



The Forum is a place for Journal readers to express their feelings on any topic they think is important to Extension. We ask that it be no more than two double-spaced pages. Send to: Jerry Parsons, editor, 310 Poe Hall, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, 27607.

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I read with interest the comments by John Ohliger in the July/August issue, and looked forward to the replies of the Extension leaders from around the country. I'm a part of UW-Extension and am a believer in, as well as a student of, the Extension idea, applied to a broad range of activities.

The responses to Ohliger's letter were most disappointing, however. If these were representative of Agricultural Extension leadership, then it seems to me that they justified Ohliger's challenge more effectively than any evidence he presented.

I'd expect educators and leaders of Extension programs to defend them, since there's much to be proud of. I did expect, however, that these writers would recognize and admit some of the problems of the past and present, instead of attacking Ohliger's credentials and generalizing about how fine the present programs for low-income people are. I'm not aware of any major breakthroughs in one major problem area—helping Extension people of middle-class, upwardly mobile backgrounds, work with low-income or minority groups—even though many individual workers are trying very hard. I do know that as Extension workers have tried to work with low-income groups and minorities they've on occasion found themselves estranging the large farmers and businessmen who were formerly their supporters. I'd expect this to become an even greater problem in the future, if we really work to serve all groups in the community.

I believe that a key point which Ohliger was suggesting and which was ignored, is the fact that technical innovations on farms have social implications both on the farms and in the cities. As I grew up on a farm in Iowa, 30 years ago, I saw the pressure on farmers to get larger or get out. My friends who remained on farms seem to be feeling that pressure even more today. In Wisconsin, I've watched farmers and their wives take jobs in town so they could afford the expensive machinery necessary in farming. And, as a social worker, I've seen the social problems resulting from that different lifestyle. Hightower gets carried away at times in *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times*, but he makes a good case that the innovations brought

by Extension agents often helped the few and made agriculture untenable for many small farmers. Perhaps we should have asked whether we wanted cheap food or a fair number of independent farm families. Very few of us asked that question earlier, but I'd hoped that leaders all through Extension were considering it.

Perhaps the greatest example of the fallout from Extension activities is the large number of black citizens who moved from the rural South to our urban areas in the 1950s and 60s. A strong argument can be made that mechanization of agriculture in the area, aided and abetted by Agricultural Extension, led to their being forced off the farms and into the cities with no preparation for urban living. People with "urbanitis" like Ohliger, and all of the rest of us, will be living with that situation for a long time.

This isn't to say that Agricultural Extension is bad, or that change is bad. I do hope, however, that leaders in Extension will recognize that their technology and their decisions have social implications both good and bad. Hopefully, Extension now includes a broad approach to community needs, not just Agricultural Extension.

Ohliger questions whether the injection of technology into a situation is necessarily an answer. I'm not sure that I agree, but this is a crucial issue. It's problems like this we should be addressing ourselves to, it seems to me, not putting down the people who ask the question.

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Your July-August issue was an exposé. Sitting in their offices, at conferences or seminars, Extension workers may find their "Puritan," "Conformist," or "New Humanitarianism" values uncovered. Similarly, John Ohliger's comment in "A Jaundiced View of Agricultural Extension," drew fire from many respondents. In so doing, he exposed why Extension often can look, or be, *jaundiced*.

Benjamin Yep's, "Poverty: Are You a Part of the Problem or Solution," cleverly helps to expose the values and attitudes towards the subject of poverty of its reader. He demonstrates how values determine *what* we see, and *if* we see the problems faced by Extension. In addition to the weaknesses of the Puritan, Conformist, and the New Humanitarianism approaches, Yep presents the positive side. He documents how social institutions view their responsibilities, and uncovers through a historical perspective the changes and growth in that society.

Through the responses to his article, Ohliger similarly exposes some of the basic problems faced by Extension. Almost to a person those listed as being able to make responses prove his point.

Following are a few examples: Clark says or accuses Ohliger of not believing 4-H can contribute "to the well-

being of the socially deprived.” Is he another of those who would unquestionably beat their chest and happily ask for more money as a means of solving problems? Alcorn, in his reply, tips his hand. He refers to Paulo Freire as a “someone else” who had something to say about Extension activities in Chile and Brazil. Freire says things that any aspiring or would-be adult educator or Extension worker should take time to think about. Evelyn P. Quesenberry adds to the list of dolefuls suffering from the same old recipe—a long list of ingredients which are reminiscent of past War on Poverty programs—or what Ohliger might say were “Ho Hum” when it comes to being of use to a low-income farm family.

And while he is worried that Ohliger took out of context some writers’ points—debatable—Edgar J. Boone would deny such an individual the right to express an opinion that doesn’t fit with his perception of what are problems. Finally, Charles Beer passes the article off as being written to only cause “controversy and misunderstanding.” Beer also takes for granted that if it is *change*, education must be involved, and if it is change, then it must be for the good. Surely, Ohliger was pleading the case that Extension has too long been party to the “growth ethic”—it has not been discerning in the long-term effects of its efforts—and exposing that Extension may in actual fact have been a part of the problem rather than a solution!

(For more comments about Ohliger, see Letters section, p. 31.)