

## RESPONSES TO HECKEL

*In an effort to stimulate discussion of the national evaluation of Extension, the Journal invited nine Extension leaders to prepare responses to Heckel's article. Each wrote independently . . . that is, though each knew who the other responders were, no effort was made to coordinate the responses. They knew their responses would appear in this special issue and were reminded of its theme.*

*We hope this interchange of ideas will encourage you to participate in the discussion of the national evaluation and other relevant Extension issues. The inside front cover of this issue tells how to do so through regular articles and Idea Corner. The Forum section and Letters to the Editor are other means.*

*The title given below the name of each respondent is the current status of that person. Ellen Elliott, for example, now past president of NAE4-HA, was president when the invitation was made in October, 1980.*

**Mary Nell Greenwood**  
*Administrator  
SEA-Extension, USDA  
Washington, D.C.*

I second Maynard Heckel's reaction to the national evaluation of Extension. Opportunities have been created for the Extension worker. He has prescribed a challenge for every professional Extension worker to more sharply focus on the evaluation process in assessing program efficiency and impact.

He has made note of the dynamics of the evaluation process in looking at such issues as organizational relationships, funding, program priorities, reporting systems, methodologies, and continuing evaluation. Exploring these issues leads to opportunities in explaining the local, state, and federal partnership. The opportunity to relate how Extension links funding and program planning will help people understand the issues of funding and program determination.

The evaluation process further leads to setting priorities that result in greater citizen involvement in program planning. Looking again at existing reporting systems from an evaluation perspective will lead us at the local, state, and national level to adopt reporting systems that provide meaningful information.

As Heckel suggests, evaluation will force us internally to "know what we're about." We learned from the national evaluation. We learned the strengths and weaknesses of current evaluations and our limited capability to react to relevant questions.

The decade of the 80s has brought us full front and center to face up to accountability. I endorse and strongly support increased evaluation in the Extension program development process.

**Ellen P. Elliott**  
*Past President, NAE4-HA  
Schnectady, New York*

The national evaluation of Extension is significant both as a study of the impact of Extension programs and as the first step in developing a process for continual evaluation. Even more important are the challenges the study presents to those of us who will be responsible for Extension programs in the next decade.

- The challenge to establish and strengthen Extension's communication with decision makers on all levels—county, state, and federal. This communication must be both two-way and continual to help build a greater understanding of the Extension organization, program development process, methodology, and impact.
- The challenge to define clearly the clientele Extension serves. It will become increasingly important to choose program efforts carefully so Extension's limited resources may be applied carefully to meet specific unmet needs.
- The challenge to train staff not only in subject matter, but also in the new methodology and evaluation techniques that will be critical for successful programming during the next 10 years. Of special importance, as identified in the study, is the need to strengthen the academic base in youth development for those responsible for 4-H programs.
- The challenge to clearly define the role of the Extension professional in providing leadership for goal determination and program development. The strength of Extension lies in our ability to be responsive to local needs. The professional must be prepared to work closely with community volunteers to define those needs and help develop a program to meet them.

Each professional should consider the study carefully to determine the significance it has for you, the people you work with, and the programs you plan to conduct in the challenging years ahead.

**Katherine Everson**  
*President, NAEHE  
Las Vegas, Nevada*

Evaluation is one of the most important and most difficult tasks each of us confronts. Evaluation is particularly difficult if clearly stated objectives and appropriate methodology haven't been identified and included in the actual program plan before the evaluation process.

Another deterrent to effective Extension evaluation is the variety of programs conducted by individual states. Since each state must seek some funding for their state and justify its use, perhaps both a national and a more localized evaluation

for decision makers would be most effective in pointing out Extension's value to people.

The national evaluation of Extension, while it was to be a comprehensive report of program status and national image, really identified many individual parts. The overall image may have brought to the attention of national decision makers the varied, effective, and innovative programs Extension does. Yet, because it does encompass so many varied programs, much of its intrinsic value may have been lost.

Parameters of the evaluation weren't specifically defined. Whom Extension serves, as well as why and how, does need attention. The inequity of target audiences for the four program areas needs to be addressed. One of the areas not addressed by the evaluation is the impact of audiences served by volunteers. Establishing program audiences and priorities can be facilitated by the evaluation.

