

## Points of View

### Dialogue with a County Agent

Maryville, Tennessee  
February 4, 1966

Dear G. L.:

I continue to receive a scholarly little publication every season with a red front (?) called the *Journal of Cooperative Extension*. I find some interesting and stimulating articles in it. It is an excellent publication, and you are doing a splendid job with it. I am happy to remember our fine working relationship as fellow Extension agents in Greene County, under some rather trying circumstances. But in the long run, I'm sure the experience was good for both of us.

To get back to the *Journal*, I have two suggestions (not criticisms) I might offer: (1) Keeping in mind the wide variation of people the publication is designed to serve, I would suggest at least one article in each issue designed to help Extension agents at the county level. Why? I have found that many agents with whom I have talked consider the *Journal* strictly "cloud nine" and do not read it because the articles are written in graduate-level language instead of layman-level language.

For status, dignity, and respectability, perhaps there is not much that can be done about this problem, because of the necessity to maintain certain standards.

Something can be done, however, about the second suggestion I would like to offer: (2) More articles on subjects of direct interest to the agents who must be in everyday contact with individuals, committees, and larger groups in the counties. I have in mind such articles as those of Sabrosky in Vol. I, No. 1; Mees, Vol. I, No. 2; Ballard, Vol. II, No. 4; VandeBerg, Vol. III, No. 2; and Lidster, Vol. III, No. 4.

One area I have specifically in mind is considerations of importance in

selecting members of the County Extension Agricultural Committee, or County Extension Council, as it is called in many states.

When I wrote my master's thesis on Extension Methods, I had a chapter on selecting the committee, but it had been deleted because of the lack of authoritative supporting evidence. My advisor stated at that time that I should submit this chapter to you for the *Journal*. I neglected doing so, but would be glad to up-date it now for your consideration if you are interested. Please let me know what you think.

C. H. Edwards  
County Agent

Madison, Wisconsin  
February 16, 1966

Dear Mr. Edwards:

Appreciate your comments regarding the *Journal*. We get too little reaction of this sort. Our purpose is to produce a publication of primary utility to county personnel. This is not easy! In the first place, most county personnel (and Extension personnel, for that matter) are not "schooled" in the language used by people who deal with the kind of topics that have been judged appropriate for the *Journal*—and that is a discredit to Extension personnel. Those who deal with such ideas are (or should be) concerned that they use language that can be understood (I'm agreeing with you at this point).

I try to distinguish between language that is technical of necessity (technical in order to be precise) and language filled with jargon for the purpose of sounding "learned." We deal with some of both and try to edit out, reduce, or simplify the latter category. We try to simplify the technical language to the extent we dare (and the author will permit) and still be precise enough to avoid complete ambiguity. No doubt you encountered this in your own

—especially. For example, what do we mean when you say "County Extension Council"? That, or a similar term, means something quite different in almost every state that has such a structure.

Now I'll differ with you a little, I suspect: I would suggest that those who criticize the *Journal* content for being a "cloud nine" are really saying that the language is on a different "cloud nine" than theirs. This could be illustrated, I believe, by recording some county agent's talk to a group of farmers or by examining some of the instructions a county agent mimeographs as a means of giving directions for calibrating a spray rig, for example; or better yet, have some county agent try to explain the Extension Service to someone who never heard of a county agent or the Extension Service. That's a very interesting exercise; I've tried it! Too often, most of us think of "everyday language" as being that which employs our own vocabulary. How technical "cloud nine" is the typical county agent's language as compared to the typical farmer's?

My argument is not to suggest that the problem you pose is not real—it is very real. But the solution may not be the entire responsibility of one side of the communication—in other words, it may not simply be a matter of the *Journal* employing the "typical" county agent vocabulary. It is intended to deal with content different from his agricultural technology.

In order to introduce some badly needed preciseness into the kind of Extension-related concerns dealt with in the *Journal*, it may be necessary for readers to acquaint themselves with some of the technical language used—especially if they are to deal effectively with the concerns that appear to be appropriate for the *Journal*.

I'm belaboring the point with the feeling that you are in position and will initiate this same kind of discussion with other county agents. What disturbs me is that some readers find one article they don't understand and discard not only that issue but the whole *Journal* idea as worthless—seemingly with the attitude that we should have

been able to start such a journal at the ultimate level of perfection.

The fact is, not only have we had a great deal to learn about producing usable material, we've had to discover people who have worthwhile information and who will try to get it into a form that will communicate to people unaccustomed to their vocabulary. (Many are not accustomed to doing so). Creating such a situation doesn't happen overnight. You can't be too demanding when the contributor prepares material gratis.

The very encouraging thing is that such people as yourself continue struggling with the *Journal*. Apparently most personnel in Tennessee have given up! However, in some states more than 80 per cent of Extension personnel are subscribing.

