FARM DIRECTED EXTENSION

by John B. Claar*

As I studied your conference agenda, I noticed that your committee very wisely planned for a division of labor. As I discuss the implications of economic changes for educators, my task is to show how these changes affect the farm family phase of the extension service program. Of course, this is only one phase of the program. Since different phases compete for resources while giving mutual support, it is hard to talk about only one phase of the program without some overlap. However, I shall try.

I also detect from the emphasis in your program that this conference is especially interested in the larger, more sophisticated farmers. I believe that this is a significant problem that deserves our time, and I will do my best to fit in with this objective. At the same time, I want to record that this is not the largest group of farmers, and that we could hold an equally challenging conference on meeting the educational needs of farmers who fall below your target group in size of operation and income. In Illinois we are concerned about meeting the needs of these smaller and less well capitalized farmers and we are designing programs specifically aimed at them.

As we consider extension's mission to reach commercial farmers, two questions come to mind:

1. What are some of the more significant needs of intelligent commercial farmers?

2. What is the situation today in which they seek information?

Significant Needs of Commercial Farmers

Without trying to recount all of their needs, a few seem to be increasingly important.

1. Each individual farmer needs specialized knowledge tailored to his specific type of farming. This information might draw upon a wide range of subject matter, and get into such fine points as choosing the best alternative from among several good practices. There may also be problems of fitting technology into mutually supporting systems. Capital requirements and risk considerations also play an increasingly important role.

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2. Although commercial farmers have already exhibited considerable business competence, they increasingly need to have an excellent understanding of executive management and decision making principles and how to handle data and decision-making tools and techniques. These needs seem to have special implications for the extension service.

3. Commercial farmers need to understand the agricultural industry as a whole and the relation of the industry to the general economy. Especially must they understand what is going on in related industries, both in markets and services, and constantly assess the meaning of these developments in general economic terms and as they effect their industry.

4. They need data from the firm itself on which to base decisions. They need more cost accounting so they can use input-output data to make decisions. Lack of this data seriously hampers the whole decision making process. This area is poorly developed in the midwest.

5. They apparently need more study on the relevant ways to price and move products to the consumer. It seems that some of these farmers may not display Adam Smith buttons as prominently as they once did, and that they want to study and explore some adaptations of the present system to be sure it is the best one. I'm not saying that this group believes they do not have the best system, but younger men coming into the industry want to think it through again and try all relevant approaches that might improve it. This is a great educational challenge to extension.

6. These commercial farmers need to understand essentially all there is to know that affect their operation. They are willing to study nutrition, physiology, and reproduction in a basic as well as in an applied sense. These needs add increasingly higher levels to the Extension educational program and permit new methods to be used.

**Relevant Changes in the Educational Climate**

A few things stand out when we assess the climate in which extension will be carrying out its programs toward this group in the future.

1. The increasing capability of this group to learn through independent reading and study, and to apply this knowledge.

2. The increasing use by industry of an educational approach to sales and service and the associated increase in agriculturally trained personnel being employed. This will permit extension to reduce its efforts in certain fields and to move still further in its unique role.
3. The significant increase in government aid to education that Congress has passed or is considering and the associated growth in extension work by other institutions and other parts of the land-grant university that is likely to result. This is an exciting development that will permit the land-grant universities to develop more fully in other parts of their institutions the same concept as historically has been confined to agriculture and home economics.

4. The growth in number of educational institutions in the various states as they try to meet more diverse educational needs and more students. I refer not only to higher education centers, but to technical, vocational, and junior colleges as well. These developments give local people easy access to many types of information.

5. The changing character and location of research. It appears likely that experiment stations in the future will conduct less research of an immediate problem solving character. This has implications for extension in many ways. We will probably define as extension some types of work historically defined as research, and extension will have to search still more widely to discover reliable knowledge for its program.

These things show that extension is operating in a very dynamic situation, and that many forces are at work that have a bearing on its mission and the ways to perform it. This means that extension must continue to seek its unique role. As extension stopped culling chickens when others were able to do it, so it must continue its philosophy of helping others to develop the skills and techniques and services that modern farming needs today. While it must continue its interest in action, it should continually pull back toward its educational mission as others become capable of fulfilling the action roles that Extension perhaps found it necessary to pioneer.

The extension service is a unique United States invention, and it still brings many unique capabilities to its mission. I see them as:

1. Experience in the use of informal education methods which include techniques not simply to impart knowledge, but also to encourage its application.

2. A field staff in each county and a state staff at the university that is more highly educated than at any previous time in history.

3. Access to reservoirs of knowledge at the university and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

4. Support from and liaison with agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. This places extension in a critical role with respect to working with counties in planning for community betterment.

5. A local program development process that maintains flexibility and gives priority to pressing local problems.

6. A reputation as a reliable and objective source of information.

7. A scope of concern that is broad enough to treat the farm as a unit plus
the relevant aspects of its setting. This fact is increasingly important as sources of information become more fragmented.