Perhaps one of the most valuable things for current and future evaluations, whether local, state, or national would be providing data for computer analysis. Methodology assessment and selection must be supported by funding if adjustments in program delivery are to be effective.

**George R. Gist**  
*Past President*  
*Epsilon Sigma Phi*  
*Columbus, Ohio*

I, also, believe the national evaluation of Extension will have a positive impact on Cooperative Extension. The greatest benefit will come not from the published report, but from insights gained by our evaluators during the process and from future positive efforts by Extension professionals.

During the evaluation process, we were repeatedly told by Cooperative Extension representatives on the policy group that (and I paraphrase roughly): ". . . we are making progress—some members of the group who seemed intent on writing a major indictment of Extension now are beginning to understand us and to appreciate the worth of our programs."

*The lesson:* Some important decision makers in Washington don't understand Extension and are unaware of the important benefits from our programs. This may be true, to a lesser degree, among state and county decision makers.

*The need:* Current Extension budgets from county, state, and federal sources total about \$630 million. If a top-drawer public information organization had two percent of that total (\$12.6 million), there could be a major communications campaign that would do wonders for our image.

Better yet—if each Extension unit would devote two percent of its budget to such efforts, the county, state, and national impact would be tremendous.

I come from the position that we have effective programs with major social and economic impact. We have great support from citizens who know us and use our services.

We can and should improve our programs.

We can and should improve our reporting and evaluation system.

We *must* improve our public image.

**J. Cordell Hatch**  
*President*  
*Epsilon Sigma Phi*  
*Pennsylvania State University*  
*University Park, Pennsylvania*

The late 70s seemed to be a time for skepticism, criticism, and apathy. Just the opposite is needed in the 80s. Our country and its institutions, including SEA and CES, need to shape perspectives and programs based on optimism and dynamism.

This isn't likely to happen, however, as long as there's a "you" and "us" rather than a "we" philosophy. All units within the land-grant/USDA system need to cooperate and communicate better. Our combined mission needs to focus more sharply on clientele needs rather than institutional concerns, including organizational structure.

The linkages between SEA-USDA and state Extension Services seem weaker now. In some cases, no counterpart relationships exist at all between state and SEA specialists. And for one reason or another, sometimes things just don't get done. Take the 4-H TV Agriculture (Food and Fiber) series. In spite of comprehensive planning and strong ECOP and congressional support (funding), plus the continuing popularity of other 4-H TV series such as "Mulligan Stew," the agriculture series was never finished. The leadership, relationships, staff, and procedures within the system should serve to expedite, not hinder, such progress.

Even within the Extension field staff, a stronger, closer spirit of togetherness is needed among county and state staffs, agent associations and Epsilon Sigma Phi, and between the supervisor and the supervised. The concept of "team" needs to be fostered. Sometimes we lean toward cannibalism; at other times we're just our own worst enemies.

For the 80s, we need a strong sense of being *together* on a terribly *important mission* that will provide *substantial benefits* for an improved *quality of life* for our *neighbors* on *this and other continents*.

As partners in the "information age," our limited resources and competition for them will force us to plan, cooperate, and coordinate, particularly in areas and programs that depend on technology. And it's technology that will help to offset increasing transportation and personnel costs.

**James A. Smith**  
*Past President, NACAA*  
*Appomattox, Virginia*

The word was that Extension would respond to the mandated evaluation of Extension in a positive way. Obviously I, like everyone, had preconceived expectations from the evaluation. In late winter of 1980, when the product finally came off the press, my expectations didn't materialize. I was disappointed. I asked why?

On the surface, it would seem a simple matter to articulate the "social and economic consequences" of an organization that had obviously rendered distinguished service to our nation. Besides, I'd personally given 30 years to an effort that mattered and wasn't only important, but essential, to the well-being of mankind.

In retrospect, this may not have been a reasonable request! The very concept of Extension made such a request an impossibility. After all, the organization serves a diverse clientele, different economics, a variety of commodity groups without structured national guidelines.

Quite evident, this simple charge was complex, a difficult assignment. My prejudice is for specifics and this I didn't find in the final draft.

