

**MATERIALES DE ENSEÑANZA EN
EXTENSION**

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C. 120A 630.715 D5361e 1960

geografos Induciendo a el estudio de las zonas No 5
cafe 1960, edicion

.715 D5361e 1960



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C 126A - 630.715 D5361e 1980

No 5

ELEMENTS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE UNITED STATES COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

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Published in English and Spanish

DEPARTAMENTO DE ECONOMIA Y EXTENSION
INSTITUTO INTERAMERICANO DE CIENCIAS AGRICOLAS
DE LA OEA - Turrialba, Costa Rica.

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This publication was prepared under the provisions of the Contract between the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Institute of Inter-American Affairs of the International Cooperation Administration (ICA) of the United States Government.

Turrialba, Costa Rica
November, 1960

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INTRODUCCION

The United States has demonstrated that the process called Extension Education can contribute to improving agricultural production and improving rural living. Naturally, because of this success, it is used as a reference and example for those aspiring to duplicate a similar effort in their respective countries. The question often arises, however, as to what are the elements that helped or contributed to its success. Many, unfortunately, attribute the success in the United States rural educational program in extension to the fact that the United States is rich; it is big; it has great resources in agricultural colleges and agricultural experiment stations. All of these things are true, but these in themselves contributed only because of more fundamental reasons. These factors in themselves cannot insure success unless accompanied by some more basic truths. The author, in writing up a short history of the United States Cooperative Extension Service, as an Extension Advisor to a foreign country, realized that there were some factors that could be pointed to as definitely contributing to the success in the United States. He also realized that these are the kinds of factors that can be duplicated in other countries. Perhaps this information can be useful to planners, administrators and leaders responsible for developing rural educational organizations and programs of the extension type.

The elements^{*} (according to the author's analysis) that contribute to the success and importance of the United States rural educational

* Di Franco, Joseph: "A Suggested Advisory Program for Rural Italy" (Ed. D. dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1958. 116 pp).

organization called the Cooperative Extension Service are:

1. It is an educational organization.
2. It is equal in importance to the other two vital educational services - research and resident teaching.
3. It is supported by federal, state and local funds.
4. It has an important place in the United States Department of Agriculture, but is not dominated by that Department.
5. Each state is autonomous in its administration and organization of the advisory service in that state.
6. Emphasis is placed on the local level, with each county developing its own program.
7. It is attached to the Land-Grant colleges, which coordinate resident teaching, research, and extension teaching.
8. There is a two-way flow of ideas from the top down and from the field level upwards.
9. The latest methods of communication are exploited when found useful in getting the job done.
10. Democratic procedure is fundamental to its operation.
11. Use of lay leaders is one of the strongest aspects contributing to its extensive coverage of the rural areas.
12. The program is flexible so that it adjusts to changes.
13. The Service developed from one of improving agricultural production to serving the farm family as a unit. (Special programs for men, women and rural youth are still continued).
14. Training in technical agriculture and home economics are prerequisites for extension personnel. In-service training and refresher courses help them keep pace with new developments, research, techniques, skills and new responsibilities.

It is not sufficient to just point out these elements; it is also necessary to understand what they mean. Perhaps the following brief explanations will help the reader understand why these have been selected as important reasons.

1. It is an Educational Organization

The emphasis here is on the educational aspects. Fortunately, the United States Cooperative Extension Service has been able to resist attempts by government officials and other well-meaning leaders to add service responsibilities to the job of education. We all know that credit is a necessary and useful resource in agricultural development. However, in the United States the extension personnel helped create an awareness of need, and educated farm families on the use of credit, but did not become agents of credit or responsible for handling funds or credentials on behalf of credit institutions. Obviously, the job of handling credit as a service to farmers cuts down on the time extension personnel can devote to their educational program.

Most direct services to farmers, although extremely important, tend to make the extension agents become subservient to:

- a. The limited number of farmers receiving the service
- b. The demands and controls imposed by the regulations of the service itself, e.g. credit, collecting census data, carrying out land reform projects, marketing and transportation services, etc.