**The Mission of Cooperative Extension as it Relates to Commercial Farmers**

If these are reasonable assumptions about some outstanding commercial farmer needs and the climate in which we operate, and if this is a reasonable assessment of extension's unique capabilities to contribute, what then should extension be doing to meet the emerging needs? That is, can we be more definite about its mission? How does this unique "education for action" role find expression in the changing situation? I have expressed the philosophy that while extension is interested in changes and willing to provide some services to help bring them about, it should help other sources develop these services so that it can move on to other things. Extension's role with farmers relates directly to these unique organization and function factors. Ultimately, the unique role rests in, (1) its objective posture, (2) its coordinating capabilities, and, (3) its role as an adult education agency at the university level that conducts educational programs in depth over a wide range of subject matter.

A relevant question that relates to extension's mission with commercial farmers seems to be, "What do such farmers need to know to make their own decisions, as contrasted with what they should look to others for?" I have stated that commercial farmers are highly motivated to learn. The question is where their limited time for this function can be placed. We try to deal with this question in the program planning process. Obviously, it is a highly personal matter. For example, should a farmer try to know all he needs to know to select his own fertilization program, or should he in the future simply buy this service from a group of experts? Those who argue this point say that the human body is so complicated that the normal individual cannot know enough to administer its needs. Therefore, we must rely on experts for diagnosis and treatment.

Some argue that we are reaching this point in certain phases of commercial farming. Whether you accept this point of view or not, we must plan information to meet the various needs of farmers. What kinds of information enough commercial farmers what to know so that extension can afford to direct a program toward meeting their needs? Is the importance increasing of different types of decisions such as those relating to financing? Which types of information are least available from other sources?

An associated problem, as extension considers its mission, is what it is doing today that service industries can acceptably perform in the future. For example, Illinois recently stopped its regular soil lab supervising service on the basis that extension will work with any laboratory to maintain quality control, but that its educational interest begins after the test is made. We believe that adequate soil testing facilities exist in our state. Farm accounting may be a likely candidate for similar treatment by many universities in the near future.
In order to discuss methods and organization and staff roles, I must make some assumptions about the extension mission in light of all these situations. I would like to suggest eight significant needs with which extension must continue to concern itself. All of these relate to the commercial farmer and the setting in which he lives and operates.

1. Commercial producers need a top job of education, including emphasis on buying and selling problems. Local extension councils are asking for more programs in grain and livestock marketing. The demand for technical production information is also increasing. Farm advisers in our state report more traffic in their offices than ever before.

2. Younger families, especially, need a strong program in management and decision making. This seems to be a unique role of extension.

3. Communities need a resource development program to help them work toward economic growth and civic improvement and to coordinate the services of various levels of government and other service organizations. This is important to commercial farmers.

4. People need expanded programs in public affairs to help them understand the economic and social climate in which they live and the issues which affect them. This must involve programs aimed at increasing economic literacy.

5. Families need a program in living that deals with their urgent concerns. Such a program will adapt family-living and home economies subject matter to the needs of families at various economic and social levels. Work in urban counties should be oriented to those important local problems that Cooperative Extension is capable of handling. For the wives of commercial farmers the program must go beyond the traditional programs in foods, clothing, etc.

6. Young people need continued strong emphasis on 4-H and other extension youth programs that emphasize both "learning by doing" projects and the development of skills and knowledge necessary to cope with modern problems in living and earning a living.

7. Farmers need an effective program with agriculture beyond the farm, including both the service and marketing industries. This is an important role both in reaching farmers through these groups and performing extension's continuing education mission.

8. Extension needs to represent the university in non-metropolitan communities to give them more access to the resources of the land-grant system.
Educational Methods

Earlier sections have given several clues to changes in program methods that are rapidly occurring in extension and seem unquestionably in the right direction. Several are significant.

1. Audience stratification. Cooperative extension can no longer work with farmers as a group on technical and business problems. Extension needs to sort out the more intelligent farmers and teach at their level. There must be more information at higher levels for them.

2. Intensity and depth of teaching. Farm operators today are willing to spend more time at learning if the information relates specifically to their needs and interests. This de-emphasizes recommendations and puts more emphasis on "why," so that farmers may be able to judge the relevancy of the information and the objectivity of the sources. This creates more formal extension programs with commercial farmers.

3. Packaging information to fit types of farming. This development is both possible and essential. Traditional subject matter-oriented programs are changing to client-oriented programs. Such changes require departmental information pre-packaging and coordination to fit the extension program. We foresee continued similar emphasis in future extension programs, especially those designed to reach the more commercialized farmers.

4. Increase in industry people providing technical service. One of the most dramatic developments in recent years has been the increase in numbers of industry people who are technically competent and whose job is to promote sales by providing technical service along with the product. Sometimes these people are not directly associated with sales, but the company tries to differentiate its product by offering this technical service. These men offer additional education to farmers and make it possible for extension to move continually toward more basic education. These people have added a significant dimension to extension's educational program. That is, cooperative extension now holds many types of educational programs for these representatives themselves, helping them to keep up-to-date on experiment station research and to continue their professional education. This seems to be in Extension's interest to do an effective job and perform most efficiently.

