

HOW THE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE AND THE SANITARIAN CAN WORK TOGETHER¹

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Cooperative Extension work has been defined as a partnership between each state land-grant college or university and the United States Department of Agriculture in cooperation with local governments and local people. Agricultural Extension is a unique service of three levels of government—national, state and local, organized to permit maximum flexibility and adaptation to local conditions and needs while, at the same time, carrying a hard core of purpose, objective, and focus (1).

The Agricultural Extension Service was established in 1914 by the Smith-Lever Act. Its major function is “. . . to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics and to encourage the application of the same. . . .”

Extension's function is education, not education in the abstract but education for action, education directed to helping people solve the various problems which they encounter from day to day in agriculture, home economics, and related subjects.

Financial support for Agricultural Extension work comes from the three levels of government mentioned above. While the proportion coming from each level varies by states the overall average for the United States is 40 percent from the federal government, 35 percent from state governments, and 25 percent from county governments.

Agricultural Extension is made up of over 14,000 workers, 11,000 at the county level, 3,300 at the state level, and 100 at the national level. They are located in almost every rural county in the United States. At the land-grant college or university in each state are specialists in practically every field which affect farm families including (a) production, (b) marketing, (c) use and development of natural resources, (d) farm and home management, (e) leadership development, (f) youth development, (g) family living, (h) community development, and (i) public affairs. These state specialists interpret scientific findings in their particular fields which county extension agents pass on to the people. Specialists also keep county staffs informed about national programs and policies and keep experiment station workers advised relative to local research needs.

On the national level are specialists who are available for assistance to specialists on the state level. Not to be forgotten, in addition to the paid staff, are over 1,275,000 unpaid volunteer leaders who help county staffs to assist more people.

From the above brief resume of the organization of the Cooperative Extension Service it is evident that it is quite similar to the organizational structure of public health agencies with the great number of local sanitarians on the city and county level and with specialists and consultants located in State Health Departments and, at the national level, the United States Public Health Service.

Before looking at how each of these two far flung agencies can be of assistance to each other it might be well to review the objectives of each.

In 1958, the Agricultural Extension Service took a close look at itself, its programs, and its objectives. Contained in the introduction to the report on the findings of this study (1) is the following statement relative to the organization's objectives: “. . . The Extension Service has always held high those objectives which help people attain (a) greater ability in maintaining more efficient farms and better homes, (b) greater ability in acquiring higher incomes and levels of living on a continuing basis, (c) increased competency and willingness, by both adults and youth, to assume leadership and citizenship responsibilities, and (d) increased ability and willingness to undertake organized group action when such will contribute effectively to improving their welfare.”

Objectives of the local health department might include, among others, (a) improvement of family living by improving environmental sanitation in the community, (b) maintenance and improvement of sanitary quality of certain products which farmers send to market, and (c) protection of the consumer, including farmers, from sub-standard food products.

Basically, the objectives of these two organizations are not essentially different. Both are concerned primarily with the welfare of the people. Means of attaining these objectives, however, may differ to a significant degree. Objectives of the Agricultural Extension Service or the county extension agent must be achieved by educational means. On the other hand, the sanitarian also has a responsibility for law enforcement. While the regulatory agent will most often resort to educational means to accomplish law enforcement, the extension worker can-

¹Presented at the 48th Annual Meeting of the INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MILK AND FOOD SANITARIANS, INC., at Des Moines, Iowa, August 14-17, 1961.

not rely on enforcement procedures to implement an educational program. A misconception still held by many people is that a sanitarian is strictly a law enforcement officer. Today the great majority of local sanitarians are highly trained professional people who rely first on education to achieve their objectives and use enforcement procedures only as a last resort.

In considering the specific areas in which extension personnel and sanitarians can cooperate we must take note of the changes taking place in the rural community. While the number of farm families is decreasing the standard of living of those remaining is rising at a rapid rate. The availability of electricity in rural areas has made it possible for farm families to have many of the conveniences long enjoyed by urban families. High on the list of these conveniences is the water pressure system. This, in turn, has required a waste disposal system. Availability of these conveniences outside of urban areas has also caused thousands of persons to move to the open country to build their homes. These people often find themselves confronted with problems with flies, mosquitoes, water supply, sewage disposal, dust, and noise to a much greater extent than was true in town. The result has been the development of environmental sanitation problems that did not formerly exist in rural areas. Seeking a solution to their problems people go either to the county extension agent or to the county health department for assistance.

Now how can the county agent and sanitarian work together to solve these environmental sanitation problems? Much, of course, can be done by education. This is usually considered to be the role of the county extension agent. But a county extension agent cannot be a specialist in all phases of rural living. More often than not he is a production major trained in the fields of livestock or crops. He may have in his office a bulletin on rural water supplies or sewage disposal systems or on how to control flies and mosquitoes. But the chances are that he is not familiar enough with this field to answer all of his coöperators' questions whether they be farmers or non-farm rural residents. Here is where the sanitarian and extension agent can complement the work of each other. With his specialized knowledge of environmental sanitation requirements the sanitarian can furnish authoritative solutions to many of the rural resident's problems.

