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The transition: The issues food and fiber needed by our nations. The changes in climatic patterns could cause potential for good management of soil and water resources. The financial resources and the cooperation of natural resource managers are critical issues confronting resource managers throughout North America and the 21st century. Economic and environmental concerns have already stimulated major water shortages in important North American food production centers. This highlights the need for water resources under low-input agricultural systems is bright but not automatic. Natural resource managers must keep a keen eye on the development and population growth and people concentrating in small geographical areas, the demand for water resources will continue to mount. As the per capita use of water in North America increases, our standard of living becomes more and more dependent upon an abundant resource manager's time and attention. Both food and fiber will demand much of the resource manager's time and attention. Both the natural resources in these areas. Achievements for conservationists and fund the proper management of natural resources in a way necessary to help with the cost of conserving these resources forever. The conservation community must combine forces and agree upon goals and objectives. Only with this kind of joint effort can the conservation professional and convincing the community hope to influence and convince leaders and legislators to amply and support the conservation provisions. The conservation community must help with the cost of conserving these resources.
Extension: Better and cheaper!

I had a chance to read the Peter Nowak article, "Information and Education: Demand versus Supply," in the January-February 1988 issue of the JSWC [pp. 51-53]. As an Extension faculty person working at ground zero, I would report that the article is generally right on target, though maybe not blunt enough for some to understand.

Extension's sister agencies at the federal and state levels, as well as some Extension administrators, do not understand the effect of multiple funding sources and assignments on what is delivered at the county level (ground zero). Each entity contributing to the fund makes its own demands on Extension staff time. Each wants to provide its own special guidance to Extension activities to the general exclusion of the others. And let's not forget that each individual who comes in the door feels that his or her problem is far more important than all those previously mentioned.

Generally, it is harder and more expensive in the short term to teach than to preach. However, the bureaucracies find it easier to preach from a technical guide, perceived to be written in stone, than to help and work with their Extension colleagues to educate toward change. All those angry faces across the counter are not getting the message across. Even those looking at those angry faces sometimes miss the message.

Extension educational activities have historically dealt with production and, in recent years, with marketing and financial management because people have wanted information on subjects that relate to income. Moreover, that is where the money is to support educational efforts. After all, most county and state Extension offices are scratching to find a way to keep the door open and pay the secretary enough so she [or he] will stay.

Let me pose an example. If the county Extension Council thinks a demonstration of high-residue tillage systems would help local farmers improve their income, provide conservation education, and show off some of the information available from the university, where do you suppose the land, equipment, and inputs come from to support the project? The vast majority comes from private business. Should one of the aforementioned groups provide a few pennies, it would ask for an extensive proposal, a ream of reports and half the credit. The private company, on the other hand, would ask for a place to stick a sign and maybe for one copy of the newsletter or of the same report you send to the rest of the sponsors and hand out at winter meetings. A quarter-million-dollar demonstration, and the person that provides the least wants the most.

Extension does not have a problem delivering information and education activities; it has a problem with funding. If someone comes up with the money to support an educational effort on conservation or any other issue, Extension can do it. If people want reports, they should ask for something simple. Most Extension folks would be glad to help out and probably wouldn't ask for much credit, but let's be patient. You can't provide educational activities for adults without serious preparation. The whole issue gets down to looking out for the folks and one another. All the agency heads and subordinates give lip service to cooperation, but I won't believe it until I see one divide the pie for the other's benefit. Extension's slice of the pie is becoming microscopic at all levels. Soon, unless they change their methods, our sister agencies will be left all alone to face those angry faces across the counter by themselves.

Extension in the past has always helped other agencies for free. The words "for more information, contact your local Extension Center (or county agent)" were freely spread by all. But all the freebees are gone. We are still willing and can help, but someone else will have to finance the project. But, in the long run, I bet we can do it cheaper.

Gary D. Hoette
University Extension
Montgomery City, Missouri

A response!

