

Extension: Crown Jewel or Glass Bauble\*

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Colleagues and Friends: I am deeply honored by the invitation to present the 1990 Ruby Lecture at this annual meeting of our national honorary fraternity. It has held high the ideals and expectations of our chosen profession, preserved our rich traditions, maintained the philosophical base and values which have characterized the Extension program for almost four decades and provided a motivation for excellence. Those who serve our fraternity have earned the trust and esteem of their colleagues. I am grateful for the inspiration and support you have provided me personally and wish you a successful conference.

Today, I raise with the leaders of Extension a question - "Is the Extension Service a Crown Jewel or a Glass Bauble?" To set the stage for this rather vague question, let us move backward in time to July 2, 1862. A Vermont legislator, Justin S. Morrill has just witnessed a historic moment, President Abraham Lincoln has signed legislation establishing the Land-Grant College system. It has been a long struggle for Morrill, Johnathan Baldwin Turner and other leaders. Their vision of a great rural America has been given new promise by three important acts of legislation this year. The founding of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the Homestead Act were

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important but this act establishing the Land Grant Colleges is unique. This is America's contribution to the educational system of the world. It is like a golden tiara, a crowning achievement, and the most innovative concept developed in the educational process. The act was further strengthened by the 1890 Land Grant Act which prohibited discrimination in the use of congressionally appropriated funds. Given the social agenda of these times, it resulted in the formation of the 1890 Land Grant Institutions. Thus, the first crown jewel of American education was born, charged with bringing knowledge to the children of the masses.

According to Wayne Rasmussen in his superb work, "Taking the University to the People," Iowa became the first state to accept the Act on September 11, 1862. Eventually all states responded to the challenge, however, progress for this revolutionary idea in education was slow. Many states lost their initial grants through bad investments, and enrollments were low. By 1873, 27 institutions had been formed but only three served more than 150 students.

A major drawback to the educational process was a lack of tested knowledge. Students' scientific exposure came largely from work on college supervised farms which taught practical application of a limited scope of knowledge. Clearly something was missing from the crown of American education.

Some states and institutions began the search for new knowledge by establishing Experiment Stations. Connecticut developed one of the first in 1875. This fueled a growing movement for a national system of Experiment Stations with financial aid from the federal government. In 1887 Congress approved and the president signed the Hatch Act, which provided funds to each state for an Experiment Station. Thus, the second crown jewel of this unique

system of education, research, came into being.

Allow me to digress a moment and point out that Representative William H. Hatch was from the state of Missouri. He represented my home congressional district, but contrary to the popular opinion of my children, I never had the privilege of voting for him. However, as a county agent, I have walked the hills and fields of his family farm near Hannibal, Missouri where at one time the university maintained a branch Experiment Station.

The process of scientific inquiry was eminently successful, in fact, productive beyond expectation. Knowledge accumulated at the Land Grant Colleges. They became the focal points for the testing and access of information. Farm papers though severely limited in circulation were early users of the data. Farmer bulletins were made available by USDA, and the land grant colleges held farmer institutes. Agricultural and civic leaders began to sense that something was missing from this educational system.

Rasmussen reports that in 1910 there were six million farmers and that they comprised one third of the nation's work force. The people engaged in agriculture averaged only \$139 in income compared to the non-farm worker's income of \$482 per year. The call for change echoed across the nation and agricultural leaders responded. One year before the 20th century, a great agricultural leader, George Washington Carver of Tuskegee Institute, developed a farm demonstration program in Alabama. Observations of this led Seaman A. Knapp to request funding in 1906 for a cooperative demonstration agent in Texas. States across the country were being creative - the Chautauqua system in New York, the Rutgers Lectures in New Jersey, boys and girls clubs in Ohio and other states, farm management institutes in Pennsylvania - all were engaged in extending the practical application of science to people's every

day work and problems.

Legislation which would establish an educational delivery system for the people was first introduced in 1909. It required compromise and persistence to shepherd the Smith-Lever Act through Congress, but on May 8, 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Act and added the third crown jewel - Extension - to the land grant college movement. Secretary of Agriculture, David Houston, called the act "one of the most striking educational measures ever adopted by any government."

