

Implications of Current Extension System Initiatives for Programming on Agrosecurity Issues

David E. Foster
Associate Director
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension

Agrosecurity is a very timely subject for this conference. I compliment the planners who chose to focus on such a hot topic. Hot topics are interesting and they generally elicit one of two responses. Either, as you're doing here, you want to learn more about what really is going on, decide how the issue might impact you, and respond appropriately, or you keep quiet and hope that the issue doesn't rock your boat too much. I encourage you to examine the agrosecurity issue fully, discuss it openly, and act boldly. It is an issue that won't go away and should not be minimized.

In the broadest context the agrosecurity issue is really many issues, some derived from nature and some, manmade. Some can be anticipated while others cannot. Many states are already involved with sister agencies in planning and have begun to prepare educational materials and programming to respond to those issues that can be anticipated. I trust that we can also develop and refine our capacity to respond to unanticipated issues as they arise.

Many of you work with individuals and organizations that are bound by a common interest. Such communities of interest have very specific characteristics and needs. It has been my experience that Extension specialists work with these communities very effectively. What many of you are now doing as you interpret the provisions of the new farm bill is a case in point.

I'm not sure that we get such high marks when we deal with communities of place. The challenges of handling an important and/or contentious issue with a group that is bound primarily by geography is a much different challenge than we face with communities of interest. This is a challenge that our Extension field staff faces every day. Although our field staff can deal effectively with the "how to" aspects of an anticipated agrosecurity issues, I doubt that, as a group, the field staff is prepared to play a substantive policy education role within the communities where they live and work. Without that capacity Extension is ill-equipped to prepare local communities to deal with those agrosecurity issues that cannot be fully anticipated.

I want to spend the balance of my presentation acquainting you with two current initiatives taking place within the Extension System. Both the concept of engagement as defined by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities and the advent of an e-Extension system will impact how Extension works with both communities of interest and communities of place.

Engagement and a Vision for the 21st Century

In February 1999 the Kellogg Commission issued its third letter entitled *Returning to our Roots: The Engaged Institution*. In that document the commission acknowledged the presence of Extension's county-based network and its capacity; it challenged Extension to apply that capacity fully. Nevertheless, the commission observed that Extension is likely too staid within its traditional institutions and approaches to be a significant player in university-wide engagement. In October 2000 ECOP appointed a task force to consider the third letter of the Kellogg Commission and respond to it. The task force report, *The Extension System: A Vision for the 21st Century*, was published in February 2001. To view the document, go to the NASULGC web site at nasulgc.org and click on councils; then click on Council of Extension, Continuing Education, and Public Service; then click on view publication. Before the end of calendar 2002 the 21st century implementation team web site will be operative at extvision21.com.

If Extension is to meet the challenge of the Kellogg Commission, we must examine how we interact with the communities we serve. We need to identify and train leadership within a broader array of communities of interest and communities of place. We need to transfer to those leaders a level of program ownership that will cement our relationship and ensure their role in making our educational endeavors effective.

The seven-part test of engagement as articulated in *A Vision for the 21st Century* provides a framework which, when fully implemented, will cultivate a level of community leadership needed to support us in addressing issues and/or aspects of agrosecurity that cannot be fully anticipated and prepared for in advance. There is a great deal that policy specialists can do with respect to both process training and program content to prepare our field staff and community leaders to exercise real leadership and deal with issues in real time.

e-Extension

Within the past month CSREES has agreed to fund a pilot project to develop an electronic-based delivery system that when fully configured will serve as both a knowledge-based and curriculum-based system. Think for a moment how e-Extension might impact how you support the field staff and interface with the communities that you serve.

The knowledge-based aspects of the system will have a profound effect on how Extension serves the technical transfer needs of sophisticated communities of interest. It will impact the roles of both specialists and field staff. The curriculum-based system will make it possible for Extension Services, if they collaborate effectively, to provide the kind of sophisticated learning objects, instructional modules, educational programs, and curricula that the next generation of Extension users will demand. No state Extension Service has the capacity to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by e-Extension on its own.

To learn more about the e-Extension pilot project, click on **asred.msstate.edu/e-extension/e-extension.htm** at the Association of Southern Region Extension Directors' web site. The site will also provide information on how to become part of the e-Extension interest group.