

## *The Area Specialist Position*

**The future of area specialists depends upon  
the degree to which they become involved  
in meaningful programs**

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THE POSITION of area specialist is relatively new in the Cooperative Extension Service. It has been added to meet the increasing demands for technological assistance to county staffs and clientele. In arriving at decisions as to how a new position will be integrated into an established organization two considerations are paramount: (1) what the new employee will do; and (2) what his relationships will be with other positions in the organization. An exploratory study was undertaken to identify the important duties that might be performed by the area specialist and the relationships associated with the position.<sup>1</sup> This article deals with the findings of that study.

Since very little had been written about the area specialist, a rationale was developed for the position and a job description written from the rationale. A mailed questionnaire was used to see if the description fit the job as being practiced by area specialists in three states and if the job description was acceptable to such specialists and county agents.

The reasons for employing area specialists were considered in developing the rationale. In a 1962 survey of Extension Directors from the 50 states and Puerto Rico,<sup>2</sup> the following reasons were identified for employing area Extension workers: (1) to provide organizational and educational leadership in new or specialized pro-

<sup>1</sup> See Frank S. Zettle, "The Generic Job Description of the Extension Area Specialist" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1964). This study was conducted as part of the research program of the National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study and was financed in part by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Robert S. Dotson, Fred P. Frutche, and Ralph E. Groening, "County Extension Organization and Financing Procedures—Summary of Study" (Washington, D.C.: Federal Extension Service, 1962), pp. 39-40.

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grams; (2) to provide greater depth in teaching; (3) to provide competence not available in the county staff; (4) to provide opportunity for specialized staff to meet with program planning groups; (5) to provide greater individual consultation with clientele; and (6) to provide an opportunity to work on a larger geographic basis.

Analysis of the foregoing reasons points to duties involving technical competency beyond that held by the county staff, assistance with the planning process, providing organizational and educational leadership in a subject-matter field, and teaching of clientele. However, of the 25 reasons given by Extension administrators for employing area specialists, not one reason pertained to teaching county staff. This points out an important difference between the work of area and state specialists. Studies by Harvey<sup>3</sup> and Scheneman<sup>4</sup> rated teaching county staff members technical subject matter at the top of the list. Thus the state specialist is seen primarily as a teacher of county staff members.

Extension administrators also saw the possibility of developing programs on an area basis through the employment of area specialists. In discussing adjustments that Extension must make, James and Ackerman<sup>5</sup> indicate greater need for specialization and area programming. However, Extension's total resources and policies are geared to support county programs—and local financing is based on county units. Laws in many states prohibit the use of monies appropriated by the county unit to be used in support of area programs. Regardless of the many problems, there are Extension leaders who feel the transition must be made. How long this transition period will take and what final organizational structure and programming units will evolve is mere conjecture. Therefore, it is necessary to develop an organizational structure and a programming procedure that will permit the Cooperative Extension Service to program effectively on both the county and area basis.

An important question is how the area specialist fits into the organizational structure and what his working relationships to other staff members may be. Motsenbocker<sup>6</sup> says the Extension area

<sup>3</sup> John Jackson Harvey, "A Comparative Analysis of the Functions of Specialists in the Cooperative Extension Service, by Broad Subject Areas" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> Carl N. Scheneman, "The Functions and Procedures of Subject-Matter Specialists in the Missouri Cooperative Extension Service" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1959).

<sup>5</sup> H. Brooks James and Joseph Ackerman, "Changes in Education to Meet Agricultural and Rural Adjustments," *Adjustments in Agriculture: A National Base Book*, (ed.) Carlton F. Christian (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961), p. 364.

<sup>6</sup> E. E. Motsenbocker, "The Inter-County Agent, a New Kind of Cooperative Extension Worker" (unpublished M.S. thesis, Michigan State University, 1961).

specialist fits "somewhere between the level of the county Extension agent and the subject-matter specialist."

The county agent or some other designated county staff member is responsible for the county Extension program and should have authority to direct it and determine how the work of the area specialist should be incorporated. One could look at the activities of the area specialist as an extension of the county agent—he is doing work the county agent would do if he had the time and the specialized knowledge. Working in this manner the area specialist would be a staff assistant to the county agent.

A different relationship exists when an area program is considered. In most states a supervisor is responsible for programs and personnel in an area. Since the area specialist is assigned to the area, it would seem logical that he would be responsible to the area supervisor. With programs carried out on an area basis, the area specialist would function in a line administrative relationship to the supervisor. The area specialist would have responsibility within his subject-matter field for program development on an area basis and be held accountable to the supervisor for program planning, execution, and evaluation.

