

Dialogue

The opinions expressed in these articles are not necessarily those of the editors. ACE members are invited to present opposing views or to present their considered opinions on other communications issues of direct concern to ACE members, generally.

Professionals, Terminal Degrees and Terminal Illness

Rarely have I come across an article in ACE Quarterly, written in behalf of the American farmer.

Instead, the emphasis of the writers has been on the "professionalism" of the agricultural communicator, rather than on the professionalism of the farmer. These expository exercises have become even more pronounced since we shortened our name from AAACE to ACE. Dick Lee, in the October-December issue of the QUARTERLY, has accurately pinpointed the problem, I believe, when he wrote: "such matters as academic standing and terminal degrees do seem to create a dilemma for information staff in land-grant universities." That may have been the understatement of the decade.

For my part, information staff need terminal degrees like they need terminal illnesses. I, of course, appreciate the desirability of being on the faculty salary table rather than the staff table. But I am convinced that unless one is engaged in teaching and/or research, one should be satisfied with a nonacademic title, remuneration notwithstanding.

I came to the College of Agriculture & Environmental Sciences at Rutgers as chairman of the "Department of Agriculture and Home Economics Information." We quickly renamed it the Communications Center, to impart its broader role. Nevertheless, my conception of an agricultural college editor was one who used whatever skills one possessed as a communicator for the

benefit of the farmer. Home Economics and 4-H editors responded to the need of their clientele as part of the total informational effort.

Of **direct** benefit would be the assistance given to both the experiment station researcher and the Extension specialists in providing the latest information-- in comprehensible language and form--to the farmer, who required it for increased production. (This is at the heart of the land-grant philosophy of education.) In agricultural marketing, production efficiency is always the goal, for it is the only part of the marketing equation over which the farmer has any control.

Of **indirect** benefit would be information targeted for urban and other nonfarm audiences in an attempt to describe the role of the farmer in the total economy. In New Jersey, the most urban state in the nation, a sustained public relations effort in behalf of the farmer is of paramount importance. I was delighted to read James Grunig's footnoted comments concerning public relations. But for me, PR rates an entire dissertation, not just a footnote.

Our job as **agricultural** communicators, distinct from science writers, is to explain, to as many publics as possible, just exactly what the 4 percent of the nation's work force is doing out there in the fields, in the feedlots, in the farrowing pens and in the dairy barns. And I might add, doing it so magnificently!

Agricultural communicators should be explaining why farmers sell commodities below the cost of production, and still continue to produce.

Agricultural communicators should be writing about the \$32 billion worth of exports farmers supplied in 1979, helping to offset some of the costs of Middle East oil.

Agricultural communicators should be warning about the 5 million acres of farmland our country loses every year to erosion of one kind or another.

Agricultural communicators should be penning essays on the structure of American agriculture -- how farming is organized, who controls it and where it is headed -- as Bob Bergland has courageously suggested.

If we do our jobs as "agricultural communicators in

education," we will be educating the public, the researcher, the extension specialist, the county agents, the experiment station administrators — and the farmer.

If we accomplish all of that, then we deserve the soubriquet, "Ace."

But, then again, this is only my opinion.

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On Conducting Communications Research

I am not sure whether it makes me a maverick or a heretic, but I disagree with the notion that, for the sake of gaining professional parity in an academic setting, agriculture communicators should be conducting communications "research."

For better or for worse, I came to academic agriculture journalism rather late in life--after spending 20 years in various types of commercial publishing. Ever since I have been working for agriculture institutions (about ten years now), I have been hearing the communications people grumbling about being second-class citizens. The plain truth is that, in a way, we ARE second-class citizens at a university. We perform a support role for the people who do the real work of the institution. To put it in business terms: We don't make the company's products. The products of a university are graduates and new knowledge. In my opinion **working** journalists (not to be confused with **academic** journalists who teach) doing "research" is a feeble attempt to compensate for inferiority feelings that have grown out of our support position. Furthermore, doing research for professional enhancement may actually keep us from doing what we are being paid to do.

Those who are unable to accept their status as support personnel should get jobs with newspapers, magazines or book publishers. In those situations editors