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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN
AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
STATE OF OKLAHOMA

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COUNTY AGENT WORK
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*The County
Farm Demonstration Agent
And the County
Home Demonstration Agent*

*By Bradford Knapp
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The County Farm Demonstration Agent *and the* County Home Demonstration Agent

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What is the work of a county demonstration agent and of a county home demonstration agent? What was the origin of the work? How is it financed? What are the relationships of the work of these agents to the rest of the educational system of the state? These are questions which are continuously being asked. This brief bulletin is prepared and published for the purpose of giving information on these subjects to the people generally and of being helpful to the members of the force and to the public officials of the state and the counties who are dealing with this work.

The county farm demonstration agent, often called "the county agent," or the "county agricultural agent," and the county home demonstration agent, often called the "home agent," are together the real field force in agricultural extension work. The rest of the work is mainly for the purpose of helping them in their work with farmers and members of the farmer's family, his son, his daughter, and his wife. But what is the work? Legally, this work should be known as the "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics" conducted by cooperation between the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College and the United States Department of Agriculture.

What is Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics?

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics is a part of the educational system of the state and nation, created by an act of the congress of the United States passed in 1914 (often known as the "Lever Act" from Hon. A. G. Lever, member of congress from South Carolina, author of the act, and at that time chairman of the house committee on agriculture) and approved by President Woodrow Wilson on May 8, 1914. This act was accepted by all of the states and thus became a part of the state system of education. The state of Oklahoma accepted the provisions of the act by an act of the legislature at its session in 1915.

The most important provisions of the Lever Act are contained in the first two sections, one of which provides for the establishing of the work and the other describes in general terms the nature of the work to be done under it. The first section provides, in part, as follows:

"That in order 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, there may be inaugurated, in connection with the college or colleges receiving the benefit (of what is known as the Land Grant)—etc.—agricultural extension work which shall be carried on in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture.”

The land grant college in each state is the college receiving the benefit of an act of Congress approved July 2, 1862, and known as the “Morrill Act” which created the agricultural colleges. That act was accepted by Oklahoma and the Oklahoma A. and M. College designated as the institution to receive such benefit as it was designated by the legislature to receive the benefit of the experiment station acts and finally of the “Cooperative Extension Act” of May 8, 1914.

The second section of the “Lever” or “Cooperative Extension Act,” referred to, specifies of what the work shall consist and is, in part, as follows:

“The cooperative agricultural extension work shall consist of the giving of instruction and practical demonstrations in agriculture and home economics to persons not attending or resident in said colleges in the several communities, and imparting to such persons information on said subjects through field demonstrations, publications, and otherwise; and this work shall be carried on in such manner as may be mutually agreed upon by the Secretary of Agriculture and the State Agricultural College or Colleges receiving the benefits of this act.”

What Institutions Does the Extension Work Represent?

As will be seen from the above, the extension work represents the land grant college, which in Oklahoma is the A. and M. College, and the United States Department of Agriculture. In a certain sense, the work also represents the county in so far as the county contributes funds. In each state, the work is under the direction of the college of agriculture, and the director of extension work represents both the A. and M. College and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Why is it Called Cooperative?

The work is called “cooperative” because of the provisions of the “Lever Act,” making it a cooperative work so as to avoid duplication on the part of those institutions which have information to disseminate, or send out, to farmers, namely, the United States Department of Agriculture, A. and M. College, and Experiment Stations.

Why is it Called Extension Work, and Where does it Get Its Information to Extend?

It is called extension work because it goes out from sources of information. It gets its information from the state experiment station, from the United States Department of Agriculture, and from other approved sources. It may even gather information to a limited extent from observation. The experiment station gathers information from its own experiments and from inquiries and observation of the success obtained by farmers, and prepares this information

for the public. The United States Department of Agriculture is constantly acquiring useful and valuable information of all kinds, which is of great benefit to the farmers. The extension work constitutes one of the important means of getting this information out to farmers.

How did the Work Originate?

For many years information was obtained by farmers through farmers' institutes, meetings, lectures, bulletins, the agricultural press, and other sources.

The present county agent, county home demonstration agent, and boys' and girls' club work, the main parts of the present cooperative agricultural extension work, were originated by the late Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, who was then an employee of the United States Department of Agriculture. In 1903 he suggested to Hon. James Wilson, then secretary of agriculture, that the best way of meeting the ravages of the boll weevil was to teach the farmers how to grow other crops than cotton, and how to grow cotton in spite of the boll weevil. At that time, Central Texas was in despair over the first advance of the boll weevil. Dr. Knapp believed that the best way was to get farmers to illustrate good practices on their own farms with their own tools, teams, and equipment, under real farm conditions. He thought that this would be the best proof of improved methods. He went on the principle that if the farmer did anything with his own hands once, he could do it again. He sent men of practical experience and good agricultural training out as agents to secure what he called "demonstrators" to demonstrate improved methods of crop production. Today this stands as the most distinct contribution to our modern system of education that has been made in recent years. From a little beginning, it has become a national system, due to the fact that it won its recognition at every step and finally resulted in the passage of the Lever Act, outlined above. Gradually in 1906, '07, and '08, the boys' club work was developed as a part of this work. In 1910 the girls' club was begun, and in 1911, home demonstration work.