There appears to be two valid reasons for an area as well as a county program. In recent years, Extension has taken a new look at its objectives and responsibilities. The Scope Report<sup>7</sup> and the Rural Areas Development Program identify broad objectives which many Extension administrators feel can be more effectively reached through area programs. Secondly, there are highly specialized types of farming in an area with perhaps only a few units in each county. Because of limited time and resources, the county agent may not feel justified in developing a program in this field. Horticulture, mink raising, and farm recreation might be characteristic of this group.

#### JOB DESCRIPTION

In an American Management Association study it was found that the typical job description is divided into three or four major sections, generally bearing headings such as function, duties and/or responsibilities, authority, and relationships.<sup>8</sup> Since the area specialist will not be directing or supervising other staff, a section on

<sup>7</sup> Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, *The Cooperative Extension Service Today: A Statement of Scope and Responsibility* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958).

<sup>8</sup> C. L. Bennet, *Defining the Manager's Job*, Research Study No. 33 (New York: American Management Association, Inc., 1958), p. 121.

authority was not included. A section on qualifications was. A job description was written and developed into a questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to Iowa, Michigan, and Kentucky and involved all specialists serving in an area of 12 counties or less and the county agents they worked with. The same questionnaire was sent to Extension personnel men in 12 states. The analysis included responses from 27 area specialists, 125 county agents, and 10 personnel men.

### *Duties and Responsibilities*

The following 21 duties were considered as possible parts of the job of the area specialist:

1. Carries on applied research in his subject-matter field.
2. Reports needs for research to his subject-matter department.
3. Assists county planning groups in planning a county Extension program.
4. Cooperates with planning committees within firms, groups, organizations, and agencies in his assigned area by providing technical knowledge needed for effective planning.
5. Helps planning committees state realistic educational objectives in his subject-matter field.
6. Plans educational projects on an area-wide basis in addition to work with county programs.
7. Independently recruits lay leaders necessary to carry out area projects.
8. Independently organizes area planning committees to plan for area projects.
9. Assists Extension committees in planning area projects.
10. Carries out educational projects on an area-wide basis in addition to work with county programs.
11. Prepares an annual plan of work.
12. Keeps county staff informed of the latest developments in his subject-matter field.
13. Helps county staff members understand how his services can contribute to a broader and more comprehensive program.
14. Teaches county personnel subject matter in his specialty.
15. Teaches clientele subject matter in his specialty.
16. Prepares news, radio, and television releases relating to his specialized field for use by county staff members.
17. Prepares teaching materials relating to this specialized field for use by county staff members.

18. Keeps his subject-matter department and supervisor informed of resources needed to carry on an effective educational program.
19. Assists with state Extension educational programs relating to his subject-matter specialty.
20. Cooperates with other area Extension programs.
21. Initiates effective procedures for the evaluation of the work of the area specialist.

Responses to the 21 duties by area specialists and county agents with whom they work are shown in Table 1. A relatively high per cent of both agents and area specialists indicated that area specialists *do* and *should* perform all the 21 duties except two. These two duties deal with independent work within the county: duty 7, inde-

Table 1. Per cent of county agent and area specialist respondents indicating duties and responsibilities that are being done and should be done.

Duties and responsibilities*	Being done		Should be done	
	County agent	Area specialist	County agent	Area specialist
1. Carries on applied research	65	52	73	74
2. Reports needs for research	96	88	100	100
3. Assists county planning groups	73	65	94	81
4. Cooperates with planning committees	88	89	98	100
5. Helps planning committees state objectives	66	82	98	100
6. Plans projects on area-wide basis	82	81	98	96
7. Independently recruits lay leaders	17	31	22	38
8. Independently organizes area planning committees	9	38	9	46
9. Assists committees in planning area projects	79	82	98	100
10. Carries out projects on area-wide basis	87	88	97	96
11. Prepares annual plans of work	82	82	94	93
12. Keeps county staff informed of developments	77	93	99	96
13. Helps county staff understand contribution of services	78	96	98	96
14. Teaches county personnel subject matter	83	81	98	96
15. Teaches clientele subject matter	96	96	99	100
16. Prepares news, radio, and TV releases	63	59	93	81
17. Prepares teaching material for county staff	64	67	98	89
18. Keeps department and supervisor informed of needs	95	96	100	96
19. Assists with state program in specialty	96	85	98	96
20. Cooperates with other area programs	88	100	99	100
21. Initiates procedures for evaluating work	50	52	92	85

\* In abbreviated form. See text for elaboration.

pendent recruitment of lay leaders for area projects and duty 8, independent organization of planning committees to plan area projects. Even though the per cent was low, a substantially higher proportion of area specialists than county agents indicated that these two duties are being and *should be* performed.