We need to confront this question: Is evaluation a serious weakness of the Extension educational process?

Is it feasible to view earmarked funds as the national concerns that have been agreed on by the state leaders, SEA-Extension staff, and the decision makers? If so, could an evaluation be focused on these concerns for an in-depth appraisal?

Extension programs are designed to change skills, knowledge, and attitudes. This change doesn't occur at a constant rate among all who are exposed—neither do these people adapt or commit the new understanding to practice because of the many factors that affect the individual's decision-making process.

Would a predetermined evaluation scenario best provide a true estimation of the program's worth? Could it be designed to demonstrate why the response was successful or unsuccessful and how the negative responses might be reversed? Could these data be collected with a sample, thus avoiding duplicity?

Heckel raises seven issues that must be resolved. Resolution of these issues might well be a function of ECOP.

Ask any Extension agent or involved leader this question: Are Extension programs enhancing communities, developing efficiencies in agricultural production and marketing, helping young people acquire positive experiences in a "hands-on" environment, and providing new understandings of nutrition, clothing, and shelter? The answer would be a resounding

YES! Prove it! This is the problem—how to measure both objectively and easily (without committing a great deal of resources) the program consequences.

Newly employed county staff members quickly find that time is fixed in slots—media preparation, leader development, fixed program commitments, client demands, in-service training, and staff conferences. They become so involved in *planning* and *implementing* programs that there's little time for effective evaluation. Extension agents are frustrated when asked to collect additional data for evaluation when they are already overextended—possibly overworked—and have limited support staff.

**William F. Taggart**  
*Chairman, ECOP*  
*Oklahoma State University*  
*Stillwater, Oklahoma*

I agree with Heckel's conclusions that the national Extension evaluation will result in: (1) a recognition of the need for a continued and improved understanding of Extension's program effectiveness at all levels, (2) an alleviation of the misunderstandings of Extension as a "straight-line" federal agency, and (3) improved programs that are more sensitive to clientele needs.

A major challenge or opportunity in the 80s is the need to build on those strengths that have made Extension a vital educational agency for the past 65 years. Those strengths have been many, but essentially they are:

1. A legal partnership with cooperative funding by federal, state, and local sources.
2. A continued understanding of the partnership roles by all parties that remains strong through leadership changes over time.
3. A reputation for integrity and reliability as an educational agency disseminating research-based information through the land-grant university relationship.
4. The relevance or priority of educational programs based on clientele involvement at local and state, as well as, national levels.

The major opportunities for Extension in the 80s will be to keep and improve these and other strengths. We must improve local, state, and national advisory systems to ensure program relevance to the changing needs and issues of the 80s. We must be more sensitive to our mission to improve understanding and teamwork with Extension and to all internal and external support groups. We must continue and strengthen relationships between research, extension, and resident instruction, particularly as it concerns national and state funding. Our combined strength is the total land-grant university system.

The single greatest opportunity or challenge for Extension, as well as our land-grant partners, in the 80s is to do a better job of telling our story and to better articulate our resource needs through advisory and support groups. We must effectively implement total team effort into educational programs that will positively influence the multitude of economic and social problems affecting agriculture, home economics, 4-H, and rural development. This has to be done in a decade that promises drastic changes in energy, land, and water usage and continued inflation that will affect families and communities, while as a nation we support the need for strengthened national defense and government spending limitations.

The 80s—decade of opportunity—will require the best team effort in all of us. We *can* meet those challenges and even better serve U.S. citizens at the county, state, and national levels and worldwide.

**Gale VandeBerg**  
*Past Chairman, ECOP*  
*University of Wisconsin*  
*Madison, Wisconsin*

The mandating of anything, whether by an executive, a state legislature, or the Congress, tends to bring out a negative attitude, a defensive posture. That happened with the congressional 1977 Farm Bill mandating this national evaluation of the CES. As a result, the process and the actors were under unusual question at times. And, the results have had less circulation and less reading, discussion, and use than they merit.

It was an expensive study. It has many parts, some historical and some analytical, some extremely well-done, some lacking in completeness, and some not yet published. Many, having learned a brief "Executive Summary" was published, have read only that and have missed the valuable contributions the main evaluation report offers.

