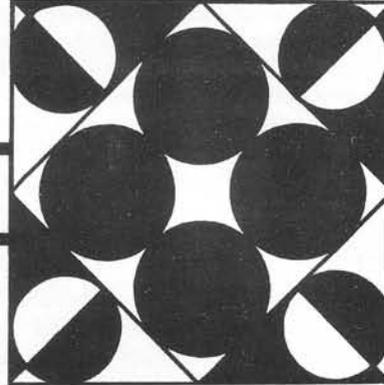


Idea Corner



Real Amigo

In 1968, Irene Timberlake, one of the first program assistants hired in Indiana's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Programs, was assigned to the small town of Austin. Most of the town's population is associated with a canning factory.

But the northeast quarter of town has for years been the breeding place for the lower-income factory workers who don't have time to eat well during canning season, don't have cash to eat well during off season, or who simply aren't oriented to good eating habits. Many of the living conditions could be classified as primitive. This was the area where Irene began her door-to-door visitations.

But, in 1971 a greater need was observed by Irene. A new group had migrated to Austin. They were Mexicans, not only handicapped by conditions resulting from low factory wages, but also by a language barrier and a feeling of rejection by the community. The combination of low wages, lack of effective communication and ridicule by the community resulted not

only in individual problems, but community and racial problems. Irene saw the Mexicans as isolated, withdrawn individuals whose apathy affected their desire for proper nutrition. So, she asked permission to enter the migrant camp and lend a helping hand.

The Mexican project was initiated under the assumption that to produce healthy, contributing citizens, the Mexicans needed to understand American customs and available resources. It was felt that their social, economic, and psychological conditions resulted in a pattern of living that caused malnutrition and further physical and mental deterioration.

To gain entrance to the camp, Irene first contacted the factory president who owned all of the camp facilities. Then, she became acquainted with the camp manager, whom she called her twin because they both had the same birthday. It was Irene's sincere, tactful, and jovial manner that won the confidence and acceptance of the camp families. (Later, when armed guards closed the camp to visitors Irene Timberlake was given freedom to visit as often as she chose.)

Visiting from kitchen to kitchen, Irene found that the Mexican women weren't as eager to receive Mexican recipes as they were to learn the "American way." They followed her in groups and anxiously awaited her visits to learn about the basic four foods needed in the daily diet.

Soon they realized that their diets were lacking in high quality protein needed to build and repair body cells. They learned they were eating too many carbohydrates tending to make them overweight. In general, the Mexican diets lacked the assortment of foods we consider necessary to good health.

A 24-hour food recall gave an indication of why many Mexican women felt "run down" in the middle of the day. Coffee and Mexican tortillas didn't supply the nutrients needed for total body maintenance.

Everyone began feeling better when Irene introduced American ways of including dairy foods, fruits, vegetables, and high quality protein in the daily diet.

As the interest in American goods grew, Irene was able to teach some of the lessons she'd perfected during her first three years as a program assistant. They included a series of lessons on buying, visiting the market, and weight control, in addition to ways of preparing the basic four food groups.

Then Irene approached the factory president about improving the Mexican camp living conditions. When Irene first called on these families, they were living in one- and two-room shacks. The camp was dry-walled, but never painted. Only one family had a

stove, the other families cooked on two-burner hot plates. They had no sinks and few refrigerators.

After talking with Irene, the factory president had the camp painted both inside and out and installed sinks, stoves, and refrigerators in as many homes as possible. He also had all sanitary conditions improved. Irene says that improving the homes enabled the Mexican families to practice her lessons on cleanliness and food safety.

Next, Irene tackled the problem of cooperating with other agencies and individuals seeking a supportive effort to make available their resource services.

To improve public relations between the Mexican families and the more permanent residents of Austin, Irene sought ways to stimulate their capacity for social interactions, increasing beneficial relationships as much as possible. She acquainted Mexicans with residents responsible for community resources—church groups, social groups, township trustees, etc.

The ministers' wives taught English classes. Town groups even sponsored parties to which the Mexican families were invited. To further develop socialization and leadership among her families she had class members participate as teachers.