It is interesting to note other duties in which substantial differences occurred. Except for four, a comparable per cent of both groups responded affirmatively as to duties that should be performed. In each of these four cases a larger per cent of county agents than area specialists indicated the duty should be performed. These include duty 3, assist county groups in planning county programs; duty 16, prepare news, radio, and TV releases for use of county staff; duty 17, prepare teaching material for county staff; and duty 21, initiate procedures for evaluating his work. Each of these focus largely on assisting county staffs with responsibilities that are primarily theirs.

In terms of what is being done, a larger per cent of county agents answered affirmatively to four duties, each of which relate to duties that are broad in scope: duty 1, carry on applied research in subject-matter field; duty 2, report needed research to subject-matter department; duty 3, assist planning groups with county program; and duty 19, assist with state programs relating to specialty. A higher per cent of area specialists than county agents rated themselves as performing four duties that are fairly specific to the local situation: duty 5, help planning committee state realistic objectives in the specialist's subject-matter field; duty 12, keep county staff informed of developments in the specialist's field; duty 13, help county staff understand how specialist's service can contribute to a broader and more comprehensive program; and duty 20, cooperate with other area Extension programs.

#### *Administrative Relationships*

Area specialists and county agents were asked to identify the positions responsible for nine administrative relationships. Although respondents did not agree on who supervises the area specialist, the largest number responding to a single relationship recognized the need for both technical and administrative supervision. Thirty-eight of 118 county agents and 9 of 27 area specialists said that the area specialist is supervised for job performance by both the subject-matter department and area supervisor. There was not consensus among positions or states on the question "To whom is the area specialist responsible for technological proficiency?" Fifty-

three of 121 county agents and 8 of 26 area specialists named the subject-matter department. (More respondents named the subject-matter department than any other position or combination of positions.)

The combination of state specialists and subject-matter departments was most often named as providing area specialist in-service training in technical subject matter. There was not much agreement or understanding as to responsibility for job appraisal or promotion. Most positions or combinations on the state level were named. However, the combination of the subject-matter department and area supervisor was most often named.

There was high consensus among respondents as to whom the area specialist and county agent look for resolving problems between them. Over 75 per cent identified the area supervisor. However, there was considerable disagreement as to who decides whether the area specialist takes part in an educational project in the county program. The combination of county agent and area specialist was named most often; however, 77 per cent of the respondents named other or combination of other positions.

Respondents were far from unanimous on either how the relationships of the area specialists exists in the organization or how they should exist. This difference in the understanding of relationships was found to be due to a difference between individual respondents rather than a difference between states, positions, or individual area specialist/county agent groups.

### *Primary Function*

Seventy-nine per cent of all respondents said that the primary function of the area specialist was to teach both clientele and county staff members subject matter in his specialty. A majority of county agents and area specialists said that area specialist activities are a combination of (1) some planned and executed as a part of each county program and (2) others planned and executed independent of the county program.

### SUMMARY

This study concerned some of the important administrative relationships and job tasks that should be considered in establishing the position of area specialist. Several important decisions will need to be made if the incumbent in such a position is to function effectively. It will be necessary to determine the extent to which the

positions will be associated with the subject-matter department. Means of supervising and coordinating the activities of the area specialist and county agent will need to be specified. Probably having the organizational and administrative relationships defined and understood is more important than the specific way relationships exist. (A clear understanding of relationships did not exist in the three states surveyed.) Lack of understanding is a potential source of trouble.

Another important decision is whether the area specialist is expected to have an area program or only to support existing county programs. If he is to have an area program, this must be defined, understood, and accepted. Other important problems associated with county relationships include (1) what the relationship of the area specialist should be to lay committees supporting the county program, (2) how local finances can be obtained and used for the area specialist program, and (3) what changes need to be made in laws regulating the use of county appropriated funds.

The job of the county agent and state specialist has changed with the addition of the area specialist. What is the future role of the county agent and state specialist in the Extension organization? The future of area specialists, it would seem, depends upon the degree to which they become involved in meaningful programs. What programming procedures are most appropriate for area programs? How are these programs developed and who is involved? There will be many problems in establishing this new position in the Extension organization.

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ALWAYS DREAM and shoot higher than you know you can do. Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.—WILLIAM FAULKNER.

MINDS are like parachutes—they only function when open.  
—SIR THOMAS DEWAR.

ANYBODY can become angry—that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not within everybody's power and is not easy.  
—ARISTOTLE.

THE PAST is a bucket of ashes, so live not in your yesterdays, nor just for tomorrow, but in the here and now. Keep moving and forget the post-mortems. And remember, no one can get the jump on the future.  
—CARL SANDBURG.