

editor's page

Where is Extension work going? What's the future of Extension education in our society now? What direction can Extension programs and Extension organizations take to really meet the needs of the people of the United States?

These questions are often asked by Extension professionals as they begin each day of work. "The People and the Spirit," "The Scope Report," and even articles in the *Journal of Extension* present ideas to us in reflecting on this perplexing concern. But something is missing. There doesn't seem to be any one place where ideas and philosophies for future Extension programs are discussed and developed.

Dr. Einer Ryden from the University of Maryland proposes establishing a "Think Tank" to focus on the future of youth work, and be located at the National 4-H Center in Washington, D.C. He suggests a group of selected individuals be housed together to give them the opportunity to contemplate our history, identify important present problems, and establish some long-range goals and direction for Extension youth workers.

I believe the time has come for development of a "Think Tank" for all Cooperative Extension work. Ten years ago several institutions of higher learning provided a basis through graduate work for individuals to gather and contemplate Extension's long-range goals. The effects have been far reaching; back when the National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study was in operation at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, individuals gathered from all over the world to focus on Extension work. The effects of this time to think and contemplate is still having a significant impact in developing relevant Extension programs all over the world.

No such opportunity is currently available. Certainly excellent graduate programs are located at many institutions, but there's no one location where leaders or potential leaders of Extension gather to study. I believe that an establishment of a national Extension "Think Tank" where selected individuals could be brought together for an extended period of time (no less than six months) would be an important addition to Extension work in the United States.

Who should participate? Time and time again very knowledgeable and experienced people are asked to retire—placed out to pasture, so to speak—at a time when their ideas and philosophies could have an important effect on Extension. Certainly many young new Extension workers bring with them ideas and enthusiasm that could also be important if mixed well and tempered with knowledge and experience. In short, the group should be a mixture of people representing all facets of Extension.

Yes, Extension work is ready for some new ideas and creative thinking. It's time we structured and planned for our change rather than react and be shocked by it. A national Extension "Think Tank" might help give Extension education a mutually determined direction. Don't you agree?

PJB