension offices in every county in America is a vestige of a bygone era when we were an agricultural country and communications were still in its infancy. Today, with a declining farm population, these county offices are turning to servicing nonfarm constituencies with advice, counseling and literature on lawns, backyard gardening, hobbies, home economics, etc." By closing the Extension offices, Lambro believes that \$332 million would be saved to help balance the federal budget.

G. Edward Schuh (1986), executive director for agriculture and rural development at the World Bank, believes that Extension's problems are closely tied with the need to revitalize the Land Grant University system. He criticizes the universities for moving away from their problem-solving roots and moving toward narrow academic specialization. He feels that because of this move, Extension has become too specialized in its offerings and is not meeting the demands of its clientele.

Cooperative Extension Service administrators have felt this criticism. Budget cuts and the need to justify its existence has touched every state Extension Service to some degree. Traditional programming and delivery methods are being questioned at all levels of the organization. Administrators have had to seek alternative sources of funding for Extension programs. Downsizing (Schuchardt and Cunningham, 1986) the Extension organization is occurring.

What Is the Future?

What will be the role of the Cooperative Extension Service in the future? Can Extension still carry out its traditional role of continuing education with a shrinking agriculture population and still be flexible enough to meet the educational needs of new clientele? These are tough questions and may only be answered when a clearer picture of the future is conceived.

The public's perception of agriculture and its lifestyle is changing. The early '70s was a time when agriculture was again viewed in a favorable light. Many city dwellers saw agriculture as an acceptable way of life, one of which they wished they could be a part. This perception has changed somewhat and is expressed in the results of a 1986 Gallup Poll (Ag Focus, 1986). More than 1,500 federal and state government leaders, journalists, university professors, and businesspersons were interviewed across the country. When asked about agriculture, the majority agreed that: 1) the days of the family-owned farm are numbered; 2) farmers probably earn less money than other Americans and would have more difficulty in obtaining loans; 3) farmers could only be successful if they had a college education. The majority agreed that farming was an important industry, but one they would not choose or recommend to their children. Richard Krummer (1986), editor of *Successful Farming* magazine, was quoted by The Associated Press, when he identified 10 "megatrends" of the future of agriculture. They were:

- Agriculture is becoming truly global—80 percent of all tractors sold in the United States last year were made overseas . . .
- New technology is about to burst upon the world—Genetically engineered crops and chemicals could increase yields by 50 percent in just a few years . . .
- The cost of farming is declining—One young farmer farmed 940 acres with a machinery investment of just \$113,000 . . .
- Farmers are drowning in a sea of unproductive

debt—A *Successful Farming* survey of 679 farms in six states shows that each \$3 of debt since 1978 has returned only \$1 in sales . . .

- Financial management has become the most important farming skill—Smart farmers take courses at local colleges or Extension offices . . .
- U.S. agriculture is a mature industry—A large number of firms, most of which are equally competitive, but with a stable or declining demand for its products . . .
- Consumers are concerned about the wholesomeness of their food and water—Americans have endured Temik in watermelons, salmonella in milk, nitrates in water, and spoiled cheese . . .
- Demand for agricultural products is changing—America is on a diet . . .
- The decline of rural institutions is imminent—Much of the funding for rural schools, hospitals, county government and social welfare stems from farm wealth in rural states . . .
- Two classes of survivors are emerging from the crisis in agriculture—First, those who make money without spending money and second, those who work harder at financial management.

Michael J. Phillips of the Office of Technology Assessment U.S. Congress (1986), also painted a picture of agriculture in the future. He claimed that if the present trend continues, there will be 500,000 fewer farms in the United States in the year 2000 than in 1982. The number of small farms will remain relatively stable, with large farms increasing in number, and moderate-sized farms decreasing. By the year 2000, almost 70 percent of the farms in America will be classified as small part-time farms with sales of less than \$100,000 annually. More than 85 percent of the farm products sold will come from farms with annual sales of over \$250,000, an increase of 35 percent using 1982 as the baseline. Extension's traditional agricultural clientele has been the moderate-sized farmer. Phillips suggested two major questions which Extension should address concerning clientele:

- Can Extension survive without the moderate-size farm clientele?
- Can Extension survive with primarily an urban-based clientele that it has cultivated over the past few years?