It would be helpful to get your reaction as to whether we have made any progress in kinds and manner of presentation of content since we started. Matter of fact, I would welcome your candid reaction to every issue forthcoming. We're starting (with the Spring issue) a letter-to-the-editor type feature in which we solicit appraisals of the content published or commentaries on other points pertinent to Extension personnel.

Regarding your paper on the selection of committees, we'd be glad to examine it. We typically have articles reviewed by several people. On the basis of their reviews and our own judgment, we reach a decision whether or not to publish. If the decision is to publish, we then work with and assist the author, in whatever way we can, to get the material in the best possible form for publication. Nothing would please me more than to publish an article by you. Send us 3 copies of your manuscript, typed, double spaced. Footnotes should be on separate page(s) at the end of the article (also double spaced).

G. L. CARTER, JR.  
Editor

Maryville, Tennessee  
June 20, 1966

Dear G. L.:

Surely the first thing I should do is

apologize for being so slow in answering your very kind letter of February 16, 1966. Has it really been that long! I want to apologize also for making you defend the *Journal* so stoutly.

Your defense was sound and strong and I liked it. It was, perhaps, a bit testy, but it need not have been. I believe you agree with me that the problem is one of communication. One can communicate with a mule if he can get his attention—and this may require a club; but a lump of sugar might get a more friendly response.

At any rate the *Journal's* communication problem is two-fold because two audiences are involved: those who write and those who supposedly are written for. These two groups seem to live and work in different worlds. Those who write appear to do so for others on the same level of communication as their own. The language sometimes seems technical, learned, and stiff.

On the other hand, county field workers are faced with piles of administrative mail, farm magazines, constant streams of mail from all forms of agricultural related industries, new technical publications, farm organization materials, appeals to recruit Peace Corps, Job Corps, and foreign agricultural workers, crop and market reports, questionnaires, surveys, constantly ringing telephones, office calls, farm visits, meetings day and night. We are asked to work with other government agencies and groups too numerous to list, to make speeches and to attend conferences; to research new problems each day, to conduct demonstrations, to write news, to conduct radio and TV programs, to sell government savings bonds, to—I could go on and on as you know.

Especially are we asked to set aside enough time for planning that we may have time for all these things. Then, we are advised to plan programs for years ahead designed to take up approximately 70 per cent of our time!

What I have written you already know. I write it to explain why one chafes at having to read, study, and re-read an article of great interest that could have been interpreted by one person so that it would require no more than 30 per cent of the time for many

of us to get the meaning of it.

Please don't interpret the foregoing to mean that I would change the *Journal*. I am trying to discover a basis for supplying an apparently missing link. I would not change the *Journal*, not yet.

Now, I think you would be interested in a survey taken by show of hands at the state conference of Tennessee Extension workers in June. Two questions were asked the group of men Extension workers by the NACAA vice-president for the Southern Region (R.A. Farmer, County Agent, Richmond County, Virginia): First, how many of you subscribe to the *Journal of Cooperative Extension*? The hands of about 25 per cent of the agents went up. The second question: Now, how many of you read it? It appeared that no more than half those who were subscribers raised their hands.

Not knowing that these questions would be asked, and being sincerely interested in the *Journal*, I had already made my own private survey. I found that, of those who subscribe, most were older agents. The younger agents were the most critical of it. Some of the newer agents did not know about the *Journal*.

G. L., I do not see how anyone could have done a better job with the *Journal* than you have done. What is needed, I think, is not to change the *Journal*, but to sell it in its present state.

Why not a letter to all Extension workers, subscribers and non-subscribers, presenting the purposes, the problems, and the goals of the *Journal*. There is much in the letter you wrote me that would be perfect for such a letter. Commercial publishers use the idea. Why not the *Journal*? From having worked with you I know that you are aware of the value of public relations.

Such a letter as I propose would start out simply by recognizing that we know how very busy county Extension workers are from having been on yourself, the everyday demands that seem to leave no time for professional improvement, how the *Journal* (even though some of it is necessarily technical) is designed to fill the gap.

I recognize that "it is not easy to produce a *Journal* of primary utility

county Extension personnel," and I don't covet your job! You can and are doing it. Getting it read is a job that requires wisdom and patience. Getting the *Journal* published is one-half the job; the other half is getting it read. I attended a leader training school in another county with 16 of my community leaders recently. The agents in that county had done a remarkably good job of preparing the subject matter for the meeting. But only three of their own leaders showed. It doesn't matter how good the teacher unless there are pupils.

When we want to know the needs of dairy farmers, or livestock producers, or tobacco growers, we make a survey. A survey concerning the *Journal* might be a project for a graduate student. Here, we already know the problems and needs of our clientele (or think we do) but often we get some real surprises when the returns come in.

Why do 80 per cent of the personnel in one state subscribe to the *Journal*, and only 15 per cent in another state? There must be considerable variance in emphasis or approaches in different states.

