

forum

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The 1980's: A Decade of Opportunity: The Case for Caution. If you take the optimistic view that problems breed challenge and challenge leads to opportunity, than indeed the 1980s will be a Decade of Opportunity. We certainly have the problems. But, we've always had problems and, by and large, we've done a mighty fine job of solving them.

Cooperative Extension is, perhaps, the most successful adult education institution in the United States. We've brought about more behavioral change in our client systems than any other educational enterprise. If that sounds like bragging, it should. It is.

The reasons we've been so successful is that Cooperative Extension has been built on a "grass-roots" philosophy of program planning. Our programs have come from the bottom up. We believe that the people themselves can best determine their own needs. We believe that people will learn what they set out to learn. We believe that people must be active in their own learning process and that they'll actively pursue learning goals that they help determine.

Formula funding, under the Smith-Lever Act, lets states decide on their own Extension programs; and the states built their programs from needs determined at the county level.

There are a few clouds beginning to appear on the Extension horizon. These have to do with the funding of programs.

First, we had "earmarked" funds. These were monies that were "earmarked" for certain purposes. Marketing funds and farm safety funds are two examples. As long as these purposes were general in nature, states could still do pretty much what they wanted. But lately these "purposes" are getting more and more specific and the states are losing some control. In some cases, we've been given a solution and told to go out looking for the problem.

Secondly, we seem to be running into "seed money" funds. These are funds to start a program with the expectation that the states will take over the program once it gets underway. This works well if indeed the states can find the funds to

continue the program once the "seed money" is gone. But often expectations of the client system are raised only to be frustrated when the program ends because of lack of funds.

Now, we're hearing more about competitive grants as a method of funding. Sounds good. But aren't grants more apt to be for "new" programs rather than established ones? To be competitive, we're apt to place more reliance on the grantsman than the educator. The programs may rely more on the razzle-dazzle and tinsel of method than on program content. The grant may well run out long before the adoption process has had a chance to run its course.

But, in all of these cases the real problem is that the program planning function is moving *away* from the states *toward* the "Feds" or other money source. We're moving toward top-down planning where the state and local Extension units are given the task of getting the job done rather than determining what job needs to be done.

Seed money can be helpful when money is plentiful and the program can be picked up when the seed money runs out. When funds are tight, there's little chance that even good programs, started on soft money, will be able to be funded locally. The results . . . spasmodic programming, raised expectations that can't be met, and a confused Extension image.

Competitive grants are particularly cute. They move program planning to the federal level (if you want my money—do my programs), but leave accountability at the state and local levels.

We've all heard the arguments in favor of grants, seed money, and earmarked funds. In general, I can agree with them. They do produce new programs and buy flexibility. I also agree that objective data and expert knowledge are legitimate sources for the determination of needs. But these funding sources also move control of the Extension program away from the local level toward the Federal Establishment. We must ask ourselves if this is the direction we wish to take and how far down that road we wish to travel.

The Forum is a place for **Journal** readers to express their feelings on any topic they think is important to Extension. Don't make it longer than 600 words.