What, Then, Is This Work?

It is now organized and financed as a public work, a part of the public educational system of the state. The funds for paying all salaries and expenses are derived mainly from three sources: (1) appropriations made by the United States Congress; (2) appropriations made to offset funds from Congress by the state legislatures; (3) appropriations made by the various counties in which the work is being done.

Sometimes when counties are not able to make appropriations for various reasons, groups of business men have contributed funds for support of the work, but in all cases these funds are contributed with the distinct understanding that the work is left to the direction of the college and the department.

Organization and Relationship.

The work of the organization consists of placing a county agricultural agent, or "county farm agent," and county home demonstra-

tion agent in each county which contributes to the work, the salary of these agents being paid from funds appropriated by the United States, from state funds, and from county funds. The work in the state is in charge of a director, responsible to the A. and M. College and through the college to the United States Department of Agriculture, under agreement for unity of action in administration of the work. There is a central office where the director has assistants to supervise the work and specialists who are highly trained in particular lines of work to assist the county agents in particular problems, such as horticulture, dairying, poultry, nutrition, food preparation, etc. These specialists keep in touch with the departments of the A. and M. college and the state experiment station, and with the results of the work of the United States Department of Agriculture, and help to bring these results to the county agents. When outbreaks of diseases of livestock or plants, or insect pests occur in a county, the county agent calls representatives of the staff of the experiment station, or the United States Department of Agriculture, of the state livestock disease control work, to help in the control of these pests.

Kinds of Work Carried Out By These Agents.

It should be remembered that all of this work is educational. While the agents may temporarily, and for short periods of time, perform personal services for individuals, they are not employed for the purpose of saving farmers, or groups of farmers, from doing that which they ought to do for themselves. They are employed for the purpose of imparting information and helping farmers and their families to put the information into practice. The different types of work carried on by an agent are as follows:

1. *Demonstrations*, which are living examples of good methods conducted by farmers, or some members of their family, for their own benefit and for the benefit of neighbors of the community in general, illustrating some improved practice, or introducing some new crop, method, or undertaking into the community. Demonstrations will be discussed more fully later.

2. *Illustrations*. By this we mean the things done by the agent himself, or herself, for the purpose of teaching, such as grading fruit or vegetables for market; canning meat; treating oats for smut, etc. These illustrations are performed by the agent with his, or her, own hands, for the purpose of illustrating some lesson he, or she, wants the farmer or his family to acquire. They are not to be confused with demonstrations. The demonstration is performed by the person who is acquiring the information and is, after all, the most important part of the extension work.

3. *Lectures*, meetings, and other oral instructions.

4. *Distribution* of bulletins and other publications, press articles, etc.

5. *Educational exhibits* and other visual education, such as taking persons to see demonstrations, etc.

What is the Difference Between Agricultural Extension Work and Other Types of Educational Activity?

Extension work is designed to teach persons while they are engaged in their everyday occupations, without interrupting their ordinary work. It differs from schools in that while it teaches, it does not teach systematically in classes, nor does it require the one to be taught to leave his work and go to school.

Mainly, it teaches by bringing information to farmers that will be helpful in solving some existing problem on the farm, or in the home, or the community. Extension workers find that farmers will have very little interest in demonstrations or lectures on a subject which is not giving them any trouble, or with which they are finding no difficulty. Hence, in the main, extension work applies itself to bringing information that will be helpful in solving some recognized problem.

Extension work deals with practical agriculture and home economics and not with theories. It takes proven facts and should not deal with experiments.

Does Extension Work Bring Information Useful to Boys and Girls?

Certainly it does, through club work. All instructions along agricultural lines in the various branches of the club work are under the supervision of the county farm agent, and the instruction for the girls in their various lines of endeavor, including the home orchard and home garden work, are under the supervision of the home demonstration agent. In Oklahoma the clubs are organized as a unit but with varying lines of work. Some of the boys are engaged in the production of corn, some in the raising of pigs, or sweet potatoes, or poultry, while the girls are instructed in canning, gardening, sewing, etc.

In these clubs boys and girls get practical instruction of benefit to themselves and, through their demonstrations, of benefit to all who come in contact with them. They are getting, here an inspiration for better life on the farm through this training which teaches them to appreciate the value of knowledge, to take proper pride in the work they are doing, and to secure such inspiration as comes from friendly competition for excellence.

