

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION: THE EARLY AGREEMENTS

John Hillison, Professor
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Abstract

With many universities having merged or discussing merger of agricultural education and cooperative extension administrative units, it is time to examine the history of competition and collaboration between the two agencies. Historical research methods using both primary and secondary sources were used to accomplish the objectives of this study. The major objectives were to examine the common historical factors of the two agencies, examine the controversies of the two agencies, and examine the memoranda of understanding established for them. Both have common clientele groups with youth and adults and a common subject matter area of agriculture. After passage of the Smith-Lever and Smith-Hughes Acts, a federal memorandum of understanding was established by members of the Federal Board for Vocational Education and USDA. Over a period of 20 years, the original memorandum was revised a few times, but basically it stayed intact. Today's agricultural educator and cooperative extension leader need to look at the historical memoranda of understanding to find precedent-setting points of agreement and points of controversy in order to best facilitate collaboration.

Both agricultural education and the cooperative extension service started before there was legislation giving them federal financial support and national uniformity. Both have several goals and areas in common. In fact, they have enough common goals that many officials were concerned that after passage of federal legislation for each, that there would be a lot of duplication between the two. When federal legislation was passed for both, some controversy occurred and a great deal of energy was put into establishing work boundary agreements for the two agencies.

The Hatch Act of 1887 had close ties to both agricultural education and cooperative extension. One of the important statements in the Hatch Act was "That in order to aid in acquiring and diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects connected with agriculture, and to promote scientific investigation and experiment respecting the principles and applications of agricultural science" (Hatch Act, 1887, p. 440) It could be argued that this provision was the beginning of both agricultural

education and the cooperative extension service. Both have the fundamental purpose of disseminating information of a practical nature. Today, several universities have merged agricultural education and extension activities into one administrative unit and several other universities are debating such a move. With that perspective in mind, it is important to examine the historical development that has led to both competitive and collaborative arrangements for agricultural education and the cooperative extension service.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the commonalties between the cooperative extension service and agricultural education and how agreements attempted to avoid duplication of efforts after passage of federal legislation.

Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Describe the common developmental background of the cooperative extension service and agricultural education.
2. Describe the controversies and concerns of leaders for cooperative extension and agricultural education after passage of both the Smith-Lever and the Smith-Hughes Acts.
3. Describe agreements established at the federal and state level between cooperative extension and agricultural education interests.
4. To draw implications from the controversies and agreements reached for contemporary cooperative extension and agricultural education leaders.

Methods and Procedures

Historical research methods were used to accomplish the objectives of the study. Both primary and secondary sources were used to obtain the information needed. Primary sources included letters, memorandums, government publications, commission reports, and federal bills and acts. Secondary sources included magazines and books. All sources were subjected to internal and external criticism. Information was obtained from the Library of Congress, the National Agriculture Library, the United States Department of Education Library, National Archives, and the library of the American Vocational Association.

Results and Findings

Common Developmental Background

In 1906, a Division of Agricultural Education was established in the Office of Experiment Stations by USDA (Lane, 1942). A reorganization in 1915, led to the establishment of a States Relations Service which had a Division of Agricultural

Education. At about the same time several extension activities were also occurring. For example in 1903, Iowa had two railroad companies run trains through the state in order to promote the use of better seed corn (Rasmussen, 1989). In 1911, 71 different trains ran in 28 states attracting a total of 995,220 participants for extension-type activities (Rasmussen, 1989). In 1911, Senator Page of Vermont and Representative Wilson of Pennsylvania introduced an innovative bill to Congress with the preamble: "To cooperate with the States in encouraging instruction in agriculture, the trades and industries, and home economics in secondary schools; . . . in maintaining extension departments in State colleges of agriculture and the mechanic arts; and to appropriate money and regulate its expenditure." (Page-Wilson Bill, 1912, p. 1)

The bill showed an evolutionary development of the Congressional District Agricultural School concept. It specified support "For the maintenance of instruction in agriculture and home economics in State district agricultural schools of secondary grade." and "For the maintenance of branchfield test and breeding stations, to be designated in this Act as branch stations, to be located at the agricultural high schools . . ." (Page-Wilson Bill, 1912, p. 3)

The Page-Wilson bill also recognized extension. "For the maintenance in each State college of agriculture and mechanic arts established under the provisions of an Act of Congress approved July second, eighteen hundred and sixty-two, of an extension department devoted to giving instruction and demonstration in agriculture, the trades and industries, home economics, and rural affairs . . ." (Page-Wilson Bill, 1912, p. 4-5)

A degree of confusion existed over whether the Page-Wilson bill was really an extension bill or a vocational education bill. Some farm and agricultural interests believed it was more of a vocational bill and they were hesitant to support it.

Passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 was a concession to the agricultural interests. However, the agricultural interests promised to support separate vocational legislation for the privilege of having the extension act passed first (Wirth, 1980).

After passage of the Smith-Lever Act, a commission was appointed in 1914 to determine the feasibility of federal support for vocational education. Many prominent individuals gave testimony to the commission. One such individual was Dr. A. C. True, Director of the Office of Experiment Stations for USDA. Dr. True reported a great deal of activity in the area of farmers' cooperative demonstration work noting activity in "15 Southern States, involving the employment of 1,075 county and other agents and the expenditure of \$375,000 of the department funds, \$250,000 of general education funds, and \$490,000 derived from State sources." (Report, 1914, p. 60) However, when asked if boys on the farm were being reached by such extension activities, True noted that it was only to a very limited extent. "That might be done in the widespread organization of these clubs and other institutes, if other forms of extension work were taken up, but that kind of work would involve, I take it, regular school instruction for young people." (Report, 1914, p. 61)

Controversies and Concerns

Within a few months of passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, representatives of both cooperative extension and vocational agriculture were starting to identify potential problems between the two agencies. In a letter written to David Houston (Secretary of Agriculture) on October 3, 1917, James Munro, President of the Federal Board For Vocational Education, indicated a concern over the duplication of work done as a result of passage of the Smith-Hughes Act. He stated, "It seems to us very desirable in this connection that at the earliest opportunity there should be a conference arranged between yourself and those of the Federal Board directly concerned with the work in agriculture, so

that there may be a clear understanding as to the lines of demarcation between the work now carried on under the authority of the Department of Agriculture and that to be carried on under the authority of the Federal Board for Vocational Education."

Bradford Knapp, Chief of Office of Extension Work in the South, wrote a letter on November 20, 1917 to A. C. True critical of suggestions made by L. S. Hawkins, Assistant Director for the Federal Board for Agricultural Education. Knapp wrote, "Mr. Hawkins begins a discussion for the Smith-Lever Act which shows such lamentable ignorance of extension work and of the provisions of the act itself that I most seriously doubt his ability to do anything except present the viewpoint of the Federal Board for Vocational Education regarding its own aims and functions respecting the Smith-Hughes Act."

In general, Knapp's letter showed disagreement with Hawkins on several points. Two examples were: "I do not agree with the second provision that boys' and girls' club work must be carried out under the direction of the school authorities. Such an agreement on our part would be illegal in my judgement, because it would prevent the giving of extension instruction in the homes and upon the farms of people not attending the college, which work we are authorized and expected to do under the Smith-Lever Act." and "I must insist that the schools must not teach things contrary to the work of the county agent."

Agreements Reached

While letters were being exchanged, memorandums were being written, meetings were being held, and discussions were occurring. For example, on November 7, 1917 L. S. Hawkins wrote a prophetic memorandum explaining the background of the Smith-Hughes Act, including its purposes. He also reviewed the continuing support USDA was giving to agricultural education and

reviewed the issues of relationship between the objectives of the Smith-Hughes and Smith-Lever Acts:

1. Instruction in agriculture for boys and girls in school should be administered by the regular school authorities of a State and not by the State agricultural college.
2. Extension work in agriculture in so far as it affects young people should be confined to those who are not in school, except in so far as funds may be used to assist State boards in getting instruction established.
3. State authorities in charge of the administration of education in a State are primarily interested in administrative work and in the organization of courses of instruction. The State college of agriculture is usually in a position to furnish State boards and local communities working in cooperation with State boards information along the lines of agriculture in so far as such information lies in the technical fields of agriculture.
4. It is the function of State boards for vocational education to administer the organized instruction in agriculture which comes under the provisions of the Smith-Hughes Act.

Hawkins also noted that 1917, was only the beginning for federal funds for agricultural education. The program was certain to grow and be available for all who desired to take it. He suggested that authorities who were in charge of funds must be cautious in spending appropriated funds economically and make certain that duplication of efforts did not occur. He also reported the interpretation that the Smith-Lever Act gave wide discretionary authority for extension

work, while the Smith-Hughes Act was much more prescriptive (Hawkins, 1917).

The Hawkins' memorandum identified other areas where the Federal Board and USDA needed to work out differences. These included the USDA definition of the age group to be served by the boys' and girls' club work, the method of administration within a State, to establish terms of agreement between colleges of agriculture and state boards of education for work with students enrolled in school, and to establish how USDA would create plans for easy conversion from its work with youth to Smith-Hughes work with the same youth. He further suggested that agreements would have to be made concerning research in agricultural education and work with adults.

