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Origin, Growth and Explanation Of Farm Demonstration Work

A year has passed since the cooperative agricultural extension act of May 8, 1914, commonly known as the Smith-Lever Extension Act, went into effect. In that period much has been accomplished in creating or perfecting the administrative machinery for carrying on the extension work in agriculture and home economics in the department and the several States. The general lines along which these extensive enterprises will be conducted have also been quite well determined.

All the States have assented to the provisions of the act either through their governors or their legislatures and the action of the governors has been ratified by all the legislatures which have been in regular session during the year. A single agricultural college in each State has been designated as the beneficiary of this act, thus providing for a unified administration of the act within the State. In several States where the college designated is not coeducational, a cooperative arrangement for the work in home economics has been made with the State college for women, and similarly in a few States having separate land grant colleges for negroes a cooperative arrangement has been made for extension work among people of that race.

EXTENSION SERVICE IN EVERY STATE.

In all the States the colleges having charge of the work under the Smith-Lever Act have created extension divisions or services and have brought under these divisions all their extension work in agriculture and home economics whether carried on with Smith-Lever or other funds. In some States these divisions are not yet as clear-cut as is desirable, and in some cases old State laws or general administrative regulations of the institutions adopted years ago have thus far continued in confusing union of the extension organization with that of the experiment station. In thirty-two States a separate officer is in charge of the extension work usually under the title of director, in thirteen States the extension director is also director of the experiment station or dean of the college of agriculture, and in three States there is still an acting director. In almost every State the extension work has already become such a large and varied enterprise that a separate officer in active charge of its operations and devoting his entire time to this work is essential to its highest efficiency.

In 20 States the farmers' institutes are still carried on by the State Department of Agriculture, though in a number of States there is a movement for their transfer to the agricultural college and this has taken place in South Dakota. In practically all the States where the institutes have a separate organization there is some kind of a cooperation with the agricultural college in this work. Where the institutes are under the direction of the college they are undergoing a more or less reorganization with a view to making them more definitely demonstrational and educational.

STATES RELATIONS SERVICE.

The plans for the unifying of the management of the agricultural extension enterprises within the States were met by the Secretary of Agriculture, in the first place, by the creation of a States Relations Committee, for the general supervision of all the extension enterprises of the department bureaus and of the cooperative arrangements with the State institutions involving the use of Smith-Lever or department funds for demonstrations or other forms of extension work. This committee has now been succeeded by a permanent States Relations Service, created by Congress in accordance with the Secretary's recommendations, which beginning with July 1, 1915, will have among its functions the duties previously performed by the States Relations Committee.

All the State agricultural colleges receiving the benefits of the Smith-Lever Act have entered into cooperative relations with the department, and in 46 States these institutions and the department are conducting all their extension work in agriculture

and home economics under the terms of a general "Memorandum of understanding," which is used as the basis for a great variety of cooperative agreements.

COUNTY AGENTS IN 1,000 COUNTIES

There has been remarkable unanimity in the acceptance by the States of one of the fundamental features of the extension enterprises which was developed by the department with funds wholly under its control prior to the passage of the Smith-Lever Act. The experience of the past twelve years has fully demonstrated the value of the county agricultural people on their farms and in their homes the results of practical experience and scientific research in agriculture and home economics and securing the practical application of these results through demonstrations and otherwise. There is therefore general agreement that nothing is more important in the development of extension features under the new conditions arising from the Smith-Lever Act than the establishment in each county of permanent headquarters for extension work, in charge of a competent county agent, who shall act as the joint representative of the local community, the State through its agricultural college, and the nation through its Department of Agriculture. It is believed that in this way the need of the agricultural people in their several communities can be best determined, and whatever help the State and the Nation can give them in their agricultural and home problems can be most speedily and effectively brought to them. A large share of the department extension funds, much money derived from State, county, and local sources, and a considerable portion of the Smith-Lever fund have therefore been devoted to the maintenance and extension of the county agent system. There are now over 1,000 counties in the 48 States which have county agents.

On the whole these agents have been very successful in winning the confidence of the farming people, and the tangible results of their work are very encouraging. The personality of the agent is, of course, a very large factor in determining the measure of his success. His understanding of the real problems of the region in which he is working, his sympathy with rural people, and his ability to meet them on their own ground and actually convey to them important practical instruction and information in a convincing way are among the essentials. When to these qualifications are added studious inclinations and habits, the possession of accurate and up-to-date knowledge of the practice and science of agriculture and business ability of high order, we have a very able and useful man whose services will mean much for the agricultural and social advancement of his county.