These club members have often been the greatest incentive for better agricultural practices. They stimulate lines of work and set examples which are copied by their elders with profit. Corn production is on a better basis, and purebred hogs have greatly increased through the efforts of the boys' clubs; while the girls' clubs of the South have done more for home gardens and canning than any other force.

The instruction given by home demonstration agents in canning and preserving has made the South much more of a home-living section than before these clubs came into existence.

What is a Demonstration?

"A demonstration is an act, or a series of acts, in the production, or handling, preparation, or sale of a farm product, performed by a

farmer, or some member of his family, on his own place, or possibly by a group of farmers, or members of their families, under the instruction of a county agent, for the purpose of perfecting themselves in some improved agricultural practice, and at the same time assisting others to acquire the same information." Demonstrations are related closely to farm problems; for example, if the yield per acre in a county is low, then the use of legumes and manure and the application of commercial fertilizers are important demonstrations, looking to better production per acre in such a county. If food preservation is something that farm women have not practiced in a county, or if they have unnecessary losses from spoilage in home canned fruits, then canning clubs among girls and home demonstration clubs among women to learn improved methods of canning and preserving are important demonstrations.

A good demonstration involves a mutual agreement on the part of the one who is going to perform the demonstration, whether it be the farmer, the club boy or girl, or the farmer's wife, and the county agent giving the instructions. The one whom we call the "demonstrator" agrees to follow instructions and to carry the demonstration to completion, according to the outline agreed upon with the extension agent. These instructions may involve bringing in a specialist to help in giving the demonstration. The agreement should also provide that the demonstration is to be visited and inspected by others of the community in group meetings to be held in the field, the barn, or the home holding the demonstration, and that a report should be rendered showing the results obtained. In every plan of work in the county, the actual illustrations are of the utmost importance. The demonstration is, after all, the key to the extension work.

Relationship of the Agent to Organizations.

It must be remembered that the county agricultural and the county home demonstration agents are public officers, paid from public funds, and they represent the institution involved in the work, as indicated in this bulletin already. They may work with groups of farmers, or organizations of farmers, in educational work, in so far as the work does not constitute the taking over, or performing, for a farmers' organization of work which the farmers' organization ought to perform for itself.

They may work with and through organizations for improvement of farm practices, marketing methods, etc., but should not take upon themselves the marketing work. They should not become organizers of existing farm organizations and should particularly refrain from encouraging farmers to organize in sections where organizations already exist for like purposes. They may very properly help people, at their request, to form voluntary community organizations for general betterment. They may very properly help the people of school districts in meetings. They may very properly, and should, attend farmers' meetings on invitation, and may speak on general problems of production, preservation, storage, grading, marketing, and other topics of a similar kind.

These representatives of the public institutions approved by law are not political officers, and have nothing to do with political matters. It is highly desirable that all employees should refrain from participating in political campaigns of whatever sort. The county agents must maintain themselves in such an attitude that they can reach the largest possible number of people with useful service, and to this end their friendly attitude toward all good movements is desirable. Refraining from controversy is equally desirable.

Community, County, and State Plans of Work, and How Made Up.

As the work of this great organization has developed, it has come to have plan and system to it. Thus has been developed the idea of community, county, and state plans of work. All of these are made up so as to reflect the problems of the community, the county, and the state. All phases of agriculture and home life are incorporated into these plans, in so far as they apply. For example, in a community there may be work intended to improve production per acre, or soil fertility; work with forage crops and pastures; the use of better seeds; improvement in methods of feeding livestock; the use of improved breeds of poultry; culling the flocks; grading eggs and selling same; home gardening; canning and preserving meat for future use; selection of material and making of clothing; prevention of diseases; the eradication of insect pests, etc. Community, county, and state plans are made up largely by considering the desires of farmers in the communities, and the knowledge and experience of the agents, specialists, and administrative staff of the extension service, the A. and M. college, and the department of agriculture, of the real difficulties or problems of the community, county, and the state.

Much money is being spent in finding out useful facts for the benefit of farm people. Much money is also being lost by farmers because of their failure to know what to do at the proper time. It is a part of the business of the extension work to give out useful information to help solve problems and to prevent the losses due to lack of knowledge of what to do just at the right time. At critical times the county agent and the county home demonstration agent show their greatest worth, but it can be clearly shown from statistics that those counties which have constantly kept agents on the job have made the greatest progress. The service is here, and these public servants are anxious to be of use. The largest possible benefit to the community, the county, and the state will come from a friendly attitude toward the work and full cooperation on the part of the country people with this force.

No motive actuates any man employed in this service, from one end to the other, except that of the greatest possible good to the farmers of the state. The highest good to the state of Oklahoma will come from a successful, profitable, and permanent agriculture and an educated and reasonably happy rural people. All lines of business in Oklahoma are helped when the great body of our rural people are prosperous. The true object of this work is a public educational effort to prevent losses, improve earning capacity and thus help the whole state.