It is, however, a direct responsibility of extension personnel to be the educational link between these services and farmers. They can help farmers understand how such resources can benefit them and how they can be used in:

- a. Increasing production.
- b. Raising standards of living.

The extension service must be educational. This in itself is a full-time job. The United States Extension Service continues to build its success and prestige upon the fact it makes it a full-time educational job and it continues to resist attempts to have it do other jobs.

2. It is Equal in Importance to the Other Two Vital Educational Services -- Research and Resident Teaching.

Research here means both in the field of natural sciences and in the field of social sciences. Resident teaching refers to the formal in-school college academic training.

Although most countries throughout the world have colleges and universities and research (experiment) institutions, there has not always been a direct link between them. At least, in many instances, they have not always had equal importance. Certainly the importance of research as basic to learning and teaching cannot be disputed. This is accepted in most countries. Unfortunately, with the recent development of rural educational organizations, these "extension" organizations are not recognized by the two other long standing formal institutions, colleges and research stations. It is not our intention to elaborate on the why of this, but to emphasize that when these three forces:

- a. Research
- b. Resident teaching
- c. Extension education

are put to work on an equal basis, all three programs benefit. They complement each other. In fact, as the United States story proves, each gains in importance and prestige. There is a need and a place for all three, but more important, it is obvious that each is related to the other. It is not a question of which organization is most important or which was established

first; each is important. Any one can do much to help people. Two of them can do more. All three working together make the greatest impact.

3. It is Supported by Federal, State, and Local Funds.

This is one aspect of the cooperative nature of the United States Service. Each political sub-division makes its economic contribution, which not only makes it a partner in supporting the service for its respective area, but also gives it the right to have its say in what it wants from this educational service. It becomes a people's program and not a government program. Or perhaps it is better to say that the people become involved in a program supported by their government, county, state and national. It is also an accepted idea that people who contribute to a cause appreciate and support it more than they do something extended to them as a "free" service.

4. It Has an Important Place in the United States Department of Agriculture, but is not Dominated by that Department.

It is only natural that the Extension Service, which has as its objectives:

- a. To raise agricultural production
- b. To raise the level of living of rural people,

be a unit within the Agricultural Department. This department which serves rural people, expands its usefulness and effectiveness by the addition of an educational organization that reaches every agricultural area of the United States. In turn, the technical services provided by the personnel of this Department backstop the educational extension service in meeting needs and solving problems of rural people.

The relationship is important. Most countries immediately assign

their extension services to the Ministry of Agriculture. The difference in the United States and the reason the United States relationship is unique, is that the Extension Service is autonomous in its operation and is not dominated by the Secretary (Minister) of Agriculture, or other political leaders. It has its own director, who submits his program and budget to the Secretary for administrative purposes only. Once the budget has been approved, the Extension Service is responsible for developing a program of education within the guidelines of the law. It is only responsible for reporting to the Department of Agriculture, but not necessarily subject to following any of the ideas and program proposed by the Department of Agriculture, unless it fits into the Extension Service's objectives and plans of work.

Another important feature is that the National Director of Extension is not subject to changes in political administration. Although cabinet members change with changes of presidents, the director does not. This permits a security and permanency that allow for long time program development and planning.

5. Each State is Autonomous in its Administration and Organization of the Advisory Service in that State.

This characteristic is a continuance of the previous one (#4). The idea of autonomy makes each level of the organization free to adapt itself to the conditions within its area of influence. If we think of this, we realize that this flexibility to develop independent programs gives it strength. All of us hear people say: "But in our country it is different. We have different habits, culture, crops, different seasons, etc." The same can be said about each state in the United States. Therefore, these differences (even if minor in nature) are taken care of by each state's autonomy to develop its own organization, relationships, and programs. Perhaps this feature has contributed the most

to the success of the United States Extension Service now enjoys. This is why we emphasize the fact that we have 50 extension services in the United States. Truly each state is an autonomous unit. In reality we can also say we have 50 different extension programs.

