

tools of the trade

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Rural Society in the U.S.

Rural Society in the U.S.: Issues for the 1980's. Don A. Dillman and Daryl J. Hobbs, eds. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982. 437 pp. \$10.50 (paper).

Rural Society in the U.S.: Issues for the 1980's addresses significant issues that will likely affect America through the remainder of this decade. The book was commissioned by the Rural Sociological Society in 1979 to identify cogent public issues and develop a research agenda for behavioral scientists during the 1980s. But, it's also highly relevant as a resource for professional Extension educators to identify issues for the 1980s on which to base Extension educational programs for rural America.

The first part reviews the historical and policy context of rural-oriented research. The second section outlines the major changes in the 70s and the issues emanating from these changes for the 80s. Among these changes are, for example, the reversal of migration from nonmetropolitan areas, more expensive energy, and the challenge to the "big-is-better" sentiment of the 70s.

The concern of the third part of the book is for the people who live in rural America. Many issues are identified that could form the basis for developing educational programs for rural areas. For example, research on the new elderly who have moved into rural areas would be useful to Extension in designing educational programs for this audience, and also for policymakers and community leaders regarding the delivery of services to the rural elderly.

This section also discusses other audiences that are targets for Extension programming in rural areas—youth, minorities, women, and the low-income.

Part four focuses on issues about services to meet people's needs in rural areas—transportation, employment and manpower utilization, education, housing, outdoor recreation, health, medical care, food, nutrition, and crime prevention. All are issues in which Extension's likely to conduct educational programs throughout the 80s.

The next section presents issues related primarily to community development educators: residential preferences, the functioning of rural communities, community development as a means of rural problem solving, needs assessment surveys for decision makers, social indicators of well-being, and social impact assessment.

Part six is instructive for future educational programming in agriculture. It discusses the heterogeneity of farms in rural America and the forces that have brought about this mix. It focuses on the changing structure of agriculture and how these issues are connected to the broader political economy. Other major questions include: Who will speak for agriculture? Who will own and operate America's farms? How will marketing, processing, and distribution influence the quality of life in rural communities?

The authors then focus on the public concerns with natural resources and the conflicts between developers and environmentalists. After an introductory chapter on the use and protection of natural resources, this section focuses on specific topics such as land use, water, forestry, and fishing. These chapters outline a number of issues for possible new directions for education in the 80s.

Although Extension educators aren't identified as the target audience for the book, it's a significant resource for them.

The book provides a comprehensive discussion of the issues facing rural America and these issues could be used effectively by program planning groups concerned with future Extension education programs in rural areas.

Where gaps exist in the knowledge base for solving major issues in rural areas, the challenge will be for social scientists to generate the information. To the extent that the suggested research agenda is implemented during the 80s, it will broaden the knowledge base on which Extension can then build creative educational programs for rural America. These are the challenges faced by social scientists and Extension educators in helping solve the major issues in rural America in the 80s.

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