SPECIAL TRAINING FOR COUNTY AGENTS

Considering the limited number of agricultural college graduates and the numerous avenues for congenial work which are opening up to them it is not surprising that up to the present time it has not been practicable to obtain a sufficient number of such graduates with the practical experience and other qualifications required for the position of county agent. There will be a steady demand for men of thorough training, combined with satisfactory practical experience, to fill these positions. The colleges have therefore a special duty to train the future extension workers and it is encouraging to notice that they are beginning to feel their responsibility in this direction.

ORGANIZATION AMONG FARMERS

Inasmuch as it is impracticable for the county agent to deal altogether with individual farmers, the problem of the organization of groups of farm people through whom they may work is assuming great importance. Two general types of such organizations are now being utilized. County organizations, often called farm bureaus, are being formed which are expected to take the initiative in securing county or local financial support for the county agent, take part in the selection and appointment of the agent, and

stand behind him in his efforts to advance the agricultural interests of the county. Many of these organizations include business and professional men, as well as farmers, and their complex organization has given rise to special problems. It is, however, now very apparent that while the cordial sympathy and support of all classes of our people in the movement for the improvement of agricultural conditions is very much to be desired, the farming people themselves should control and in the end determine the character and work of the organizations on which the extension system must depend for its local support.

Another type of local organization being tested in various places is the small community club. Where a considerable number of these clubs exist in a county they are often confederate to form some kind of a county organization. The exact relations of organizations of either type to the extension system, the breadth and variety of their functions relating to extension work or other enterprises, and the most effective forms for their organization are as yet largely undetermined and they must still be considered as in the experimental stage.

WORK FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

Another important line of extension work which has been developed in a large way by the department and the agricultural colleges prior to the passage of the Smith-Lever Act and which has been carried over into their new extension organization is the boy's and girl's club work. In the Southern States this enterprise is organically associated with the county agent work but in the other States has a more separate organization. Through the club work the extension agencies are brought into close touch with the State and local officers and teachers, who largely cooperate in the formation and management of the clubs. This has raised many interesting questions regarding the relations which the club work might or should sustain with the regular school instruction in agriculture and home economics. For example, it is practicable and desirable to consider the club work as in the nature of a home project for the pupils and to give school credit for this work? Undoubtedly such questions will require much consideration by the extension officers in the future.

For many years the agricultural colleges have done a large amount of extension work through the members of their faculties, and experiment station staffs. At first this was purely incidental to their regular duties, but as the demand for extension work has grown a somewhat definite and, in many cases, a large share of the time of specialists in various branches of agriculture and home economics has been devoted to this work. More recently in some institutions certain officers have been set apart wholly for this service with the coming of large funds for extension work under the Smith-Lever Act, much attention is being given to the enlarging and strengthening of the force of extension specialists is practically all the States.

These officers are expected to supplement the work of the county agents by giving them advice and assistance in connection with special problems which arise in the counties, to carry on short practical courses of instruction, often called movable schools, in various parts of the State, to conduct demonstrations along special lines, to prepare extension publications, to address meetings of farmers, to answer the inquiries of county agents or farmers on a great variety of subjects, etc. In general, they are to gather up the available knowledge in their several specialties, and especially the knowledge obtained by the State experiment stations which bears directly on the farmers' problems within the State to put this knowledge in effective form for delivery to the farming people, and to carry it to them directly or through the county agents by word of mouth, demonstrations, or publications.

STATUS OF EXTENSION SPECIALISTS

The organization of such a force on a large scale is giving the administrative officers of the colleges much trouble and perplexity. The determination of the status of the extension as members of the college faculties and their relations to the teaching force and station staffs is by no means an easy or simple matter. The question as to how far the extension

specialists should devote all their time to extension work or should combine such work with teaching or research is a very complicated one. Obviously there is great danger that persons employed on the extension staff will waste much time and energy in traveling about on indefinite errands, will do too much offhand talking or writing, will be content to be superficial students of their subjects, will not give sufficient to the planning and conducting of worth-while demonstrations, will make their teaching too theoretical or sensational, etc.

