

Extension Strategies Targeting Energy Conservation and Efficiency

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The Role of Extension in Energy Conference
June 30, 2009
Little Rock, Arkansas

The time to develop energy conservation and efficiency programs for Extension is yesterday. Once again, Extension is in danger of not being a partner in an important education and training opportunity. Why are we slow in moving to address new issues important to the clients for our services? A large part of the answer is related to how we are organized and funded. Most Extension programs are still administered colleges of agriculture variously defined. This makes it difficult to mount programs outside the scope of interest of the deans and college leaders. On the funding of Extension, we simply need a drastically different model. Most Extension programs have become smaller during recent years, and are still looking to for increased income traditional sources, which has not been forthcoming. We will focus on these two major items, organization and funding in addressing the role of Extension in Energy.

Organization

The organization of Extension under colleges of agriculture is rather easy to explain. The federal funding comes from USDA. The state match typically comes from the agricultural budget of the states. Funding from counties has a distinct bias based on existing programs. These programs are typically agriculture, families, 4-H youth, food security and nutrition, communities and environment and natural resources. And, over time more and more of the Extension budgets have gone to what could be called public sector activities. Private sector activity has held with agriculture (and in some cases communities), even though the share of agriculture in the economy has decreased significantly. Why has Extension not moved into more of a relationship with the rest of the private sector? The answer in my view is that the colleges in which Extension is administered focus mainly on agriculture. And, that the state funding match is largely controlled by agriculture interests.

This set of controlling agents has put Extension in something of a dilemma. Budgets are contracting, the control of the Extension budgets is with the agricultural interests, and there is strong pull or lack of resistance in moving toward the public sector activities. Extension has operated with dwindling and highly competed for resources. This has occurred while the land grants have become more well rounded institutions. In fact, agriculture in these land grant institutions is often one of the smaller colleges. Why has not Extension moved with (or followed) the parent institutions to develop programs with the other major colleges of the University?

The universities and Extension have not taken advantage of the wide open and untended field for outreach programs that is not within the traditional areas of Extension. But, to adequately tend the “new” outreach field Extension must go out of the colleges of agriculture. On the positive side the intended new client group, the private sector, is willing to pay for services.

And, some of the services now provided by Extension should be paid for by clients. Fees can be a major source of income for Extension. As well, if the effort is sold properly by the land grant institutions, additional state funding is a possibility. The time is ripe for effort to make the private sector more competitive and Extension has or could acquire the necessary capacities.

Funding

Extension has and is experiencing dwindling funding. The federal funds for years have been stable in nominal terms—despite the fact that a well organized lobbying effort is mounted each year by the land grants through NASULGC. State funds for the match have as well been decreasing. County funds are increasing, but not by much. This leaves as alternatives fees, grants and contracts and gifts, all requiring skills that are not abundance within the existing Extension personnel.

We must these “new” sources of funding to expand the role of Extension. And, we can look to our parent institutions, the land grants, for guidance. Most land grants now charge students tuition and fees that make up a significant part of the university revenue, 40 to 60 percent of the cost of the university. There has been some negative response of the students and families but, in general, there is recognition that the federal and state government cannot foot the bill for the education the students want. Why has Extension not followed the same funding trend? And, why has Extension not developed the variety of different programs indicated by the spread in services of the colleges of the land grants.

The time is upon us for a different focus of the programs of Extension and the adaptation of different funding model. If we accept this challenge, Extension can return to the major place it occupied in the land grant colleges or universities in the past. If not the answer is clear from the immediate past history. Extension will become smaller and smaller and less an integral part of the land grant system. The funding results of the latest economic down turn make this projection and recommendation for action all the more compelling. If our services are valuable, the clients will pay for them or will pay a larger part of the cost than we now are charging,

What to do?

There is a real chance to develop a significant Extension program in energy efficiency and conservation and in the growth of the renewable energy system in the US. We do not have the resources to do this, and will not get them from the federal and state sources. The only way we can capture this opportunity is to develop a new revenue model and cooperate with partners who have an interest in the result happening. How to effect these changes? Partner with private and public sector agents that have an interest in developing a renewable energy and energy efficient programs. Find a niche that fits the capacities of Extension, or that Extension can grow to support. Recognize that the funding to accomplish these activities will likely not come from traditional sources. Expand to get the capacities of different colleges than now are a part of Extension. A difficult task but we can do it, and this can conference can provide a great start for expanding the role of Extension in energy.

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