6. Emphasis is Placed on the Local Level, With Each County Developing its own Program.

Just as we can truly say that there are 50 extension services in the United States, we can also say that we have 3,000+ extension education programs. Each county (under federal and state legislation), is responsible and must develop its own program. Each county meets its own needs and develops a program of work based upon the cooperative planning between the local agents and the farm families.

Certainly this permits an educational service to contribute to solving people's problems. This means a people's program at a level and rate they want it to be, not one designed by government or political bodies imposing programs that are resisted by people, because they are someone else's and not their own.

Most educators and extension workers readily agree that this is an important element in developing educational programs for rural people. However, local agents and people must be educated and given time to make this process of cooperation work. It is far easier for agents to look to their superiors for direction and programs rather than working with large numbers of people. Because program building with people requires time to develop, results are not forthcoming in the early years of new organization. Political leaders and extension people themselves too often want immediate results and try to speed up programs by imposing themselves on the people at a faster rate than people can be involved. There are many cases in many areas of the world where there is evidence of a top down kind of program

development. The failures far outnumber the successes when this happens. It is true that time waits for no man, but it is also true that men need time to develop.

7. It is Attached to the Land-Grant Colleges, which Coordinate Resident Teaching, Research and Extension Teaching.

In element #2, we recognized the importance of these three areas of work. But here we emphasize the fact that extension is attached to an institution of higher learning which immediately associates the extension service to an educational foundation. At the same time, it is an institution directly concerned with agriculture. By Federal Law, a Land Grant College has been established in each State. This law also makes it mandatory that it be an Agricultural Institution. These Land Grant colleges are the major force in the United States in developing agricultural leaders. With their major interest in agriculture, their sympathies and concerns are with rural people. The extension service naturally fits into this scheme of things. With the Land Grant colleges also dependent upon and associated with agricultural research to obtain new knowledge in technology and skills we have another strong link between these three necessary institutions.

It is a marvel to many that a political body such as the United States legislature should have created three separate institutions essential to the economic and social progress of its people. Perhaps not because the legislators created these institutions, (many other countries have done the same) but because they gave them autonomy, free from the pressures of political change. And in addition established a relationship of cooperation. A famous policy adopted by Cornell University which also includes the Land Grant College of Agriculture of New York State. This democratic feature has paid dividends. "Freedom with responsibility", freedom to organize and develop responsibility to put knowledge to work. Political bodies must

create institutions, but off-times they must withdraw from forcing their own ideas too rapidly upon people, regardless of their best intentions or superior knowledge.

8. There is a Two-Way Flow of Ideas from the Top Down and From the Field Level Upwards.

In previous elements we stressed the autonomy and freedom permitted at all levels of the organization and in program development. The National Extension Service is free from the United States Department of Agriculture. Each state is free to develop its own programs and administer its own organization. Each county has these same freedoms. This does not mean that all ideas from national leaders and administrators are rejected. Nor does it mean that there is no relationship between regional, state or national effort. In fact, many ideas do originate at higher levels -- just as research stations develop new knowledge and technology so do ideas originate from leaders. It is how these ideas are incorporated into the system. With security assured by autonomy from politics and other disrupting influences, leaders are recognized for ideas that come from study of factors from their broad training and experiences, from their position of knowing other areas and program. As the people learned that they did have freedom to develop their own programs to solve their own problems, they had greater faith in the people who made up their extension service. Naturally, the technologists and administrators had wider contacts and could help in unifying ideas and making use of resources to help solve needs.

The system of two-way flow means that as new technology is forthcoming, it is passed on to the farmers. Farmers in turn were able to pass on to their leaders their problems. Technologists and administrators were then working on problems of the people and the people were receiving new knowledge and utilizing

resources made available in this mutually beneficial cycle. It is true that we cannot now determine where the cycle starts, but it is one that permits national and state leaders to be partners with the people they serve.

9. The Latest Methods of Communication are Exploited when Found Useful to Getting the Job Done.

Fortunately, in the United States communications developed very rapidly. But more fortunately, these media were used to promote educational programs and not only to exploit people. (By exploitation we mean to advertise goods for sale, or propagandize for political purposes or only for recreational activities). Educators in the United States were foresighted enough in realizing the advantages of using all communications media to reach more people and to reach more people more effectively.

