

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR EFFECTIVE EXTENSION POLICY EDUCATION

*Barry Flinchbaugh*  
*Assistant to the President*  
*Kansas State University*

Historically, Extension public policy education was the domain of specialized agricultural economists, trained basically in farm management and interested in federal farm price and income support programs. It developed years ago when problems were defined and alternatives and consequences outlined for a cross-section of local leaders and rural farmers. Extension's traditional clientele made up the largest part of the audience. The audience was divided into groups and challenged to hammer out a solution. The policy specialists attempted to be objective and neutral.

However, Extension public policy education has expanded. Areas of interest and issues tackled have expanded. New clientele have been added and new disciplines have become involved. But the old model, alternatives and consequences, still remains effective. Changing times have now provided us with an opportunity and the challenge to take an old traditional model, used first in public policy education on the farm problem in the 30's, and use it effectively in a new era. I see an opportunity or challenge to make three fundamental changes in extension public policy education. And now is the time.

First of all, new non-traditional public problems can be effectively tackled in public policy education. In fact, the traditional farm problem, still with us in a different form, is just one of among many problems areas crying out for some objective educational input. The public policy education domain is no longer price and income programs for farmers. In fact, it is no longer just agriculture. It is as broad and far-reaching as we have the vision, guts, and ability to take it, e.g., energy, government regulations, crime, health, land use, food, international trade, marketing alternatives. I could go on and on. So the first opportunity challenge is to include new issues.

Now, I know some of you have tackled these new issues and that brings me to my next point. You agricultural economic and public policy specialists in a traditional agricultural Extension service no longer have a monopoly on the public policy education domain. I have found, for example, in my home state of Kansas, that

home economists are far more receptive to doing policy work than the traditional old cowboy types with their boots on. I spent time last fall at the National Association of Home Economists working with them on how to do policy education. They are so far ahead of the old cowboy type agricultural agent it is pitiful.

On another point, we have developed a model for policy education that can be shared with other disciplines. If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that we are no longer equipped from a technical subject matter basis to do effective policy education work on all emerging issues. One of the hottest issues in the rural area of my home state is crime, and we have no person on the Extension staff equipped to deal with that. Therefore, to meet the needs of the people, Extension policy education must become interdisciplinary.

Again, you say we have done this. That brings me to my last point. Who is your clientele? Is it the traditional rural audience, i.e., farm organization leaders, cooperative leaders, agricultural business representatives, and rural bankers? Dan Ogden told you that public policy is hammered out in the political arena through compromise among a multitude of special interest groups. How effective is your public policy education program? It is really only one of the special interest groups, i.e., farmers and their organizations? Issues have broadened. Other disciplines are the source of the needed technical information. Therefore, the clientele must be expanded.

Again the home economists are out in front. I spent some time this past summer in Iowa with home economists interested in building and involving support for home economics Extension programs in the urban areas. Recently, Secretary of Agriculture Bergland was at Kansas State University to deliver a Landon lecture on Landon's 90th birthday. He was asked a hostile question by a hog farmer from Western Kansas on why he appointed Carol Foreman as his assistant secretary of agriculture. He very quietly and coolly gave those in attendance a lesson on how food policy is made. And he significantly used the term food policy rather than farm policy. He set consumers apart. To use Ogden's jargon, consumers have penetrated the agriculture cluster. He said that consumers were the clientele of the Department of Agriculture, and consumers could open doors and bring farmers and consumers physically together in the policy-making arena which no traditional assistant secretary of agriculture could possibly do.

It seems to me that we have an opportunity to boldly expand

our minds to include new issues, additional disciplines, and new clientele. The policy-making process in "the new world" has already done this. Will Extension policy education catch up? There is a need. Will we accept the opportunity and meet the challenge? To do so, we must put aside our arrogance and jump in with both feet.

**PART II**

***U.S. Energy Policy***

