

# editor's page

## Up Front with Computers!

The theme of this issue lends itself to several interpretations: (1) we must be open and honest about how we use the computer in Extension, (2) we have an obligation to help our clientele learn how to effectively use the computer as a management tool, and (3) we need to set an example as effective users of the computer as an analytical, decision-making aid.

I believe all these interpretations have meaning. We need to share our successes and failures so our clients have a satisfactory experience with computers.

We increasingly hear about families purchasing computers to manage family finances and farm businesses. The interest is growing rapidly and the price of computers is coming down. We in Extension must ask ourselves: "Are we going to lead, or be led?"

We have an obligation to the people we serve to be leaders in this field. We must show our clientele how to use the computer and help reduce their anxiety. But first, we need to reduce our own anxiety.

Now that computers speak English, they can more effectively be used in Extension work. Most of us are computer neophytes and must learn to communicate with computer specialists. We don't need to learn how to write computer codes, but we must know the rationale that goes into them. As subject-matter experts in close contact with the clientele, we have good ideas that can be developed into sound computer programs.

We have the knowledge it takes to develop programs, but we need cooperative relationships with computer programmers and systems analysts to deliver the final product. These individuals are trained to translate our thoughts and ideas into machine language for computer processing.

To help understand the "computerese" frequently used, we have developed a glossary of words (page 56) used in the computer world. My advice is don't get bogged down on trying to figure out the meaning of every word when talking computers, just try to comprehend the general idea.

Our authors have done an excellent job of telling how computers have been and might be used in Extension. We have articles that discuss software development. Software refers to the programs that operate on the computers. Most of the time when we speak about computing, we let ourselves slip into talking about the actual computer machinery. By nature, I like machines, but I've become a "software freak" and feel we can't overemphasize the importance of software and the resources needed for software development.

most computer experts agree that the development of software costs more than the hardware itself. In many cases, software packages are already written that will do the job. We must consider when it's cheaper to develop software ourselves or *modify an existing software package.*

It has been a real challenge to work on this issue of the *Journal*. I feel the authors have done an excellent job. To me, computers are challenging and fun. I hope you find them the same. Computers have a definite place in today's Extension world. They can make our work much more effective and challenging. Happy computing!

**Jim Johnson**

*We're indeed fortunate again in matching the competencies of our guest editor with a timely and important Journal theme issue. When the Board of Directors agreed on computers for the 1974 theme issue, the name of Dr. Jim Johnson, Extension leader at VPI & SU, was immediately mentioned. Jim, an outstanding former student of mine and now a colleague, is currently directing the Virginia Extension Computer Program and is nationally recognized for his work in Extension computer activities. Judging from the diverse array of article contents, he has carried out his editorial responsibilities in a most effective, efficient, and professional manner.*

*Congratulations, Jim!*

**GB**