Extension itself means to extend something. We know it means to extend knowledge. The first extension people extended knowledge by using roads to go to the people. The spoken work was taken out of the class-room. The individual farm visits became group visits. Lectures became more easily understood by use of charts, pictures and other visuals. The radio made it possible to reach still more and to reach them more often. All of these media became tools to the extension man. Studies on how to use these communications media resulted in developing improved techniques. New knowledge is now transferred to people in many forms. The learning process and the teaching arts are sciences made more effective by more effective use of communications skills. New knowledge produces only when put to work. This means it must be transferred from those who discover new knowledge (research) to those who must put it to work (farm families). The "bridge" between the two is the extension service. The tools the extension people use are, of course, the

communication skills. Extension agents in the United States have benefited by:

- a. Having opportunity to be trained in communication skills.
- b. Having opportunity to use the extensive communication media.

10. Democratic Procedure is Fundamental to its Operation.

Naturally, a democratic procedure would be a system acceptable and preferred in a democracy. However, not all democracies permit or use democratic procedures. Even the United States has not always employed democratic procedure in all its educational programs in the past. The democratic process is oft-time considered too slow for action programs. The extension service, however, has proved the usefulness and advantage of using democratic procedures. Many now proved extension educational principles are based upon the fact that a democratic foundation exists. The principle of "involving people" takes on different meanings, depending upon whether a democratic procedure is implied, or an autocratic procedure is to be used. Obviously you can involve people in both instances. The same can be said for other principles,^{*} i.e., "start where people are", or "an extension program must be based on needs of the people", "extension should serve all members of the family" to mention a few. All these, and others, depend upon an understanding and use of the democratic procedure as understood and practiced in the United States. The failure of many extension programs in other democratic countries may be due to their interpretation of what constitutes the democratic process.

* A list of principles has been included in a previous paper prepared in this training materials series entitled "Philosophy of Extension"

11. Use of Lay Leaders [★] is one of the Strongest Aspects Contributing to its Extensive Coverage in the Rural Areas.

This system of using local leaders or lay leaders makes it possible for the approximately 10,000 extension workers (which includes administrators and supervisory staff) to extend services to every agricultural area and family that wants to participate. A system of direct aid or personal visits limits the number of families and the area covered to a very small percentage per extension workers. When we consider the size and population of the United States, we begin to realize that although 10,000 is a large number of extension workers, they could not hope to do the job so extensively if they were not supported by volunteer, unpaid local leaders. Certainly it takes time to build a program through leaders. They must be trained and backstopped by the agent. Certainly, too, agents must have faith that the local leaders can carry on certain training and liaison activities. Unfortunately, many extension agents' concept of a leader is of one who assists the agent, but only when the agent is present. Thus, the effect of multiplying an agent's service is nullified, because he must always be with his leaders when they "extend" skills or knowledge on behalf of the agent.

Another concept that must be changed is the belief that only educated people can teach others. It is the author's sincere belief that in Latin America, where there are:

- a. Limited trained agricultural people available for extension.
- b. Very small budgets for hiring or developing extension organizations,

the best way to extend these limiting factors is to work through local leaders. Perhaps too much emphasis is placed on references to principles, but again, using leaders is one way of "involving

★ In the list of future topics for articles for the training materials series, we will cover definition, use and roles of lay leaders.

people", "starting where people are", and other such principles that are guides to doing successful extension education.