Seventy-five years of history has proven the wisdom of the Smith-Lever Act. Its challenge - "to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics and to encourage the application of the same" has been met successfully in every county or parish in our country.

The three crown jewels of American education - teaching, research and extension - have served our country and its people well. They have shown brilliantly through two world wars, a great depression and have helped the nation build an economy which until recently was unchallenged. Thousands upon thousands of youngsters, some present today, have earned an education in these institutions. Millions more have benefitted directly from research knowledge gained through Extension to build happier and more satisfactory lives.

Yet, in the annals of recorded time, 75 to 100 years is but a heartbeat. What is the future of these institutions and the three crown jewels - teaching - research and Extension? The world is totally different now than in the past years of greatness. We have moved from a society dominated by rural values and a rural political base to an urban society. This society has built colleges - community schools and technical institutes on every corner of

America. Mass communication has shrunk the world's boundaries so that nations which seemed remote are now our competitors in world trade. We are a nation caught up in an energy crisis - a nation where many youth reject education and a nation where excesses flourish - excesses in affluence, drugs, waste.

It is in this context that I again raise the question to you the leaders of the noble profession of Extension education, "Is Extension a true crown jewel or only a glass bauble?" Will its lamp of knowledge continue to burn with the deep and permanent fire which comes from a jewel of stature or will it merely reflect the light of knowledge from others in a momentary path of brilliance until it is shattered and forgotten.

That decision depends on the leaders of Extension. I propose in my remaining time to examine with you four theses which I believe must be considered if Extension is to maintain crown jewel status into the next century.

The first of these is that "Extension must remain and prosper as a national educational movement." Within the next decade, I believe you will see this concept challenged. Nationally there are two focal points for Extension - Extension Service/USDA and the Extension Section within the Agricultural Division of the Land Grant College System. Cordial relationships and cooperative efforts are exercised by both parties to provide strong leadership; leadership which I applaud. However, there are two significant forces which weaken both these national groups.

One is the declining percentage of federal appropriations to the State Extension budgets. From a high of 40 percent in the late 40s, many states now receive less than 25 percent of their funding from federal sources. In addition, many states have dropped the federal retirement program and health

addition, many states have dropped the federal retirement program and health insurance, opting instead for social security and state programs. These factors have weakened the national system.

But perhaps more important in the future is the changing content of the modern Extension program. Increasingly, the problems confronting Extension require expertise not found in the agricultural curriculum. Dale Lick in his treatise "The Cooperative Extension System - A Future Perspective" raises two major national problems as potential Extension educational thrusts - an aging population and adult literacy. When youth at risk, health education and parenting education are added, a significant dimension of Extension programming has only a peripheral relationship to agriculture. Yet the national organizational base is closely linked both in USDA and the land grant system with an agricultural orientation. Accommodation measures must be found or potential Extension programs must be sacrificed.

Resolution of the problem may lie in the progressive development of resources outside normal Extension channels. A positive model exists within the system. Research colleagues routinely obtain large amounts of funding from such entities as the Institute of Health and the National Science Foundation. Can Extension use its influence and reservoir of knowledge and networking skills to help develop outside channels of resources? Does Extension have the ability to be competitive on a national basis in such funding? The recent successes in Youth at Risk programs bodes well for the approach. In my judgment it is important that efforts be continued in this direction. It will require boldness, courage and unanimous support if such attempts are to be feasible.

Let me pause to express to my friends in agriculture that I know and

agriculture and the environment. The progress which has been made in waste management, water quality and food safety is laudatory. My concern is for an arena of problems facing our country where Extension has the opportunity and skills to make a significant contribution to the future.

My second thesis is "Extension must strengthen its position within the Land Grant College." If Extension is to survive as a crown jewel it must be an integral part of the Land Grant University. I suggest that Extension professionals measure the status of Extension by some simple questions.

- Does the university budget provide a critical mass of Extension expertise within the system?

- Is the university leadership structured to allow Extension problems and priorities to flow through to the top decision makers of the university?