The standardization of the work of extension specialists has hardly begun. The colleges are practically compelled to increase their number rapidly by the appointment of the best available personnel. They must not, however, neglect to establish some reasonable system for scrutinizing the work of these officers with a view to determining its real value as measured by its practical results. It is believed that such specialists should be called upon from time to time to outline their work quite definitely in project statements to be reviewed and approved, by the extension director. They should be encouraged to restrict their principal endeavors in any one year to a few well chosen and strictly limited subjects and should be made to feel that their success will be measured largely by their ability to secure definite results along these lines. Many of the projects for specialists thus far submitted to the department under Smith-Lever Act as far too general and do not reveal any thorough study of what is actually needed or feasible. This is undoubtedly due in part to the rush of work imposed on the extension officers during the past year, and it will be expected that there will be definite improvement along this line in the near future.

The difficulties of the colleges in the proper development of their extension staffs and enterprises are greatly enhanced by the extravagant expectations regarding the immediate effect of this work on our agricultural advancement entertained by the public partly as a result of enthusiastic propaganda conducted by various agencies. Agricultural advancement over large areas and among farming people of very diverse elements is necessarily a slow process. Superficial results, often very beneficial as far as they go, can be obtained, it may be, in a comparatively short time. Propaganda wisely planned may be useful but they will fail of permanent success unless they are followed up by patient and continuous education.

PRACTICAL EDUCATION

The Smith-Lever Act has provided the means for a permanent system of popular practical education in agricultural and home economics, so organized as to preserve the autonomy of our State agricultural institutions, to encourage and develop local initiative and self-help, and at the same time to bring to the support of the State institution and local organizations the National Department of Agriculture with its broad outlook on our agricultural problems and its force of scientists and experts who have specialized in various lines or have had wide opportunities for study and observation in certain directions. The most encouraging thing about the extension development in the United States during the past year has been the formation on a grand scale of a cooperative system involving National, State, and local organizations and the general good will and cordiality which has marked the relations of these agencies in the inauguration of this system. A few of the major features of this vast enterprise and some of the outstanding administrative problems with which it will have to deal have been briefly touched upon in this article. It is obviously impracticable in so short a space to give an adequate idea of the immense range and great intricacy of a work which will ultimately touch every phase of the industrial, home, and community life of our agricultural people.—Experiment Station Record, August, 1915, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

A few short weeks and the town pessimist will be cussing the cold weather. But let him cuss—it's his chief occupation in life.

Ask to Increase in Values

We copy the above from our Rich Square neighbor the Roanoke Chowan Times. Bro. Connor is generally both accurate and wise in his comments. In this case he writes without the facts. The clear intimation in his article is that our committee failed of its purpose; and that they were in a combination with Mecklenburg and other counties in the matter of tax reduction. The telephone from his office to the Register of Deeds office of Bertie county would have given the facts, if he had taken the trouble to ask for them. We answer.

First; The Commissioners of Bertie county thought that a fifteen per cent raise on the land values in Bertie county was excessive. They know the property valuation and worth in Bertie county and they decided that a raise of fifteen per cent was out of proportion to what other counties were paying under all the circumstances. The Commissioners sent D. R. Britton, Chairman of the Board, Hon. Thomas Gillam and J. H. Matthews to Raleigh to go before the Tax Commission and place the facts before that body. They did so in a business way, with convincing facts and figures. The Tax Commission took off thirty-three and a third per cent of the raise and the committee came home and went about their several employments. The Commissioners were justified in their position and in the results obtained. Bertie county cheerfully pays its part of the taxes to run the State Government but she does not want to pay more than her share. She protested in the proper way; was heard and was heeded. That is what has become of the committee.

Second: Bertie county's committee had no agreement with Mecklenburg, or with any other county. Bertie county's reduction had been made and its committee at home before Mecklenburg went to Raleigh. It is no concern of ours what was done with Mecklenburg's protest. Bertie had nothing to do with it; never had any agreement of any kind with it. We stood on our own complaint and that was heard and heeded.

The story that Bro. Connor says is going around is a fable so far as Bertie county is concerned.

"What has become of the committee our neighbor Bertie appointed to secure a modification of the order of the State Tax Commission raising the tax assessment on real estate in Bertie 15 per cent to equalize it with the other counties in the State? The story goes that Bertie and the other protesting counties after hearing the case as put up by Mecklenburg county agreed that they would be satisfied with one-half of what the commission would give Mecklenburg," and, as the Charlotte Observer says, "matters turned out so this proved to be one-half of nothing. Held strictly to their bargain, these protesting counties would have to take a little raise and be satisfied with it."

Children Cry
FOR FLETCHER'S
CASTORIA