

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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1. The Earliest Educational Programs for U. S. Farmers

In the United States the first people to recognize the need for the spread of superior technical knowledge to farmers were the farmers themselves. They have always had problems.

In 1785, the Philadelphia Society, an organization in which farmers could hear speakers from outside and talks from the most successful in their midst, became the first of numerous agricultural societies and farmers' clubs formed in the next hundred years. In addition to sponsoring lectures, the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture circulated letters and notices to be read by town criers.

Around 1811, especially as a result of the influence of Elkana Watson, county fairs began to include educational features such as exhibits and lectures on superior farm practices. In the mid 1800s, adult agricultural education sprang from several sources in New England. In 1852, the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture was formed with specific educational responsibilities. In 1854, they began distribution of volumes of their annual, Agriculture of Massachusetts, in rural areas. That same year, Charles Flint, the Board's secretary, suggested farmers' institutes patterned after the teachers' institutes.

In 1860, Yale began its popular agricultural lectures - a combined school, convention, and farmers' institute. In 1863, the Massachusetts State Board held its first annual agricultural meeting with Louis Agassiz and other reputable scientists participating. Success resulted in expansion to include summer field meetings in 1869.

State agricultural colleges were established in Pennsylvania and Michigan in 1855, Maryland in 1856, and Iowa in 1858.

2. Establishment of the Land Grant Colleges, 1862

The Morrill Land Grant College Act of 1862 brought a new concept of education to American life - - the democratization of knowledge. Its purpose - - to provide opportunities for college education to the sons and daughters of the working classes; to teach "such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts."

3. Establishment of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations, 1887

The Hatch Experiment Station Act of 1887 established a nationwide system of Experiment Stations at the Land Grant Colleges. Until then, the agricultural colleges had very little to teach because very little agricultural knowledge had been tested scientifically.

Much of the information in this summary is drawn from "Taking the University to the People: 75 Years of Extension" by Wayne D. Rassmussen; and "A History of Agricultural Extension in the U.S.", a paper by Norman Carlson.

4. Farmers' Institutes and Kansas Agricultural College

The Farmers' Institute idea fully crystallized in 1868 when both the Kansas Agricultural College and the Union Agricultural Society, also in Kansas, held institutes. "Tree borers" was one of the topics discussed.

The institutes were one to five day, usually three day, events with talks in the afternoon and evening. At first, successful farmers presented most of the lectures, but experts soon took on the major share. Topics for farm women and issues about rural life were also included in later Institutes.

The institutes were popular and successful. In 1899, 2,000 institutes were held, attended by half a million farmers. By 1914, the peak year, 8,800 institutes were attended by three million farmers.

Institutes were usually sponsored by local farmers' organizations. Colleges paid experts to lecture. Other expenses were met locally. Later, states hired lecturers and subsidized the institutes. Finally, the federal government came to provide part of the funds.

Extension was a logical outgrowth of this movement.

5. Chautauquas

Another movement that influenced the development of Extension originated in 1874 when the Chautauqua Sunday School Assembly organized in Chautauqua, New York. In 1876, this became the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. This was a cultural and adult education movement. At one time, home reading and correspondence courses from the parent institution had an enrollment of 60,000. Independent organizations and traveling troupes, both also called Chautauquas, similarly dispersed culture around the county in the decades around the turn of the century.

6. The Father of Extension - Seaman A. Knapp

At age 70, Seaman A. Knapp had been a farmer, a professor of agriculture and President of Iowa Agricultural College. His experience and observations had convinced him that reading pamphlets or observing work on demonstration farms operated at government expense would not lead farmers to change their practices. However, they could be convinced of the value of change through demonstrations carried out by farmers themselves on their own farms and under ordinary farm conditions. He said, "What a man hears, he may doubt; what he sees, he may possibly doubt; but what he does, he cannot doubt."