- Does the Cooperative Extension Service program have access to knowledge and expertise of all schools and colleges within the university or is it restricted to a few?

- Is the Extension faculty accorded the same privileges and responsibilities as the research and teaching faculty?

If these can be answered positively then there probably exists a strong framework for the state's development of future programs.

There are people in significant leadership roles who believe the Land Grant University System has lost some of its zeal and appreciation for the Extension mission. Perhaps a high level national blue ribbon commission needs to be charged to conduct a study on the need and potential role of Extension programs nationally. Several states have conducted similar studies and most will report their programs are in a stronger position because of the study. Such action requires courage and Extension must be ready to face the

consequences of the study results.

There is one other factor regarding Extension relations within the university system. This concerns criteria for determining excellence of Extension programs and for evaluation of Extension faculty. Many state Extension Services have moved to joint appointments and administrative combinations with other university functions. Unless criteria of excellence are available for evaluating Extension programs and people, Extension will be judged by others criteria. National standards of excellence and an open review policy for Extension programs would enhance the integrity of Extension programs and improve its professional standing and reputation within the university system.

My third thesis is "Extension's future is dependent upon the development of professional leadership." Our profession has a philosophy of service and a doctrine of beliefs regarding knowledge and its use in society which are unique in higher education. While these tenets should be shared throughout the organization, they are vital to the leadership structure of the organization. Where does an organization go in search of a leader with Extension principles to guide the program? Conversely, where does a young Extension professional who aspires to these principles go to obtain the education and experiences required to qualify for a leadership position? Outstanding leadership will be needed at all levels of the organization in the future. County agents are expected to secure thousands of dollars in local funding and relate to a myriad of organizations and groups. Middle management has the difficult task of guiding the overall effort of diverse geographic and economic units. State and national leaders with vision are desperately needed to meet the challenge of Extension programs in the future.



Fortunately, leadership is an acquired skill. Extension must make a bold re-commitment to leadership training for the future. It is both a state and national problem. Part of the solution will come from states working together to create a national center for leadership training. But states must also work to develop the training institutes and graduate programs that will guide the emergence of leadership from those engaged in the profession. As these programs are developed, it is important that Extension share these with other colleagues within the university system and with the general public. Seminars for young university administrators and rising young public leaders on Extension programs should be considered. Such action might pay huge dividends if the individual should become president of a land grant institution or chairman of the state's budget committee.

My fourth and final thesis is "Extension must work smarter not harder." Extension's work ethic is one of the strongest in the field of education. From county agent to administrator, the weekly work clock is closer to sixty hours a week than the traditional forty. It is imperative in a time of declining net revenues that the organization expend time wisely and creatively. Electronic technology must be utilized. Time must be allocated to creative thought and direction. Extension must also consider that its role in the future may become that of an educational catalyst leveraging resources to bring education solutions to society's problems. Through its expertise in networking, alliances and the old social action process, Extension can have a maximum impact in problem solving. Finally, Extension must continue its search to set priorities for its educational efforts. The problems facing our nation are too many and the educational resources too few to waste them on peripheral issues. It is important that the states maintain flexibility to

treat the issues germane and important to that state's people. Priority setting is a difficult process but few tasks will pay greater dividends to the Extension program.

Those of us in this room have had a unique and tremendous privilege to work with the Land Grant University System. It is a crowning achievement in education and its contribution to our country and the world in total has been striking. The wisdom of the statesmen who crafted the three crown jewels of teaching-research and extension has been upheld in discovery, delivery and use of knowledge. Extension has been a crown jewel, perhaps even a RUBY, which has reached into every corner of American life, enriching and empowering it to greater achievement. I propose that the past 75 years has been but a prologue to an even more glorious and progressive future.

Those with responsibility for the program are challenged to maintain and strengthen Extension's national power base, to reaffirm the importance of the Extension program within the land grant institution, to enhance and enrich the leadership base throughout the organization and to keep the Extension programs of the future firmly entrenched in the problems of the country's people. If these challenges are met, I have no doubt that the brilliance and beauty of this unique educational process - Extension - will shine with the fire and glory of a true crown jewel.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

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