

NEW TECHNIQUES AND METHODS OF DISSEMINATING
INFORMATION IN VIEW OF BUDGETARY
CONSTRAINTS BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

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The Cooperative Extension Service at the University of Illinois faces increased demands for educational services. This increase is in an environment marked by increasing costs, and stable to decreased financial support--especially from the Federal partner. The situation we face in Illinois is similar to that faced by many other State Cooperative Extension Services. We are better off than some states--worse off than others. What of the future? Will we be able to deliver viable programs to farmers and agri-business firms? I believe that we will, but we will have to change to do it. The focus of this discussion is some of the changes that we are considering in the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Illinois.

Like many other states, we have approached our future through a Strategic Planning/Future Priorities Task Force. The report of this task force is currently under study, with a date for presentation of a "final" plan to the Cooperative Extension Service faculty and staff on November 3, 1986. It would be premature for me to unveil this plan at this time; however, there are a number of changes that I am able to share with you. Some of these are taken directly from the Strategic Planning/Future Priorities Task Force report. Other changes are those which, as Director, I believe are necessary for a viable, relevant future.

Priority Problem Issues - Our task force identifies six priority problem issues, which will serve to guide the Cooperative Extension Service at the University of Illinois during the next five to ten years. Stating these as priority problem issues is consistent with the idea that the future Cooperative Extension Service in Illinois will be strongly issue-oriented. The six issues developed by the task force are as follows:

1. Agricultural Profitability and Sustainability
2. Family Well-being
3. Food, Nutrition and Wellness

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4. Environmental Quality
5. Community Development/Rural Revitalization
6. Leadership Development

The priority problem issues set forth by the Strategic Planning/Future Priorities Task Force are similar to priorities set forth by the Joint Council on Food and Agricultural Sciences, in the Council's report to the Secretary of Agriculture on FY'87 Priorities for Research, Extension, and Higher Education. I believe this is an important fact, given the criticism leveled at the Cooperative Extension Services, that the services do not focus attention on national priorities.

A full discussion of each of the six priorities is beyond the scope of this paper. I will limit my consideration to Agricultural Profitability and Sustainability, Environmental Quality, and Community Development/Rural Revitalization.

Agricultural Profitability and Sustainability - Ag profitability must be a high priority for Extension programs in agriculture. In fact, it is likely that it will be the highest priority for the next several years. In our Extension programs we will place increased emphasis on improved management skills, so that farm operators and managers can make more effective resource allocation, can improve enterprise analysis, utilize more effective credit and capital management, and provide record-keeping and budgeting consistent with modern business.

Agricultural subject matter programs will be integrated into interdisciplinary approaches consistent with the decision-making process utilized by farm operators and managers. Integrated pest management and crop management systems will be the norm, rather than the exceptions, as we strive to improve the competitive position of agriculture.

Farmers recognize the need to keep abreast of new technology. Critical to an improved competitive position will be the adoption of new cost production technology. Our Cooperative Extension Service program will place increased emphasis on increasing cost effectiveness through reduction in costs, and increases in returns.

Environmental Quality - Extension programs in the future will include the response to growing public interest and concern relative to the environmental impacts of agricultural methods and systems. The use of agricultural chemicals, and concern about the environmentally detrimental effects of soil erosion are examples. Illinois and other states have soil loss goals that are mandatory before the end of the 20th Century. Educational programs will play an important part in providing public awareness of the goals, and of the strategies that can be used in meeting the goals.

Extension programs in the future, will place emphasis on efficient use of agricultural chemicals, and on soil management systems that provide for maintenance of soil erosion losses within tolerances.

The target audience for programs in environmental quality will include not only farm operators, managers, and landowners, but also agri-business firms, and public and private organizations, as well as general awareness educational thrusts for the public.

Environmental quality programs must include a policy education approach in which objective consideration of problems and solutions are considered. In addition, we must emphasize the necessity of sound environmental programs that are also economically effective.

Community Development/Rural Revitalization - A drive into virtually every rural community will provide visible evidence that the fiscal stress faced by farm families and agribusiness firms is having a spill-over effect into Main Street businesses in rural communities. We believe that we must place priority on Extension programs in community development, that have rural revitalization as an objective. In Illinois, we expect to increase our efforts in assisting small business firms with financial analysis and business management programs similar to those offered for farm families. We are carrying out, and will continue to carry out, effective efforts in working with local government officials to enhance their ability to manage in the public sector.

Rural revitalization is related to economic development, and to the development of a social environment conducive to an adequate quality of life.

Research-Extension Linkages - The basis for sound Extension programs rests with a sound research base. Extension serves an important linkage in extending the research knowledge base from the Land Grant Universities, United States Department of Agriculture, and other research institutions, to the people. The extension of this research base includes translation of research facts into language that people can understand, so that new technology can be effectively and appropriately applied. The Research-Extension linkage also includes the transfer of information relative to gaps in the knowledge base, from farmers and other users of research knowledge, back to the researchers.