One of the more noteworthy associations resulted in a weekly newspaper feature picturing one of the Mexican homemakers, telling something about her favorite recipe, which she displayed. A different food project and a different homemaker appeared in the town newspaper each week for one year.

Some of the Mexicans have become permanent community citizens, purchasing homes of their own, attending church services, and participating in community affairs. But the majority have moved on to another seasonal location.

As they moved, however, they took with them: (1) the memory of Irene Timberlake, who befriended them in their armed camp surrounded by a community of dissenting citizens; (2) renewed vitality resulting from learning more about the American diet; (3) increased knowledge about adjusting to living conditions in the American way of life; (4) improved skills in interpersonal, social, and cultural relationships; (5) pride in their own social heritage; and (6) an ability to live in dignity in a land foreign to their birth.

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People Plan Progress

Planning, conducting, and evaluating Extension programs in a multi-county area is a continuous process. In 1971, a team of University of Missouri consultants conducted a study to determine program effectiveness in the Show-Me Extension Area.¹

One question in this study focused on asking lay leaders about the extent of involvement they felt they had in planning Extension programs. The tabulation revealed that only 36 percent of this group felt that lay people could influence the determination of Extension programs.

This was a concern to local Extension staff, but no formal action was taken until January, 1972. At this time, four field staff members, plus the area director, formed an ad hoc committee to explore long-range program planning. They also developed some preliminary data and guidelines for citizen involvement. We asked ourselves: "Are the programs we're offering what the public needs or wants?"

The first thrust was to get staff, Extension Council, and, above all, citizen involvement.

A letter was sent to all staff asking them to suggest a person for each of the Extension program categories. Then the area director, at each of the county Extension Council meetings, asked for a council representative to work with the staff representatives.

Now we had a 12-member planning committee that decided we should establish a multicounty committee of about 30 people.

Names for this committee were obtained by: (1) each staff member submitting the names of two people from each county who were interested in a particular category and (2) each council member nominating two people for each of the program study areas.

The 12-member executive committee reviewed this list, then decided to ask one person from each county to be the representative for that county and for a program area. These people were contacted personally by a committee member, who explained the purpose of the steering committee, the number of meetings that would be called, and what each would be expected to do.

Through this process, we ended up with a 33-member planning committee, who elected its own chairman and set up its own rules. The professional staff served as resource people.

More than 200 people from all over the Show-Me Area were directly involved in the 16 different special interest committees that were formed:

1. Food and Fiber, with subcommittees on:
 - a. Agricultural Production and Resource Development.
 - b. Agricultural Marketing.
 - c. Money Management and Young Farmer Establishment.
 - d. Rural Crime Prevention.
 - e. Livestock Wastes Control.
 - f. Agricultural Public Relations.
2. Business, Industry, and Labor.
3. Community Development.
4. Continuing Education for Professionals.
5. Family Living.
6. Youth.
7. Environmental Quality.
8. Special Needs, with subcommittees on:
 - a. Education
 - b. Social Problems.
 - c. Employment.

The aim of these groups was to give direction to programs that affect the general social, economic, and educational aspects of the area.

They met as groups and subgroups, both on a county wide and area-wide basis; and they involved many more citizens than has been mentioned.

They identified the problems, evaluated courses of action, and recommended future programs.

All this information was put into a brochure. A total of 3,000 copies were printed and distributed throughout the area. It's not just reading material, but a blueprint for action. It's a four-county people's plan for progress. It's the culmination of their thoughts. Many of the programs they suggested are already underway.

The people spoke and Extension responded with programs that are paying dividends through a unified effort.

Editor's note: The above contribution is an abstract of the winning entry in the "Standard of Excellence" program sponsored by the National Association of County Agricultural Agents and presented at the 1974 NACAA annual meeting at Baltimore. Our congratulations to all the winners.

¹Missouri is divided into 20 multi-county Extension regions. The Show-Me Area includes all of the four counties located just east and south of Kansas City. It is a 2,873 square mile area, with 36 municipalities, and 113,000 people. The Extension staff consists of an area director; 5 food and fiber specialists; 10 family and youth; 1 community and public sector; 1 business, industry, and labor; and 1 continuing education for professionals specialist.

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