What Extension Must Do

The future of the Cooperative Extension Service is dependent upon how well it adapts to the changing agricultural environment. Critics are saying that the Extension Service is outdated and that the services it provides can be provided more effectively by other private and public sources. Supporters of the Service praise its past, and present, and claim a bright future for Extension. Ed Boone (1987), assistant director and head, Department of Adult and Community College Education at North Carolina State University, outlined what Extension must do to meet the challenge of the changing environment in the American community. He indicated that the Extension Service is at a crossroads in determining its future role in responding to the economic crises currently facing many farm families, the community, and the consumer in the marketplace. He stated that Extension must become more proactive in designing programs. This could be accomplished by becoming more capable in predicting the future. Extension's role ultimately must be to provide trained professionals who can help their clientele deal with change in the social, economic, and political environment. Dr. Boone identified five

major implications staff development leaders in Extension must consider to meet this challenge. They were:

- The need to be knowledgeable about and sensitive to the problems and crises with which county and area Extension agents are confronted on a daily basis . . .
- Staff development leaders must become more adept in identifying and diagnosing the immediate and long-term professional education needs of all job groups in the Cooperative Extension Service . . .
- Extension must sharply focus staff development programs . . . providing a clear purpose, a sharp focus, and must be in line with the priorities most critical to the success of Extension . . .
- Staff development leaders must accept and become committed to the need to subject themselves and their programmatic efforts to ongoing, critical study, analysis, and evaluation . . .
- Staff development leaders need to accept and work toward the idea that the organization's efforts in maintaining a well-informed and capable state and field staff in Cooperative Extension is going to depend on the ability to interface and work effectively with colleagues who are in line positions (i.e., administrators, supervisors, specialists-in-charge, and county chairmen).

The National Users Advisory Board for Extension (1986), believing that we are in the age of technology, suggested that the major role Extension should assume is that of technological transfer. Because most of the biological research is being done by researchers in the basic sciences, transferring into applied agricultural research has been slow. Another problem has been that basic researchers need to become more familiar with the real needs of farm operators, so that research efforts can be directly related to solving those needs. These problems have been amplified with the rewarding of almost 50 percent of the Federal Government's contracts in agricultural research to agencies outside the Department of Agriculture. Almost 40 percent of the 21,000 doctorates working in applied agricultural specialties hold degrees in fields other than applied agriculture. The Extension specialists can play a vital role in tempering this new information for practical agriculture and providing the communication link between the basic and applied research scientists.

What Extension is Doing

Many questions have been raised about the Cooperative Extension Service's role in this new age of information. A glimpse of the possible future has been presented and even some possible ways for Extension to insure that their professionals are equipped to meet those drastic changes in our society. What is Extension doing now to prepare for the future?

Pigg (1986) described an environmental scanning procedure being used by some state Cooperative Extension Services. It has been an early warning system used to identify factors which will affect the future of the organization. Some "early warning" systems are based on computerized data bases, while others use a multidisciplinary task force whose main responsibility has been to provide administration with alternative action plans. By having the kind of information provided by this type of service, Extension can position itself to provide proactive programming for its clientele. Pigg also described the efforts of Extension professionals to network with other professionals. By networking, on a local and multistate basis, clientele numbers can be in-

creased while still conserving limited resources.

Soobitsky (1986) stated "that many professional associations are beginning to engage in collaborative relationships with one another in the planning and delivery of continuing education programs and services. Rather than focusing attention on their respective differences, professional associations are examining their commonalities or similarities in their planning and delivery of programs and services. Through an awareness and understanding of one another's planning and delivery processes and procedures, professional associations are attempting to create a "collaborative learning system" which embodies cost-effective continuing educational programs and services for facilitating improvement in the performance of practicing professionals." The Cooperative Extension Service is strengthening efforts to coordinate program planning and delivery with other educational institutions or agencies.

The Ohio Cooperative Extension Service's planning committee (1983) has outlined programming criteria to help update Extension's adult educational effort. Those guidelines include:

- programs that meet critical economic or social needs
- programs that are based on research
- programs not readily and adequately available from other educational or non-commercial sources
- programs that are mainly educational as opposed to those of a service, regulatory, or enforcement nature
- programs that are clearly those of the Cooperative Extension Service and are within Extension's scope.

Communication technology is changing Extension's delivery system. Traditional methods, such as, fact sheets and other publications, are being replaced by computer programs, mass meetings are being replaced by teleconferences, and a briefcase by a mobile computer. Information technologies are being upgraded and Extension is shifting to new technologies as they become available. Satellite technology is already available, linking district and state offices in Ohio, which provides quick interchanges between field and state staff.

In summary, there are those who have applauded the work of Extension in the past. There have been many positive voices. Currently there are voices such as Blanton (1986), vice chancellor for Administration, University of Kentucky, who stated recently to research business officers that: "Agricultural Extension is seen as a bureaucracy urgently struggling to perpetuate itself—an old and established organization in search of a mission. Instead of proudly acknowledging its contribution over the years and going away, this expensive monolith looks for ways to perpetuate itself." Critics look on Extension as full of anachronistic programs and ideas resting on the accolade of hybrid corn and canning clubs and not becoming part of the "Third Wave." As Dik (1986) stated so well when speaking to deans and directors of Extension, "If you are shoveling water from the Potomac using a pitchfork no amount of added effort will make a significant difference. You can pick up the pace, you can work longer hours and the difference will still be insignificant. You will have to change your ways of operation, methods, and tools to become effective." Extension administrators are acknowledging the critics' voices. An effort is being made to be more effective and responsive to clientele needs. The pace needs to be quickened but not with a pitchfork. Extension administrators and teachers need to know their learners. They need to serve them, by designing responsive programs.

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