

# toward better program development

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Craig Oliver

In striving to attain its objectives during the past 63 years, the Extension Service has moved from being an agrarian institution to one that's serving the needs of people in many walks of life. As agriculture has matured, so has Extension. It has become increasingly influenced by interactions with other industries, agencies, and clientele.

## **Programs Affected**

Urban sprawl has imposed new demands related to sanitation, zoning, health, housing, land use, and taxation. Pressures for outdoor space have posed a problem of agricultural production versus alternative land-use patterns. The development of diverse youth programs for both rural and urban clientele has become essential. The pressures on society for improved living for low-income families have increased the emphasis on nutrition programs. Resource development and public affairs issues have become of major importance to all segments of our society. New environmental concerns challenge the very assumptions on which we've based many of our educational programs.

## **Methods Affected**

Even the mobility of our society has affected not only programs but methods we use in presenting educational information to adults and youth alike. Fifty years ago who would have thought about presenting a nutrition education program to thousands of youth across the country. It's only with the medium of television that we can reach out to these youth with a program like *Mulligan Stew*. In this context, careful evaluation of program needs and implementation of a well-defined program plan by the specialist and county staff is essential if they're to function effectively as educators.

Within this framework, the Extension educator recognizes that change is a prerequisite to progress. However, change and

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*Craig S. Oliver*: Assistant Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Pennsylvania State University—University Park. Received for publication: June, 1977.

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progress aren't necessarily synonymous. Progress is made only when someone has ideas about a better way and has the skill, courage, opportunity, and ability to put them to work. It's change—in a specific, predetermined, and desirable direction—that results in progress.

Program determination must be based on a critical comprehensive analysis of local, area, state, national, and global situations and reflect the problems of people and the environment in which they live. Programs must be close to the people, geared to meet their needs, and directed toward developing community resources and opportunities. Extension education begins where people are, but must be able to guide them to a higher level of learning, relating the objectives of the subsystem of a specific learning situation to the macro-objectives of the total educational system.

### **National Program Planning Deficiencies**

Briefly, I'd like to share with you the results from a national task force appointed by ECOP (Extension Committee on Organization and Policy) to study the gaps and problems associated with program development in the Cooperative Extension Service. This study indicates the following major deficiencies in the program planning process as practiced by Extension professionals:

1. Local people involved in planning don't represent all groups and interests in the geographic area.
2. There's a lack of coordination of program development with other planning groups and agencies.
- ✓ 3. The educational value of the program planning process isn't recognized.
- ✓ 4. A serious gap exists between what we say we believe about program development and what we actually do.
5. There's a lack of willingness to establish priorities.
6. There's a lack of ability to analyze data and determine problems.
7. Personal needs, biases, and interests predominate in program determination.
- ✓ 8. Plans of work are prepared to meet an organizational requirement and then not used.
- ✓ 9. A major weakness in program development is the lack of evaluation of accomplishments and/or failures.

### **Grass-Roots Involvement?**

It's obvious that productive program planning can come only if there is free expression and *maximum input of*

creativity from all units—program development committees and county, area, and state staff. Cooperative efforts at all levels of the organization are essential for program planning.

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Within this framework, we often hear that Extension deals with a "grass-roots" philosophy . . . this is a debatable point. Historically, the Extension Service has been an organization that was nurtured during times of crisis and has responded most effectively to crisis situations, which were spawned *not* at the "grass-roots" level, but at the international, national, and state levels. Many would say the true success of Extension was brought about by two international calamities—World Wars I and II, with the need to mobilize our agricultural resources for all-out food production.

The awareness of national leaders who viewed our agrarian society during the boom of the 20s and the bust of the 30s and recognized the need for changes in the rural lifestyle supported Extension activities. The evidence demanded that legislators provide financial and educational help so rural American could keep pace with the progress being made in our cities and urban areas. During this era, strong support developed not only for the farmer, but also for the homemaker and socially deprived youth. This period spurred Extension's growth and led to strong federal support for other agencies, such as SCS, FmHA, TVA, and the Forest Service.

More recently we have seen the intense interest of the public and federal officials in environmental protection. The passage of federal laws has led us into a partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency and the State of Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. This has resulted in the Extension Service assuming a key leadership role for training farmers, commercial pesticide applicators, and others who wish to use restricted pesticides.

This relationship is most interesting since I remember only 14 years ago attending a seminar sponsored by the College of Agriculture at which Rachel Carson, who wrote *Silent Spring*, and other environmentalists were severely chastised for presenting half-truths that would ruin the agricultural industry of this country.

## A Dilemma

Today, we're faced with a dilemma, a strange mix of interest groups and societal needs that make Extension programming exceedingly difficult. On the one hand, society is crying for "grass-roots" involvement in decision making and local governance. To answer this cry, government has created Revenue Sharing and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, which have dispersed billions of dollars to local governments throughout the country.