7. The First Big Problem - - Cotton Farmers Ruined by Boll Weevil

After visiting Dr. Knapp, the Secretary of Agriculture became convinced the demonstration method could show farmers how to raise cotton despite the boll weevil. This pest was causing panic and even mass evacuation of farmers from newly infested areas. In 1904, Congress appropriated \$40,000; twenty demonstration agents with jurisdiction over large areas, and 7,000 farmer-demonstrators who were to follow Knapp's directions under supervision of the agents, were enrolled.

Knapp insisted work must remain on a local level, sufficient to allow constant access and reminders to farmers. To him this meant at least one community demonstration farm (at first backed or insured by local businessmen) in each township. Walter C. Porter became the first farmer-demonstrator in 1903.

8. Growth of the County Agent Idea

By 1910, Knapp's demonstration work was carried on in 455 counties in 12 southern states. This work included boys and girls club activities and demonstration activities in home economics as well as agriculture. Knapp defined his work as "a system of rural education for boys and adults by which a readjustment of country life can be affected and placed upon a higher plane for profit, comfort, culture, influence, and power."

Without question, the result of the Extension work of thousands of county agents, specialists and administrators since then has far exceeded Knapp's greatest dreams for this system.

9. The First County Agent - - W. C. Stallings, Smith County, Texas

Seeing the success of Knapp's field agents, and having devastating problems with boll weevil in cotton, businessmen and farmers in Smith County, Texas, decided that they wanted an agent exclusively for their own county. So, on November 12, 1906, they appointed W. C. Stallings as the first "county agent" in the United States. Now, there are agents in almost all 3,100 counties in the country.

10. John H. Barron, Pioneer County Agent, Broome County, New York

Appointed in 1911, Barron traveled around in a horse and buggy, talking to farmers about their problems. He sent out circular letters to local farmers, wrote articles for local newspapers and attended meetings of the Grange and other farmer's groups. He appointed local leaders to advise him and arrange for lectures and demonstrations.

Like thousands of county agents who would follow him, he had to convince farmers that he had something to offer that would benefit them personally. Some felt that he was an outsider trying to tell them what they should do without really understanding their problems. Others thought he was trying to increase production for the benefit of the railroads and local merchants, without giving a thought to what they really needed, which was higher prices for what they produced. However, his farm background, membership in the Grange and practical approach to farm problems won him at least their tolerance, if not full acceptance.

11. The Extension Idea Introduced in 1898

The Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations introduced the idea of Extension assuming a position of equality with teaching and research as early as 1898. The proposal was formally endorsed by the Association in 1909.

12. The Smith-Lever Act Creating Cooperative Extension, 1914

The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 established the Cooperative Extension Service (federal/state/county) “to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information relating to agriculture and home economics and to encourage application of same.” It said “Cooperative Extension Work shall consist of giving instruction and practical demonstrations in agriculture and home economics to persons not attending or resident in said Land Grant Colleges in the several communities and imparting information on said subjects through demonstrations, publications and otherwise.”

13. Two Basic Reasons for the Smith-Lever Act

This Act of Congress (Smith-Lever) was in response to two basic needs:

- a) The need of farm people for education - - for knowledge to help solve their problems.
- b) The need to get research results out to the people who could use it. People were critical that State Agricultural Experiment Stations and the USDA were not getting research findings out to the people who could use them. Some Experiment Station directors had established Extension work under the Agricultural Experiment Stations.

As early as 1905, the Indiana General Assembly (legislature) had appropriated funds for Extension work in the Agricultural Experiment Station. In 1913, a year before the Smith-Lever Act, it established Extension on a permanent basis at Purdue University, with county agents to be appointed by county boards of education (which consisted of township trustees and the county superintendent of schools).

Interestingly, boys and girls club work in Indiana was established in 1912, two years before the Smith-Lever Act was passed.