Another approach would be found in your suggestion (and I agree wholeheartedly) that it may be desirable for the *Journal* "readers to acquaint themselves with some of the technical language used—especially if they are to deal effectively with the concerns that have been identified as appropriate for the *Journal*." This is indeed a valid need. Might the *Journal* start a program of doing this acquainting? This could be done editorially, partly, but you have to tell them, and then tell them, and then tell them again." There could be a note with your editorial asking agents who do read the publication to call it to the attention of agents who have not found the *Journal* readable.

Lewis Dickson (Head, Extension Studies and Training, University of Tennessee) would, I think, welcome the suggestion of a class or two in Extension Methods courses on "the importance of technical language in the Extension profession." There could be an article on this subject. One could tie it down even more: Some technical language with which every Extension agent

should be acquainted. Dr. Dickson could write such articles; and it could be sent to every Extension Methods teaching department in the country. Teachers could recommend regular reading of the *Journal* to become familiar with the use of technical Extension language.

C. H. Edwards  
County Agent

### Characteristics of Change

It is apparent to all that change will occur; that it is inevitable simply because of the nature of our environment; and that tomorrow will be different from today. It is equally apparent that agricultural adjustments will occur and effect many changes—particularly in relation to food, people, time, soil, weather, and geographic area. There are, however, certain fundamentals of change which—although constantly applicable—will vary in the degree in which they apply.

Change can be divided into two categories: planned and unplanned (the latter being the result of chance and natural laws affecting man and the universe, hence, highly unpredictable). Planned change on the other hand is manmade and somewhat predictable, since it can be described in advance to some degree; yet, the element of change when deliberately instituted must meet certain fundamental requirements to be effective. First, there must be understanding by the recipient to the degree that activation of the modifier will produce positive results. The best change program ever devised will not be a success until it actually effects the alteration for which it is designed. Secondly, there must be a real and recognized need or place for the proposed modification. Change, purely and simply for the sake of change, is useless, costly, misleading, and a deterrent to real progress. This type has no place in an educational endeavor which is economic by its very nature, in spite of its high value for research purposes. Thirdly, there must be vigorous and detailed implementation of a proposed change program. This requires thorough knowledge in depth regarding subject matter and the confidence of

people. Coupled with these attributes must be the capability to get the information to its ultimate recipient in forms and methods which will result in comprehension, activation, and adoption.

Agricultural patterns of contiguous areas will vary and each area will offer distinct peculiarities of its own; thus, it is essential that any plan purposely begun to effect a change must keep these facts in mind. To assume that a planned change will affect all geographic areas in a similar manner is only to lead one's self to erroneous conclusions and unfruitful actions.

An important component in inducing change within a contiguous area — perhaps the major component — is solid evidence of successful performance. When a grower of whatsoever bent can physically see and handle an improved cantaloupe, or see a new type of bean which can add to his income, or see a more economical method of harvesting cucumbers, then he is more easily convinced that a change for him in his farming methods may be profitable. This is true because he knows that the evidence is real, and he is able to cope with it and to evaluate it in the light of his current physical resources and intellectual capabilities. When this evidence is the result of an accomplishment on a grower's farm which is in close proximity to his own, the validity of the reasons for change become increasingly pertinent and effective. Contrariwise, if an attempt to demonstrate a change-factor results in failure from any cause, not only does this failure affect the change program negatively in that single incident but also future programs even though they might be successful. The results of this negative effect decrease with time, however, and a positive effort is not too long delayed.

Another component relating to agricultural change is that lasting successes are not achieved unless the method or instrument of change is in harmony

with the true nature of things. All too often this facet is overlooked by those persons who would propose and initiate another method or launch a new idea. They forget that the lion and the lamb do not lie down together. Similarly, the full potential of the farmer's knowledge is too often discounted in planning change affecting fundamental agriculture, and it is a grievous error to bypass this fact if one really hopes to make effective changes or to initiate superior methods of lasting quality. This is true for the reason that the people who live on the land instinctively know a large portion of the truth regarding the delicate yet forceful interactions of nature by reason of their long and intimate association with soil, plants, and animals. Shallow programs which discount basic experiences and fundamental considerations when joined with weak implementation will produce shallow effects, and poor communication will result in confusion. Failure to recognize the basic harmonies can only end in failure.

The quality of change will vary then — as opposed to the quality of money which, it is said, has no variation. For those whose work is dedicated to change, it is imperative to know that change qualities do exist; that qualities need constant improvement, revision, or adaptation to given areas; that programs need to be in harmony with natural laws; and that without change no real progress can be achieved. One must conclude therefore that as fewer people are involved in direct farming operations, the quality of change may ever improve if we are to maintain and expand the sufficient, high-quality food supply situation which we currently possess. One must further conclude that superior workmanship of professional agricultural personnel is a natural prerequisite to the upgrading of the change-factors in our total agriculture.

WILLIAM W. REED

*Plymouth, North Carolina*

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I RESPECT THE MAN who knows distinctly what he wishes. The greater part of all the mischief in the world arises from the fact that men do not sufficiently understand their own aims.—GOETHE.