You are right, Gary, I wasn't blunt enough. However, your letter certainly sharpened the issues. Based on my experience in working at the local, state, and national levels, I agree with you fully. In particular, many representatives of other U.S. Department of Agriculture agencies and conservation groups do not understand how Extension works. We are not a line agency, nor do we preach. In cutting the pie, we attempt to juggle while juggling the demands coming from local, state, and national sources. Further, Extension's teaching must be based on sound research, not predicated on prevailing political winds.

When your letter discussed funding, however, you really went to the core of the issue I avoided. I do not have to tell you about the significant increase in workload the 1985 Food Security Act has placed on Extension. Nor do I have to tell you about the major budget cuts Extension has taken in the last few years. My naive assumption when preparing the "demand versus supply" paper was that the forthcoming agreement between SCS [Soil Conservation Service] and Extension would transfer needed dollars so Extension could meet this demand. As you noted in your letter, interagency coordination receives a lot of lip service, but stops when it comes to cutting the pie differently. This has certainly been the case relative to the SCS-CES agreement. It has proven to be a sham and political smoke screen. Other than the joint SCS-Extension project in Illinois, I have only heard of $2,000 or $3,000 being transferred to Extension in other states. This is out of the more than $60 million SCS has received in supplemental appropriations over the last couple of fiscal years. When your letter discussed funding, however, from continuing to plead with the U.S. Congress on how the SCS is still short of funds. Little or nothing has been said about the severe budget problems faced by Extension. Between 100 and 200 conservation technicians have or will shortly be added here in Wisconsin with SCS funds. At the same time, our Extension conservation specialists are operating with one-third of the work force they had several years ago. This has not stopped SCS from pointing the finger at us and saying, "It's your responsibility under the 1985 farm bill." Frustration is an understatement relative to this situation.
The real tragedy is just around the corner. Drawing up conservation plans is one thing, but implementing them in an economically and agronomically sound fashion is quite another. There are going to be many land users around 1990 who are going to be turning to Extension. What may be sound plans according to the local technical guide will prove to be unworkable due to marketing, machinery, labor, or numerous other factors that were not included in the original design. Extension expertise could have been brought to bear in this process, but our role has been largely limited to preaching public relations and organized meetings. A very poor use of our expertise and limited resources. We should have been actively involved at the beginning. Only a limited emergency response will be available come 1990. The land user is the one who will be hurt as an outcome of these poor decisions regarding funding of Food Security Act responsibilities.

Unfortunately, this Food Security Act implementation fiasco is only the beginning. Funds for getting land users to adopt best management practices to address water quality concerns are already being funneled away from a teaching role to this great author, it seems appropriate that he be memorialized as well on the pages of a soil conservation magazine by quoting his poignant description of the ravages of soil erosion: “The great red hills stand desolate, and the earth has torn away like flesh. The lightning flashes over them, the clouds pour down upon them, the dead streams come to life, full of the red blood of the earth. Down in the valleys women scratch the soil that is left, and the maize hardly reaches the height of a man. They are valleys of old men and old women, of mothers and children. The men are away, the young men and the girls are away. The soil cannot keep them any more.”

William Lockeretz
Tufts University
Medford, Massachusetts

Plaudits for a watershed project

John Eckes, state conservationist in Illinois, should be lauded for moving the Illinois soil conservation effort in a bold, new direction [JSWSC, January-February 1988, pp. 47-48]. It certainly makes sense to plan for water and soil on the basis of the hydrologic unit.

This approach is far superior to the seemingly haphazard approach used in most places where water quality needs are addressed on a case-by-case basis, if at all. It also makes sense to bring people together within a hydrologic unit to plan how best to protect soil and water as opposed to working solely with individuals in scattered places.

One would hope the approach would be enthusiastically endorsed nationally.

Marilyn D. Lundberg
Minnesota Environmental Quality Board
St. Paul, Minnesota
BOOKS, ETC.

Agriculture


General


Land Use


Water