On the other hand, federal legislation that line items dollars to agencies, such as the Cooperative Extension Service, also directs activities to specific program areas, even though there may be little "grass-roots" support for these programs at their inception. For example, we in Extension have seen funds appropriated for nutrition education, rural development, urban gardening, low-income farming, safety, and urban and community resource development youth programs. All this has come about within the past seven years.

I would ask you: Were these programs created by the assertiveness of our constituency? The answer is a candid no! However, we should be thankful that the Cooperative Extension Service is noted as an agency that can accept these programs and effectively implement a plan of action, through involvement with local people, and achieve a successful end without the taint of politics and political pressures.

In the future we can expect, as educators, to see continuing pressures that will pull and tug at our time. Some of these demands may even attack our own personal values. However, our role as educators must dominate our personal feelings. We must respect the multiple nature of inputs into the program planning process and recognize how the diverse needs of people can best be met within the mission and philosophical base of this organization. At times we will need to step back from the audience we serve and critically analyze the situation before taking action. We can't afford an advocacy role!

## Levels of Initiative

To maximize the total resources of the Extension organization, all those concerned with developing programs as well as those affected by them—clienteles, agents, specialists, administrators—must participate in program planning. It is *not* a one-way street whereby programs are initiated singularly at the "grass-roots" or forced from the top down. Rather, it's a blending of all resources that make effective Extension programs. To characterize this schema,

I would say that programs may initiate from five levels. They are:

1. *Needs of People.* These programs emerge from the clientele with whom we work and are usually done through the local program development committee.
2. *Present Conditions in the State and Nation.* These programs may emerge from the clientele or from alert county, area, or specialist staff who recognize social trends and the need for action.
3. *Research and Technology.* Herein is a key role of the specialist. Programs may be generated as a result of research findings with diffusion of information taking place through publications, demonstrations, training functions, and mass media.
4. *Legislative Action.* These are programs mandated by legislation dealing with problems such as the environment, poverty, health, and so forth.
5. *Allied Agencies and Organizations.* These are programs that emerge because a specific agency or organization requests our expertise in meeting their educational needs. The county, area, and specialist staff may all be deeply involved in this type of program activity.

In reviewing these factors that affect program development, it's obvious that all levels of the organization may be involved at any given time in the program development process. Much will depend on the nature of the activity to be undertaken and the conditions from which the problem or opportunity arises.

## **A Continual Process**

The program planning process is a continual operation or series of actions that lead toward a plan of action. It's the function of Extension to help the people it serves, using educational methods, to analyze issues involved on the basis of all available facts. It's the prerogative and responsibility of the people themselves, individually or collectively, to make their own decisions on policy issues, and express them as they see fit.

Many individuals, particularly among professional and business groups, as well as public and private agencies, have useful knowledge, technical competency, and experience that can make the difference between success and failure in program planning. It's the responsibility of Extension to involve these individuals and groups in the planning phases of program development. It's at the same time Extension's

**responsibility to capitalize on its knowledge and skills by acquainting lay leadership with the principles of the program planning process.**

Research as well as experience in Extension work already has given testimony that people have little or no commitment to plans they've had no part in making. Little can be done with plans that haven't been given solid direction and objectives. It's for this reason that the program planning process must be fully understood and carefully followed. Work performed in program planning comprises the shaping of programs that the Cooperative Extension Service can best provide to meet the needs of its clientele.

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## **Summary**

Any effort that involves the problem-solving, decision-making process must concern itself first with the methods and techniques that are useful in trying to communicate effectively.

Program planning must be concerned with what the learner is expected to be able to do *after* he/she has achieved an educational objective that he/she couldn't do at the start. In translating our program planning efforts into educational objectives, we must recognize the level of attainment we wish to achieve. This may involve creating awareness of or changes in attitudes, values, and goals, teaching skills, or creating an understanding of complex principles. Regardless of the level of learning to be achieved, we must begin at the learner's level. This is the challenge to us as Extension educators.

The multiple nature of inputs to program planning makes it difficult to remedy the deficiencies noted by the ECOP task force. Extension 63 years ago focused specifically on the farmer—this is by no means true today. We have inputs from homemakers, rural community leaders, low-income and ethnic groups, local business people, social service agencies, environmentalists, youth from rural and urban areas, and government officials at all levels. We can't go back to an earlier time of limited involvement.

Since this is so, Extension should take seriously the task force's critical views of Extension practices, and keep

them in mind during program planning. Local people involved in planning should represent all groups and interests; we should coordinate programs with other planning groups; we should use the planning process as the educational tool it is; and keep personal interests out of program determination. It may be complex and hard to do, in view of the pressures from the extremely varied inputs, but it's far from impossible.

When planning programs, consider the multiple nature of inputs to the planning process, design an effective program considering these many diverse factors, and implement the program in such a way the clientele have gained the knowledge desired. This is what we call an effective Extension program.