One more factor that can enter into such a situation is the enforcement of sanitation requirements. Mr. Paul Rand Dixon, Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission recently said, "Tough policing is the backbone of voluntary compliance with the law." While this statement may sound a bit contradictory at first, I am sure all sanitarians will agree that it contains a great deal of truth. Education can go

only so far with some persons. Occasionally we encounter people who can be educated only by strict enforcement of legal requirements.

It is not meant to imply that county extension workers should routinely "wash their hands" of environmental sanitation problems and leave them to the county sanitarian to solve or that they can be solved only by law enforcement procedures. The county extension agent has a certain following or clientele, he has a certain influence with many rural families, and he has a responsibility to "help people attain greater ability in maintaining more efficient farms and better homes." By working together, however, the county extension agent and the county sanitarian can accomplish much more than by each working separately.

Another area in which cooperation between Agricultural Extension personnel and sanitarian is important is in the enforcement of Grade A milk regulations. This is an area in which there probably has been more misunderstandings due to a lack of communication between county extension agents and sanitarians than in any other. This difference of opinion has largely been the result of a failure on the part of both Agricultural Extension and regulatory agency to communicate to the other the objectives of their respective programs. There is no question that the high sanitation standards set by regulatory agencies for the production of fluid milk have resulted in substantial economic and social gains to the dairy producer. There are doubtless individual exceptions to this and there are many who have been forced out of the dairy business due to an inability to comply with sanitary regulations. But largely these are persons who, for one reason or another, might more profitably have been engaged in some other agricultural enterprise. Occasionally, a county extension agent has taken exception to the enforcement of sanitary regulations, particularly in an area where such regulations were being introduced for the first time. There are very few instances, however, where a county extension agent was contacted by regulatory agency personnel in advance and where the objectives of the program were carefully explained where cooperation was not afforded. Remember that the county extension agent has a responsibility to the public which he serves and this includes opposing any program which he feels is not in the best interests of this public. If he hears only one side of the story, the farmers' side, he cannot be expected to take an objective attitude.

On the other hand, it could be considered the duty of the county extension agent to point out to the sanitarian where it appears that the program might be improved. In 1953, Dr. J. C. Flake (2)

asked a number of dairy industry leaders several questions relative to dairy farm sanitation and inspection. One of these questions was, "Have sanitarians stressed barn and milk house construction at the expense of producer methods to the point that it is time to re-emphasize basic methods?" Of the persons answering this question 69 percent answered in the affirmative, including 64 percent of those who were working directly with farmers. While this condition has improved considerably since 1953, the one single criticism of milk sanitation programs that is heard most often from county extension agents is the fact that correction of seemingly small faults is emphasized rather than the correction of basic sanitary faults. It is the responsibility of the county extension agent to call these things to the attention of the sanitarian and it is the responsibility of the sanitarian to either justify the requirement and the method of enforcement or, if he is at fault, to see that the method of enforcement is corrected. This is not to say that sanitation requirements that may seem non-essential to the uninformed are not necessary but rather that the sanitarian must spend more time explaining to his public or his clientele the reasons for these requirements. The county extension agent should most certainly be included among this "clientele." In turn, the informed extension agent can explain the reason for specific requirements to those farmers with whom he comes in contact or who ask about them.

While cooperation on the local level may be achieved without great difficulty, there is occasionally a lack of communication or understanding on the state or national level. It is important that there be an opportunity for exchange of views and an understanding of objectives at these higher levels, not only between specialists from both agencies but

also between administrators. Attitudes at the state and national levels are often reflected in attitudes at the local level.

In summary, the county extension agent and the county sanitarian have basically the same objectives, to serve the public. Each arrives at his goal by somewhat different means, one by education, the other by education and service plus law enforcement. The fact, however, that each may travel a different route should not be an excuse for non-cooperation. Education and enforcement are not incompatible but rather are necessarily complementary.

Misunderstandings and differences are more often due to a lack of communication than to any real differences in goals. To quote from an article in a recent issue of the *Journal of Milk and Food Technology* (3), "We should strive for a good, cooperative relationship with all of the agencies with which we come in contact. It is a good policy to call occasionally at the office of heads of various agencies with whom you deal. In addition to official reports, talk over a problem with them. Ask their opinion on a subject. Their response often will prevent their building up passive resistance to programs you are attempting to carry out. By all means, report to them good things about their agency as well as the bad." Local sanitarians might profitably include the county Agricultural Extension Service among those agencies with which they deal.

REFERENCES

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3. Everett, E. L. The Responsibilities of a Sanitarian. *J. Milk and Food Technol.*, 24:55-57.1961.