

EXTENSION: PRINCIPLES AND DEVELOPMENTS

1. DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTENSION EDUCATION IN EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE

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1. My goal is to stimulate the discussion during the seminar by giving a personal view on important developments in extension education.

2. These developments are caused by changes in the society, in the social sciences and in extension research.

3. Relevant changes in the society include:

A. Society as a whole:

1. lower or even negative rate of economic growth,
2. scarcity of energy and other resources,
3. higher rate of unemployment,
4. economic growth considered to be a less desirable goal,
5. income inequalities are decreasing and are considered to be less desirable,
6. the influence of government on society is increasing through regulations, price- and tax policies and subsidies,
7. participation in government decisions desired by groups of people affected.

B. Agriculture:

1. increasing farm size and increasing specialization in farming,
2. increasing income inequalities among farmers,
3. growing scepticism about patterns of farm development among a group of farmers,
4. a rapidly decreasing proportion of the population is working on farms. Therefore the political influence of the farmers and of the Ministry of Agriculture is decreasing,
5. the role of the farmers is no longer only to produce food and income, but also to guard the landscape,
6. maintaining employment in agriculture is becoming one of the goals of government agricultural policy,
7. there is a lot of uncertainty regarding the structure of agriculture in the future.

4. Consequences of these changes for agricultural extension services are:

A. Goals:

1. it becomes less clear what the goals of extension services should be,
2. functions of these extension services are:
 - giving technical advice on the basis of agricultural research,
 - counseling farmers about ways to reach their goals,
 - explaining government policy with regard to agriculture and its consequences.

The combination of these functions might create a role conflict for extension officers.

B. Target group:

1. farmers with a small farm size, few of whom had frequent contact with the extension service in recent years, are becoming an important target group,
2. the non-farm population is becoming a target group in order to increase their understanding of farming problems.

C. Media and methods:

1. mass media will have to play an increasingly important role, because of
 - ability of the better educated farmers to utilize written materials,
 - size of the non-farm target group,
 - need to reach a specialized audience in a large geographical area,
 - increasing salary levels of extension officers,
 - new communication technology.
2. Counseling methods become more important for complex problems which require value judgements for their solution.

D. Organization:

1. the increasing educational level of the farmers and the increasing complexity of farm problems require technologically more competent extension officers; this is more difficult to realize for the existing staff than for new staff members,
2. more specialized extension officers are required, because of increasing farm specialization and complexity; this also increases the need for coordination,
3. agricultural extension services have to coordinate their work more with other government agencies and voluntary organizations.

5. Implications of these developments for extension education are:
 - a. We should give more attention to processes of decision making on the goals of extension services. The decisions are influenced by ideas from:
 - the clients,
 - the decision makers on government policies affecting agriculture,
 - the extension officers.These decision making processes should take into account the competence of each group and the right they have to influence certain goals.
 - b. Strategies have to develop to reach the small farmers.
 - c. The tendency to solve problems with farmers rather than for farmers requires new participation techniques; the solution of these problems might include the development of countervailing power.
6. Developments in the social sciences influencing extension education include:
 - a. Increasing attention to the development of change strategies on the basis of marketing, learning theory, organization development and the study of the research utilization system. Ideas developed in these fields seem to be applicable in extension education, but further experimentation is required to find the best ways.
 - b. Research on interpersonal communication, group dynamics and psychotherapy promises to be useful for the improvement of helping processes.
 - c. Research on decision making can become quite useful if we shift our attention from solving problems for farmers, to teaching them to solve their problems themselves.
 - d. The increasing attention given to power relationships in different social sciences has had considerable impact on community organization and adult education and some impact on extension education in developing countries. The impact on agricultural extension in Europe is at this moment still limited.
7. Changes in extension research are that we no longer believe the major bottleneck to effective extension work to be the conservatism of the farmers, but are also thinking about bottlenecks among extension officers and extension organizations. Research is increasingly aiming at influencing the behaviour of extension officers and organizations. A consequence is that diffusion research is considered to be less important than it was 10 years ago.
8. More attention should be given in the next years to research on the goals of extension organizations, on planning processes, on the organization and management of extension services and on the system of forces influencing the behaviour of farmers.