On December 12, 1917, 11 people representing both the Federal Board and USDA held an important meeting. Among those in attendance were L. S. Hawkins, Charles Prosser (executive director of the Federal Board), James Munro, Philander P. Claxton (Commissioner of Education), and Bradford Knapp. This group was able to put together some statements on cooperation that showed a strong influence from the Hawkins' memorandum of November 7, 1917. Smith-Hughes had no distinct provisions for adults; however, there would be situations where the teacher of agriculture will come in contact with adults and do some teaching. It would not be justifiable for the Federal Board to refuse funding of such an activity. When agricultural education teachers do teach adults they should work out a plan of cooperation with the extension department in the state where they are located (Notes, 1917).

With reference to boys' and girls' club work, the statements indicated that it should be administered by state school authorities and not by state colleges of agriculture. The extension work should be for those boys and girls not in schools. Club work financed by federal funds other than Smith-Hughes funds should be in communities

where no Smith-Hughes agricultural instruction presently exists. Club work should be organized in such a manner that it could easily be taken over by schools funded through the Smith-Hughes Act. School officials were asked to cooperate with the extension agents and to encourage students to become members of clubs (Notes, 1917).

A new memorandum superseding all earlier memoranda was written on December 20, 1928. Among its salient points were: (1) That all extension work in agriculture should be administered by those in charge of extension activities and that all vocational education in agriculture should be administered by those in charge of vocational schools; (2) Work conducted by the teacher of agriculture not included in all day, day unit, evening or part-time instruction should be done in accordance with the plans of the state extension system and in cooperation with the county extension agent; (3) Counties that had vocational agriculture departments should not have students of vocational agriculture enroll for 4-H Club Work; and, (4) Work conducted which is supported by the Smith-Hughes and Smith-Lever Acts should not in any way duplicate or overlap work conducted in the same community when that work is supported in any part from another Federal Fund (Memorandum, 1928, p. 3).

After passage of the George-Deen Vocational Act of 1936, the State Directors of Extension issued a new statement which was approved in November of 1939, and had generally mild points such as vocational teachers should encourage boys and girls to enroll in 4-H Club work and agents should encourage boys and girls to enroll in vocational courses. It also stated that: "If boys and girls enroll in both vocational classes and 4-H Clubs, they must carry separate and distinct projects in each activity. Publicity should reflect the contribution of both agencies when a joint contribution has been made in the development of the individual and his project." (Statement, 1939, p. 3).

Conclusions and Implications

Born with common influences such as the Morrill Act and the Hatch Act, cooperative extension and agricultural education had to resolve duplication problems and work responsibilities. With leadership at the federal level, especially USDA and the Federal Board for Vocational Education, many agreements were reached on numerous subjects over a period of approximately 20 years. The agreements covered such topics as location of administrative responsibility, adult instruction, membership in youth organizations, and who should be on the payroll. Some leaders advocated collaboration, while others advocated competition.

Lessons were learned over the course of the years. The formal agreements were made and implemented. Informal interpretations were made of the formal agreements. In many ways a new era is about to begin in the working relationship between agricultural education and cooperative extension. Both organizations have suffered budget cuts, but still have a very large clientele to serve. Often times the motto for both has been "Do more with less." History indicates that it is possible for the agencies to cooperate. From that history may come the best answers for working together on the traditional and also contemporary issues of administrative responsibility, adult instruction, youth organizations, and the numerous other issues facing both agencies. The history of collaboration between the cooperative extension service and agricultural education needs to be dusted off and reviewed in times such as the present.

References

- Hatch Act. (1887). U. S. Statutes at Large. 440-441.
- Hawkins, L. S. (1917, November 7). Memorandum to U. S. Department of Agriculture. Washington, D C: National Archives.

Knapp, B. (1917, November 20). Letter to A. C. True. Washington, DC: National Archives.

Knapp, B. (1917, December 7). Memorandum to A. C. True. Washington, DC: National Archives.

Lane, C. H. (1942). Contributions of the United States Department of Agriculture to agricultural education of less than college grade, 1904 to 1917. In R. W. Stimson and F. W. Lathrop (Eds.), History of agricultural education of less than college grade in the United States, Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 570-573.

Memorandum of understanding relative to Smith-Hughes and Smith-Lever relationships in agriculture. (December 20, 1928). Washington, DC: National Archives.

Munro, J. (1917, October 3). Letter to David Houston. Washington, DC: National Archives.

Notes taken at joint conference of representatives of the Federal Vocational Board,

and of the United States Department of Agriculture. (1917, December 12). Washington, DC: National Archives.

Page-Wilson Bill. (1912). Senate Bill 53, Washington, DC: United States Congress.

Rasmussen, W. D. (1989). Taking the university to the people. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 28-29.

Report on national aid to vocational education (Hearings held on the subject, volume 2). (1914). Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.

Statement on relations. (1939, November). Washington, DC: National Archives.

Wirth, A. G. (1980). Education in the technological society: The vocational-liberal controversy in the early twentieth century. Washington, DC: University Press of America.