The historical perspective written by John Jenkins, who is a historian having never experienced CES, is a valuable contribution that should be reviewed by every CES employee.

A criticism of many evaluations is the failure to set specific purposes to focus on. One can evaluate goals, methods, content, competencies of staff, the organizational efficiency levels, involvement, and impact. Tendencies exist to be vague in specificity of purpose. Thus, the evaluation process may grow and expand in many directions, without the depth and preciseness desired. Perhaps that happened in this national evaluation, leading to a large number of parts of the evaluation, some with less focus on the congressional mandate than others.

This was to be an *impact* evaluation . . . and evaluation of the "social and economic consequences" of the CES. Thus, even the history, so well-done, may be a diversion from the

central purpose. However, some sections on impact provide significant insight into the effectiveness of each of the four major CES program areas. They deserve our attention and use.

No matter the judgments of its degree of excellence, this mandated evaluation may well be one of the good things that has happened to CES in recent years. It's a launching pad for the 80s! After a decade in which CES sort of went quiet, got lost among a myriad of new and expanding agencies, and was receiving less and less of the attention of both the executive and legislative branches of government, suddenly the spotlight shifted to us. Whether you or I think it was for the right reasons or not is unimportant—the spotlight was there . . . we surfaced again!

Now we have the ready-made opportunity for increased visibility by using this as a base for a nationwide involvement of staff from every level, of clientele groups, of our federal, state, and county partners in a projection through the 1980s of the CES programs, policies, and resource needs. We're launching just such an effort as the sequel to the 1947 joint report—"Policies, Programs, and Goals," the 1957 "Scope Report," and the 1967 "A People and a Spirit." We have the national evaluation data as a base.

Shortly, there'll evolve from USDA and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges a national committee to give leadership to this project. The design team has been initiated by ECOP and the federal Extension administrator. Look for information and plans in the first half of 1981 and be prepared to cooperate with the committee, its staff, and your state directors as this important project moves forward. It will capitalize on what has been done, raise our visibility and credibility, and provide national guidelines that should help keep our programs and resource bases viable and meaningful as a part of the land-grant system so vital to the welfare of America and, increasingly, to the world.

**J. Orville Young**  
*Past Chairman, ECOP*  
*Washington State University*  
*Pullman, Washington*

The national Extension evaluation by its nature and congressional mandate dealt with objective and subjective views of past accomplishments. It wasn't designed to resolve issues facing Extension in the future. A number of these issues surfaced, however, and need to be addressed.

I find little disagreement with Heckel's statement concerning the evaluation. One additional finding that needs continual explanation is the lack of understanding by many

(including some Extension workers) of the difference between information-giving and education. Extension's responsibility goes beyond information-giving. It also has the responsibility to increase information use and provide a variety of educational experiences that build capacity, verify data, and enhance adoption. Many agencies provide information; few provide education.

The important thing now is to design efforts to address the identified issues. Several important activities are currently underway that deal with most of the issues outlined. A special task force chaired by Gale VandeBerg is outlining a study of "Extension in the 80s." This will be a study jointly conducted by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and USDA.

Members of the task force are identifying people from the sponsoring organizations and the private sector to steer and conduct the study. This effort will address the organizational relationships, establishment of program priorities, and clarification of clientele mix identified by Heckel and a number of other issues. Such studies seldom find fully agreed-on, precise answers for the major questions, but they provide a better understanding of the issues and helpful consensus recommendations.

The second activity relates to future evaluations. There's little disagreement that a continuing effort is needed. A small group within SEA-Extension is continuing to work on methods and design. SEA-TIS (Technical Information Service) is trying to identify information needs. Several states are conducting special studies financed in part by SEA-Extension special project funds. Most states are increasing their evaluation efforts.

Thirdly, an urgent need exists for a coordinated effort and progress is being made by a task force chaired by Patrick Boyle. The task force needs first to establish a better reporting system or systems. When such a system is in place, more meaningful evaluation can follow.

In summary, three important things must be accomplished before Extension can take advantage of "The Decade of Opportunity": better reporting systems, a continuing evaluation system, and a clear statement of future priorities. All are being addressed and I have confidence in the results of current efforts.