

Alternative to Extension's Future

Emphasis should be on meeting the needs of people
wherever they live

DONALD R. FESSLER

THREE ALTERNATIVES to the future of the Cooperative Extension Service were presented in the Winter, 1963, issue of this journal.¹ These alternatives represented a synthesis of ideas of state Extension directors. The alternatives suggested were as follows: (1) provide informal educational leadership in agriculture, home economics, forestry, and related subjects on a broad base in both rural and urban areas without responsibility for community or total resource development; (2) Provide informal educational leadership in agriculture, home economics, forestry, and subjects related on a broad base in both rural and urban areas and provide educational leadership for community and resource development in rural areas; and (3) Broaden Extension's educational leadership to include all informal educational programs in both rural and urban areas and extend educational programs from all colleges of the university.

The editors invited reactions to these alternatives and other ideas presented in this article. The following statement is such a reaction.—The editors.

In the article on "Extension's Future" which appeared in the winter issue of this journal Director Vines outlined three alternative courses which Extension might take in the future. There is a fourth alternative which deserves consideration and one that may overcome some of the difficulties posed by the others.

In his third alternative Director Vines indicated that Extension might be given the responsibility for "all informal off-campus educational programs for both rural and urban people." To achieve this he indicates that "strong direction would be required from the top administrative office of the institution." In those states, and

¹ See C. A. Vines, Lowell H. Watts, and W. Robert Parks, "Extension's Future," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Winter, 1963), 239-46.

DONALD R. FESSLER is *Extension Sociologist, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, Virginia.*

there are many, where general extension is administered by a state university other than the Land-Grant College, this might be difficult to achieve since not all university extension programs are formal credit courses. Cooperation between general and Agricultural Extension in many of these states is minimal.

A precedent of greater historical significance than most people realize was set in the overall planning of the Rural Areas Development Program. In this program the Agricultural Extension Service was assigned responsibility for organizing the people to recognize their needs, study the alternative solutions, and then to call upon whatever agencies or individuals were available to carry on the needed educational programs to help attain their goals.

Herein lies the pattern for our fourth alternative. In urban areas where county agents and home agents are already facing demands which they are often poorly prepared by professional training to meet, the best that they can do is to help people organize to come to grips with their own problems. Where the agents are not hamstrung by institutional prejudices, they are recommending the fullest use of all available individual and agency resources to meet these needs.

The emphasis in this fourth alternative is obviously to be placed not upon the furtherance of specific programs, educational or otherwise, but on meeting the needs of the people wherever they live, on farms or in the heart of metropolitan areas. It is a matter of helping all the people, not by trying to be everything to everybody (which the Extension Service cannot be) but by helping to develop mature individuals, capable of making the best use of whatever resources their particular social environments afford them. Of course, under this alternative the Agricultural Extension Service would still operate as in the past to provide specific resources in agriculture and home economics and related fields, wherever and whenever these were needed by the people.

To the extent that Extension improved its ability to organize the people and guide them in the process of coming to grips with their own needs, it would also strengthen the motivating forces among the people for utilizing, to the full, the resources provided by Extension and other agencies. In this sense, reliance on this fourth alternative would strengthen the work Extension is already doing while adding a vital new dimension—one that is very likely to be the keynote of the activities of any agencies that may be set up in urban areas to meet needs which existing agencies are not fulfilling.

The success of the Extension Service in putting this fourth alternative into effect will depend upon how well it recognizes the im-

portance of including in the training of all Extension personnel a great deal more of human relations, group dynamics, and organizational skills than has been included in the past. In the future technical skills in the field of agriculture will be no less important than in the past, but the individuals who are in daily firsthand contact with the public must have more than technical skills to do their jobs effectively.

The diminishing role of farming even in many rural sections, plus the rapid urbanization of other areas in which Extension has been active in the past, demands a rethinking of Extension's entire role and a willingness to make adjustments, no matter how drastic, to better fulfill the needs of all the people. As state legislatures become more responsive to the urban electorate, our failure to make this adjustment will all too soon be made apparent to us. This fourth alternative, therefore, may suggest a direction in which Extension may move with the confidence that, as in the past, it is taking the lead in strengthening the democratic process.

THE THINGS a man believes most profoundly are rarely on the surface of his mind or tongue. Newly acquired notions—decisions based on expediency, the fashionable ideas of the moment—are right on top of the pile, ready to be displayed in bright after-dinner conversation. But the ideas that make up a man's philosophy of life are somewhere way down below.

—from ERIC JOHNSTON as quoted in *Forbes*, XCII
(July 15, 1963), 50.

NATURE gave men two ends—one to sit on and one to think with. Ever since then man's success or failure has been dependent on the one he used most.

—GEORGE R. KIRKPATRICK.

WE HAVE COME to world leadership because our people have had the opportunity to develop this nation under a government and a Constitution that gave them political freedom and encouraged initiative, enterprise, responsibility, industry and thrift. Freedom and achievement are not unrelated. This nation has become one of history's finest illustrations of how a people can enrich life and raise their whole level of economic well-being when they are given justice, liberty and incentive.

—from HERBERT V. PROCHNOW as quoted in *Forbes*, XCIII
(May 1, 1964), 62.

THE GREATEST MISTAKE you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one.

—ELBERT G. HUBBARD.