14. T. H. Parks, the First Extension Entomologist in the United States (and in Kansas)

The following quote is from a letter written by Mr. Parks on November 4, 1966:

“At the time I arrived in Idaho (1913) there were only three county agricultural agents, all working under state and county funds. They drove early-day Ford cars. I rode a motorcycle in summer and traveled by train, sleigh, two horses and buggy, and by stagecoach to reach winter meetings. Our office was at Boise and there were specialists in animal husbandry, dairying, horticulture, seed analysis and one in home economics. We worked under a Director of Extension (W. H. Olin), who was a wonderful leader.

“In 1916, I went to Kansas as their Extension entomologist where I worked mainly with grasshoppers, chinch-bugs, and orchard spraying, but had to cover the whole field of agricultural topics during the winter meetings of county institutes. The president of K.S.A.C. (now KSU) thought since we were agricultural college graduates we could pose as experts in all agricultural areas. We were so scheduled by the central office at Manhattan.”

15. Few Amendments of the Smith-Lever Act

The only additions Congress has added to the original mission and purpose of Extension are:

- a) “uses of solar energy with respect to agriculture. . . . and rural energy. . . .” - - in response to the energy crisis, and
- b) “development of practical applications of research knowledge. . . .” - - in response to the need to exploit findings of more basic research.

16. State Statutes Implemented Extension in the Counties

Every state enacted statutes authorizing Extension work at the Land Grant College and a county organization and funding authority to implement Extension at the county level. In Kansas, this is the County Extension Council Law and it is one of the best, if not the best, in the nation.

17. Money for Extension Work is Appropriated Each Year

For 75 years, the federal government, each state, and each of the 3,100 counties in which there is an Extension program has appropriated money for salaries and operation of Extension. As needs for more Extension agents and specialists have expanded, these funds have expanded. At the county level, these appropriations govern annual salary increases for county agents.

18. The Work Force of Extension has Increased

From 1914 to today, the Extension work force has included:

- a) Specialists at the University, area and/or county (in California) level. As the problem areas in agriculture (e.g., marketing, management, safe use of chemicals, community development, etc) and home economics (e.g., nutrition) have increased, federal and state government have authorized and paid for more specialists.
- b) County Agents. As local people have demanded them, county governments have authorized additional staff for home economics, 4-H, horticulture, etc. Some urban counties have large staffs.
- c) Volunteers. Beginning with Seaman Knapp’s first volunteer demonstration to farmers, the volunteer work force in Extension has grown to huge numbers. They include many thousands of 4-H leaders, volunteer teachers in Extension home economics units, and committees of all kinds. The value of their time exceeds that of the paid staff.

As the number of volunteer workers in Extension has expanded, the importance of the professional worker’s ability and skills and attitudes in organizing and working with people has become at least equal to their technical knowledge.

19. The Dynamic Nature and Philosophy of Extension

From the beginning, county agents and Extension specialists have worked in a world of

constant, rapid change. Consequently, they have had to constantly keep abreast of newly developing problems of the people they serve and new knowledge which might be useful to them in farming and homemaking - - especially the new knowledge coming out of the Experiment Stations.

The classic example of this dynamic was Mr. M. O. Pence, who had been the first county agent in Delaware and was an agronomy specialist at Purdue when he retired. During a visit with him on his front porch when he was in his mid-nineties, he said "I still want to keep up with what's going on!"

With this dynamic philosophy, Extension professionals have helped people identify, analyze and solve each new problem as it has come along. Every day for the last 75 years, they have helped thousands of people find answers to questions needed to solve their personal problems. In every era, they have helped organize people and programs to solve public problems (community, state and national) - - from the boll weevil days of Seaman Knapp to producing food needed to win two world wars to helping organize new USDA agencies at the county level during the Depression of the 1930s to the myriad of farm crisis problems in the 1980s, to the revitalization of rural communities.

Thus, when new problems have come along, Extension has always been there to help solve them. The dynamic people of Extension proudly call themselves change agents - - both changing themselves and helping other people change with the times.

This philosophy has been a part of the mission oriented philosophy of the Land Grant University since its beginning in 1862 to help improve agriculture. The Experiment Stations, through scientific research, have been continuously generating information needed to solve new problems, not only in farm production, marketing, and policy, but in nutrition, family life, and community development as well.