In Illinois we look upon these industry representatives as volunteer professors and welcome them as additional Extension workers. Commercial farmers in the state seem willing for us to work closely with them as long as we stay available as a point of reference. We have been surprised, because we assumed that the work of these many agricultural representatives would result in fewer calls at our offices for specific answers to questions. However, the opposite has occurred. More people are coming into the offices for such information than at any previous time. Apparently farmers look to extension as a place where they can reduce the confusion that at times results from many different sources of information.
5. New educational methods. Extension is able today to use new methods in carefully designed educational programs. One example includes new developments in the mass media. The Tele-lecture system makes it possible for us to tap people on the campus that we could never involve in our programs otherwise. We are able to use educational TV networks to add lectures to county programs as a substitute for personal appearances with appropriate follow-up on the part of the county staff. We have been experimenting in our state with developing learning kits as our approach to self-instruction in which the individual can have audio-visual aids and study materials in the kit which permit him to go as fast and as far as he wishes in independent learning. We are also experimenting with further use of direct mail with these new audiences.

Implications for Staff Roles and Structure

The County Office.

In the discussion of county extension office missions, a suggestion was made that the county office act as liaison between the community and the university. This will occur in varying degrees as the university determines. It would seem a reasonable prediction, however, that this role will increase as other schools and colleges of the land-grant university increase their educational efforts with partial support from federal funds. It seems unlikely that more than one system of field offices will be developed. It would appear to be a good bet that the cooperative extension field offices, or at least some of them, will need to assume this role of liaison between the university and the community in many states. Current trends seem to indicate this.

It also seems relevant, however, that it might not be necessary or wise to make a university center of each county office, because the more formal character of the university programs other than those of the Cooperative Extension Service may make it possible and even more efficient to perform this liaison role on a multi-county basis. Obviously, there would need to be more flexibility in staffing and there are implications for organizational structure. It is likely that these issues will need to be faced.

Staff Specialization in Multi-County Unit

This development, if it occurs, may tie in nicely with another trend that seems to be taking place within cooperative extension. I refer to the development of programs and staff specialization within a predetermined multi-county unit. I firmly believe that each county extension staff member should maintain a long suit in addition to his generalist's role. Added education is making this possible. Extension's program scope presently places stress on a single agent in a small county to keep on top of all relevant developments, to provide program leadership in the community, and to be knowledgeable enough for the specialized producers. New developments in community planning, including such areas as economic opportunity, where local community action is required before communities can participate adds to the stress. Agents also are
expected to perform many specialized roles in addition to teaching subject matter. Examples are organization and coordination of program and personnel, community development, and 4-H Club work.

It seems increasingly clear that cooperative extension is not going to be able to place in each county the size of staff to permit the specialization required to carry on a completely effective program. This all seems to forecast some sort of multi-county structure for the extension service. County offices would probably be maintained in such a multi-county structure, but staff specialization would be provided. In plan of work processes, the county units would first consider needs, and then multi-county programs would be developed where the job could be done more effectively on that basis. County personnel would carry specialized assignments and would take leadership in each major phase of the program throughout the multi-county area.

Some such model seems to fit in very well with the overall setting and needs today. Several similar experiments around the country seem to be working well. We will probably see this develop more rapidly as its potential becomes better understood. Various types of state and federal governmental program that require action on an area basis will hasten the development of this approach.

Since the field staff is by far the largest resource available to the extension service, it must be utilized to its potential. As more Extension field staff members complete their master's degrees, they become capable of teaching in their own right and will find their work most rewarding and their status enhanced by so doing.

State Extension Staff

State Extension staff members are also interested in this development. Since they generally have completed advanced educational programs, they are most interested in teaching at higher program levels. Too, as research becomes more basic, extension specialists need to be close to or a part of applied research. And, increasing work with industry places more demand on the specialist staff for continuing education that requires their participation. Increasing specialization at the local level makes state specialists more effective because they can then develop larger, more specialized programs.

Setting Priorities

We sometimes see questions raised in the press about extension's present capabilities to meet the needs of commercial farmers. In such a rapidly changing situation, the organization may lag in institutional adjustment, and secondly, the public may lag in recognizing the adjustment once it takes place. I suggest that we are experiencing the second lag at the present time, because I am convinced that extension was never stronger nor more respected by local people than it is today, including the more sophisticated phases of agriculture.
As the public becomes more diverse and the subject matter more complex, Extension must carefully develop programs with determined priorities, and this needs to continue as a fundamental extension principle. Extension directors, however, have to allocate resources because it has too many things to do and too few resources. It is clear that today we cannot give the public everything it wants. To try to do so would scatter the shots too widely and place too much strain on the organization. We must direct the extension program at significant needs of people. We need to limit our efforts so that we can do a quality job. The trend seems clear that cooperative Extension will continue to be interested in action and the service needed to get action when such service is not available. But at the same time, Extension will constantly seek to play its unique role as a part of an institution of higher education, and will make still greater use of formal teaching methods. The future seems to promise more specialization, more delineation of staff roles, more multi-county structures, more educational work with industry, a broader program scope, and many exciting developments in both program and audience.