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PROCEEDINGS

NEW ENGLAND AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS COUNCIL
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

June 22, 23, and 24, 1970

"MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF THE 1970'S"

Sponsored by
Department of Agricultural Economics
University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont

Held at
Johnson State College
Johnson, Vermont
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES
IN FARM MANAGEMENT AND PRODUCTION ECONOMICS

Chairman: Harvin W. Kottke
University of Connecticut

Secretary: Raymond H. Tremblay
University of Vermont

Our group began by trying to discover if there was a common thread of thought expressed in the four papers. It seemed to us that two main points were brought out. One was that the nature of the emerging problems calls for more of an interdisciplinary approach. The other was that our present institutional organization contains barriers to relevant research, teaching, and extension programs. With these main points in mind we proceeded to discuss the four papers within the context of farm management and production economics.

At first we became bogged down on the question: How do you make the interdisciplinary approach occur? Hathaway had said that the idea of a team approach runs counter to our philosophy of independent reasoning and research, but since society is structured differently now perhaps our philosophy if independency may need to change. Along this line we wondered if our graduate programs should be oriented more toward the team approach in thesis work; or should we hold to the "sacred" notion that a graduate student develops competency through independent study in thesis research? Curly Frick suggested that another obstacle to the team approach is that our reward system is not geared to it. Perhaps a change in the reward system is as important as a change in philosophy toward more team research.

As we aimed more directly toward an examination of the challenges and opportunities in farm management and production economics, the discussion became livelier. Most agreed that there are and will continue to be challenges in this field. For example, Earl Fuller stressed that production functions need to be updated from time to time. Sherrill Nott pointed out the need for studying the capital investment problems and financial management of large farms. Fuller also feels that operations research is a wide open area for a lot of work in the future. Bob Christensen gave a general picture of the prospects in farm management by graphing an upward sloping curve for the complexity of farm problems and a downward sloping curve for number of farms. Then he proposed that the demand for farm management work would probably stay constant as a result of these two opposing trends.

One of the more interesting reactions was that many in the group felt constrained by the assignment to look for challenges and opportunities in farm management and production economics. We assumed that the title for Group A restricted us to search within the farm management and production economics field. If our assumption was correct, then the appeal made in the four papers for more interdisciplinary action did not have a great deal of relevance to our group. To accomplish the proposal, farm management and production economics needs to broaden its scope and move into different problem areas. Jock Elterich wanted our report to show that our group feels justified in expanding its scope of problem areas and that many of the group are taking positive steps in that direction.
In the second half of the workshop we concentrated on discussing one specific point in each of the four papers. The procedure used was to go around the room from person to person and give everyone an opportunity to respond to the papers.

On Hathaway's paper we worked on his point that more specialization is needed by departments otherwise we might all end up like small subsistence farmers. After five people had given their opinions on this point, a poll was taken to get a consensus of the group. The poll indicated that the group favored greater specialization by departments. The group agreed at least to the extent that there may need to be, for example, only one department specializing in farm management in each region. A. B. Lewis took an opposing stand on the basis that foreign students, in particular, should have an opportunity to study farm management in any of the universities in the United States.

On Schaller's paper we debated his question: Does the scientific method interfere with obtaining relevancy in research? Schaller suggested that perhaps the identification of problems should involve some art as well as science. His point was that we are concerned about people—not just the numbers that represent them. The group's reaction to this question was mixed, but the poll suggests that many members of the group were not ready to accept Schaller's proposal as they understood it. However, we think that this is an issue that warrants further discussion and could be a major topic for a workshop or seminar.

On Bromley's paper the point worked on was his proposal for an educational program which would provide flexibility by "renting" some of the resources needed. Apparently the group was not ready for this proposal either. The poll indicated the consensus was not in favor of the "renting" proposal. Bob Christensen doubted that a supply of consultants would be available for this purpose. Others questioned the quality of extension work that would result. On the other hand, the group felt that Bromley had presented some concrete methods of attempting to achieve relevancy in extension work.

On Brand's paper the proposal responded to was: In order to bring about changes in teaching programs, it is necessary to have ruthless administrators. Faculty are too conservative to make changes. Sherrill Nott opposed the idea rather strongly from the standpoint that he was not willing to give up on the democratic process. In contrast, Wilbert Geiss, a graduate student from Maine, thought that graduate students might have a better chance of getting changes through a strong administrator than through the faculty. Several people suggested other descriptive words in place of "ruthless." Given such modifications, the group favored Brand's suggestion. More specifically, 66 percent would not have taken issue with this point if they were a discussant of his paper.

At this point, we had gone beyond the time schedule and the session was adjourned.