12. The Program is Flexible so that it Adjusts to Change.

Too often this characteristic in program planning implies a paradox. In program planning and development, we always emphasize planning and the idea of sticking to the plan. Then we say a program must be flexible. What is meant is that we must base a program on needs, organize our resources, and follow a plan that will help us accomplish our objectives. Flexibility means being able to change the program to meet the changing needs or to take advantage of changes in people so as to help them achieve their goals. Too often extension people think of a program as their program and not the people's. This causes the extensionist to resist changing the program or persist in carrying out plans that are no longer valid. As people learn to use the extension service and learn to contribute, they too gain new insights and appreciations. They are able to do more. They are able to evaluate their needs more realistically. Also true is that conditions change. New resources become available. All of these are good reasons for flexibility in programs and priorities for the benefit of helping those we serve. Perhaps we mean that vigilance and evaluation should be continuous in order to be able to help people develop the programs that are best suited to their interests. Long-time goals, i.e., increasing production or raising levels of living, can be constant. The short-time goals may need to be flexible and change as we strive to achieve the long-time goals. Perhaps some short-time goals need to be discarded or modified, but this means being realistic, and, as proven in the United States is a strong element in developing success.

13. The Service Developed from one of Improving Agricultural Production to Serving the Farm Family as a Unit. (Special Programs for Men, Women, and Rural Youth are Still Continued).

In the United States, the main reason for starting an extension service was to extend technical knowledge in agriculture to farmers. At the turn of the present century, the United States was primarily an agricultural country. Most of the rural people were engaged in production and distribution of agricultural products, food, and fiber. There was a great need to increase agricultural supplies as well as to make farming more efficient. Agricultural supplies were needed to feed and furnish the industrial machinery that was developing. Efficiency was needed to release labor from agricultural pursuits for work in the industrial empire. These things happened. But as this efficiency developed, rural people were also able to aspire to higher standards and levels of living. New homes, equipment, facilities, better education for children, use of leisure time, etc., were new aspects of human welfare that began to occupy the families. As these new needs and problems changed, it was fortunate that extension was able to expand its educational program to include programs designed to help the people.

Farming is more than a business enterprise for the man; it is a family enterprise. What better reason than to include all members of the family in the problem of improving rural life, both in their vocation as well as their personal lives. Through the family approach, the entire rural population is involved in the process of learning and solving problems. Certainly the impact of 4-H Club work is recognized as preparing the future adults as cooperators and contributors to extension education efforts. The women's programs have contributed much in supporting agricultural production. As in most agricultural areas, the women participate directly and in most cases have responsibility for the small

enterprises, such as chicken and rabbit raising, gardens, etc.

Since it is hard to separate the job of working for a living, and the job of living, in subsistence type agricultural areas, it is important to involve the whole family in extension education, and as the family business improves, each of the units, men, women, and youth, begins to have time for special interests of its respective group. Special programs and activities can then be developed. Today in the United States it is accepted and recognized that developing agricultural programs, home economics programs, youth programs, and family programs, have done and still do much for making extension education an important and significant force. It continues to be in ever increasing demand even though the United States is an industrial nation, and less than 10% of the population is involved in agricultural production.

14. Training in Technical Agriculture and Home Economics are Prerequisites for Extension Personnel. In-service Training and Refresher Courses Help them Keep Pace with New Developments, Research, Techniques, Skills, and New Responsibilities.

Not much needs to be said about the need for well trained agricultural extension agents. Technical agricultural knowledge is necessary and its importance is recognized in most countries. At an early stage, one of the minimum requirements for becoming an extension agent in the United States was to be a college graduate with a B.S. degree in agriculture. Today the same is true for home economists. It was soon learned that not everyone could teach new scientific methods just because he was a farm boy. So, too, it is erroneous to think that any woman can teach home economics without technical training just because all women know about raising families, taking care of homes, nutrition, etc., since these skills are natural to women.

We need to have technically trained people in agriculture and home economics because methods, techniques and knowledge change. This means good training at all stages, such as in-serving training to help extension agents keep up on these new developments.

In addition to technical training and competency, of course, they must learn how to teach and work with people. Basically the art of teaching people must be acquired before transfer of the new knowledge and skills can take place. This is the justification and need recognized by Agricultural Colleges to include social sciences and education as pre-requisites for their extension graduates.

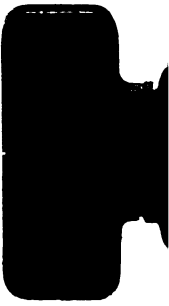
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