20. Extension's Unique Mission - - Informal, Out of School

This mission comes from the Smith-Lever Act, too - - taking useful and practical information to the people . . . encouraging them to use it . . . through demonstrations, publications, and otherwise. By "encouraging them to use it" (for improving their own lives and/or the public good) this implied "education for progress" (improvement in agriculture, family life, etc.).

Seaman Knapp's getting people to adopt improved practices after experiencing them through demonstrations was effective education because, as the behavioral scientists tell us, "when people learn, they behave differently." Knapp advocated "experiential learning".

So, through Extension's 75 years, county agents and specialists have been teachers, helping people learn new skills, new knowledge, new understanding, new attitudes, new values. Many Extension personnel have become master teachers in every sense of the word.

In Knapp's time we knew mostly just "what" and "how." Since Knapp's time, however, with the great addition of new knowledge which has been made available through scientific research and scholarly work, we have learned a great deal more about the

“why” of things. This has added a new dimension to the educational mission of Extension. Farmers and homemakers, and 4-H youth, too, are more sophisticated than they were 75 years ago with higher levels of education and knowledge. Today, many of them will respond to new ideas if they understand the “why” as well as the “what” and “how.” So, even though result demonstrations are still essential and useful Extension educational methods, many people respond to scientific explanations of “why”.

One Kansas farmer has said, “Extension has provided me an opportunity to get a Ph.D without going to college.” He is living proof, like many other people, of the Extension principle of “helping people help themselves” through education programs.

21. Scientific Knowledge and Objectivity - - Unique Strengths of Extension

From its beginning, the quality and objectivity of knowledge provided to the people by Extension professionals has been their unique strength. In the eyes of the people they serve, this has set them apart from all the other people who serve farmers.

Farmers and homemakers have been able to depend on the truth of the information they received from Extension. The only thing Extension people have had “to sell” was “useful and practical information” (skills, knowledge, understanding) which was helpful to the people. Their information has been oriented only “to help people meet their needs, solve their problems.” It has not been oriented to the sale of a product or a program to benefit a government agency.

A Congressionally mandated evaluation of Extension, incited by Extension critics, was conducted in 1977. In this evaluation, it was this scientific objectivity of knowledge provided by Extension that became its strongest defense. People at both the county as well as national level do not want to give up this service. It is their defense against all kinds of sales pitches, emotional appeals, and propaganda.

22. The Extension Philosophy of Service

This fundamental philosophy was eloquently expressed by Eva Gable, one of Extension’s great home economists. At her retirement she was asked, “What have you really been trying to do in your career in Extension?” She said “I’ve just been trying to help people find the knowledge they need to solve their problems.” Ms. Gable was and is an inspiration to all who know her. Local people have a special appreciation for Extension people who are interested and concerned about their problems and opportunities.

23. Extension Has Been a Challenging, Rewarding Career - - and Will Continue to Be

Every Extension worker, including the volunteer, gets tremendous satisfaction from their work well done. This was best expressed by one former county agent and Extension specialist when he said, “I’ve always enjoyed my work in Extension because I always got back more than I was able to give.” This has been true for every Extension worker for the past 75 years.

24. The Future of Extension is Bright

Some people say, “Extension has outlived its usefulness, so it isn’t really needed any more.” This is not true, because:

- a) People will continue to have problems and need scientifically sound, practical, useful information to solve them.
- b) Agricultural Experiment Stations will continue to generate new information which must be diffused "among the people."
- c) Every year a new group of people (4-H youth, farmers, homemakers) comes along who will need lifelong education and a continuous supply of new information to have fruitful, satisfying lives and solve their problems.

At various times at national, state and county level, serious attempts have been made to "kill" Extension. Every one of these attempts has been beaten back by the people at the county and local level where the real power is in Extension. Extension is an essential part of the education system in this great democracy - - performing a highly valued and needed service for the people at the grassroots!

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