There is continuing concern relative to who will do applied research in an environment where basic research is given highest priority for research dollars. The Food Security Act of

1985 included an amendment in the Smith-Lever Act--Extension's basic charter--which enables the use of Extension resources to carry out applied research programs. The College of Agriculture at the University of Illinois, has an excellent balance between basic research in such areas as biotechnology, plant physiology, plant soil relations, etc., and applied research, which has direct impact on improvement in crop and animal production systems. Part of this balanced approach comes from the effective research linkage of Extension specialists, most of whom have a joint Extension-Research appointment. We believe that our future must include strengthening the Research-Extension linkage, if we are to have a viable research base to extend to our publics.

Extension Industry Relationships - The Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Illinois has long treasured what we feel is a very positive relationship with agri-business-related industries. We believe that these positive relationships should not only be continued, but that we should aggressively seek out opportunities to strengthen these relationships. We believe that this can happen without damaging the integrity of the Cooperative Extension Service, which is charged with the responsibility for providing objective research-based information to farmers and other agriculturally-related target audiences. We also believe that the integrity of agri-business must be maintained. This integrity certainly will include private sector promotion of products and services produced by private sector companies. We have much to gain by moving into the future with a spirit of cooperation; we also have much to lose if we move into the future regarding each other as competitors. Farmers and suppliers of agricultural inputs need all of the help that they can get. We should seek out complementary relationships where we can work together in helping the clients which we both serve, utilize technology for a brighter future.

Educating Farmers and Some Other Folks, Too - The Cooperative Extension Service has targeted its efforts in agricultural programs on farmers and agri-business representatives for many years. We believe that we will continue to do so in the future. However, our efforts with farmers will require targeting toward the specific needs of several audiences, including commercial full-time farmers, part-time commercial farmers, the small part-time farmers, and absentee land and other resource owners. Catering the educational message to meet the specific needs of target audiences such as those above, will improve the effectiveness of our efforts and will provide increased program relevance and viability.

We will continue efforts with agri-business firms and other small business operators, as was discussed in the section on

Community Development/Rural Revitalization. We believe that the subject matter content should be tailored to meet both the technical agricultural needs of agri-business firms, and business management needs of all small business firms in the rural community.

We believe that there is increasing need for a public awareness program targeted at the mass audience. Public awareness should relate to the changing context in which farmers compete. It should also include public awareness of the positive impacts of agricultural technology on the environment. We must also strengthen our public awareness programs in expression of objective concern relative to potential damaging impact of inappropriately used agricultural technology on the environment. The Cooperative Extension Service and industry need to work together in delivering objective, credible educational messages for the general public.

Program Delivery Techniques - Cooperative Extension program delivery has long been marked by program efforts which we could regard as high touch, i.e., that have a strong person-to-person element. We believe that in the future, we need to continue person-to-person contacts on an individual and group basis. However, we also need to pursue new program delivery techniques, including electronic technology.

Computers are an important part of electronic technology that will take on added importance as we move through the 80's and into the 90's. We visualize a future when personal computers in the home and agri-business firm will have telephone access to county Extension offices and, in turn, to a data base at regional or campus level offices. We feel that the appropriate place for computer technology is as an educational aid in helping people gain an understanding of agricultural subject matter. Even more importantly, computer technology can serve an important role in helping farmers and other decision-makers come to grips with the complex factors that are involved in managing complex farm and agri-business firms of today.

Electronic technology also includes the use of television, video cassette recorders, audiotape cassettes, and radio and newspaper program delivery. We believe that we will see each of these program delivery methods expand in the future.

In a high tech environment, we believe that it is important the Cooperative Extension Service strive for a program delivery system that enables us to utilize high tech approaches where appropriate and, at the same time, maintain high touch with the people that we are responsible to serve. We feel that if we lose sight of the real world, and rely solely on remote program delivery, we may soon be out of touch with reality. When this

happens, our programs will lose relevance and viability. That is not in the best interests of the people we serve, of the Cooperative Extension Service, or of agri-business.

Summary - In this brief discussion, we have focused on some of the changes that are envisioned for the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Illinois as we move ahead into a future that we expect will be characterized by continued financial stress. We believe that our programs will retain relevance and viability, to the extent that we focus on issues that are important in the lives of people--particularly those people we are responsible for serving. The future is exciting; perhaps the most exciting time in the history of the Cooperative Extension Service. I look forward to working in this future, which I believe will hold continued cooperation and complementary working arrangements between the public sector, in which the Cooperative Extension Service operates, and the private sector, in which the fertilizer industry and other industries supplying goods and services for agricultural production, operate.

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