

## Directions for More Effective County Extension Committees

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### 군 농촌지도위원회의 효율적 운영 방안

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### 국 문 요 약

미네소타의 농촌지도에 대한 법률적 지원은 1909년에 실시되었고 1912년에는 최초의 농촌지도 요원이 임용됨과 동시에 미네소타주 의회에 의해 군단위농촌지도위원회 (County Extension Committees; 이하 CEC로 표기)가 본격적으로 가동되었다. 위원회의 조직은 총 9명이며 1명의 의장과 2명의 이사, 6명의 지역사회주민 그리고 최근에는 1-2명의 학생이 참여하여 지역주민들의 적극적인 참여를 도모하고 있다. CEC의 기본 운영 논리는 교육접 접근, 정책적 접근, 민주적 운영, 그리고 책임감 등이다.

CEC 구성요원 선출시에 고려되는 기준은 첫째, 지역사회에 관한 배경요소, 경험요소, 전망에 대하여 폭넓은 부분을 표현할 것, 둘째, 지역사회 내에서 진행되는 일이나 지역사회성원들의 요구를 포착할 수 있는 안목을 배양할 것, 셋째, 지역사회에 관한 자신의관점이나 수집된 정보를 기꺼이 위원회와 공유할 것, 넷째, 지도사업에 대해 비판적 시각을 가지고 모임, 회합에 참석할 것, 다섯째, 흥미와 열정을 보이며 긍정적인 사고를 할 것, 여섯째, 묻기 곤란한 질문도 기꺼이 질문할 것, 일곱째, 지역사회 내에 존재하는 다른 시각과 여론을 포괄할 것 등이다.

성공적인 CEC요원의 역할은 지역사회의 자문 및 상담역할이며 모든 지도 사업은 가치와 확신을 기반으로 시행되어진다. 이들의 기본적 역할은 1) CEC의 목적과 의무에 대한 명확한 이해 제공, 2) 농촌지도사업의 사명과 자원(노력)에 관한 정보전달, 3) 지역사회성원들과 함께 일하며 그들이 대표하는 지역사회에 대한 정보습득, 4) 특수한 농촌지도사업과 관련된 정보를 조사, 5) 개인의 리더쉽, 조직사업수행능력, 작업간 상호관계를 발전 등이다. 요원들은 자신의 관점이나 수집된 정보를 기꺼이 CEC와 공유하며 흥미와 열정을 가지고 지역사회사업에 참여한다. 이들의 또 다른 중요역할은 지역사회의 자문과 전체 회원에 대한 지속적인 양성과정과 교육 기회를 제공하는 것이다. 요원들과 CEC 구성원간의 상호협력은 매우 중요하며 '열린 마음, 정직, 신뢰, 친근감, 전문성, 흥미'와같은 개념에 기초한다.

군 농촌지도위원회에서는 충분한 정보와 서비스 제공에 노력하고 조직원은 지도활동을 활성화하여 농민들에게 지도와 조언을 제공한다. 또한 프로그램이나 활동에서 소외되는 계층이 없도록 두루 살펴 골고루 영향을 미칠 수 있도록 노력하고 조직결속력을 강화할 필요가 있다. 이 모든 활동을 위해서는 정보가 부족한 현실을 보완하기 위한 기초 작업으로서 정보화 사업을 강화하고 있다. 지도요원과 구성원은 일반정책의 발전 및 진행되는 사업 전반에 걸쳐 상호 연대해야 한다. 구

성원의 성격, 흥미, 취미 그들이 속해 있는 다른 조직에 대한 자료를 토대로 지도자를 선출하고 신뢰감을 배양한다. 회합은 편리한 시간과 장소에서 실시한다. 때론 모임을 갖지 않는 것이 더 효과적일 때가 있다. 전화회의, 우편, 개별전화, 개별방문 등이 새로이 대두되고 있다.

미국의 대학은 지역사회성원들의 교육적 필요성과 연구목적으로 형성되고 건립되었으며, 이는 지역사회성원들이 자신의 문제를 스스로 도출하고 필요한 부분을 해결하기 위해서였다. 대학 역시 지역사회의 일부분이며 농촌지도사업 역시 대학교육의 일부라는 개념이다. 이러한 의미에서 지역사회성원이 자신들의 필요에 의해서 대학이란 도구를 사용하고 CEC 요원들을 통해 의사를 결정하고 이를 활용하는 것이다.

## I. County Extension Committees as Directed by Law

The Extension Service was established in Minnesota in 1909 and the first Extension agent was appointed in 1912. According to the University of Minnesota Extension Service Publication titled *Building the Partnership* (April 1998), the Minnesota State Legislature established County Extension Committees (CECs) in 1923. An amendment to the authorizing bill later defined the structure and responsibilities of the committees.

The CEC was to include nine people including the chair of the County Board of Commissioners, one other commissioner, the county auditor, and six citizens appointed by the county board. The members serve three-year terms and can be re-appointed. Many CECs make a practice of limiting service to two terms. In response to recent efforts to have youth represented in various entities of government, many counties have now included one or two youth representatives on the committee. These are usually high school students who serve one-year terms and can be re-appointed for additional one-year terms. The county auditor is allowed to appoint a representative from the auditors office to server in his/her place. CEC members may receive per-diem payments from

county funds.

The 1997 *Building the Partnership* bulletin (U of MN Extension Service) says state statutes define four primary responsibilities for CECs:

1. Personnel Selection. CECs meet with the District Director to write a job description for Extension Educators. CECs, together with the District Director and Extension Educators, interview candidates. The CEC recommends a candidate to the District Director and the Dean and Director of Extension for hiring.

2. Performance Evaluation. CECs conduct an annual review of each Extension Educator based on a format provided by the District Director. The annual review provides feedback for Extension Educators for the purpose of professional improvement and is part of the Universitys merit system for salary considerations.

3. Program Development and Evaluation. CECs are to provide regular input into the plan of work of the Extension Educators and assist in evaluating the effectiveness of the work.

4. Budget Development. The CEC is to work with the staff to develop an annual budget and submit it to the county board for approval. Some CECs have actually met monthly to review bills and expenses that are submitted for payment.

According to the *Building the Partnership*

publication, CEC members should also:

- Attend and participate in all CEC meetings.
- Be aware of and take part in Extension programs in order to have some first-hand knowledge of Extension efforts.
- Cooperate with Extension staff in public relations efforts for county Extension work.
- Relay useful comments and opinions about Extension personnel and programs to Extension educators.

A March 1978 Guide for County Extension Committee (Agricultural Extension Service) says:

You, as a County Extension Committee member, will play a vital role in helping the Agricultural Extension Service (as it was known then) formulate and deliver its many resources to best serve the needs of your county. Your county extension staff will consult with you in developing and carrying out extension activities. They will seek your advice, help, and encouragement in their work.

## II. County Extension Committees in Practice

Former University of Minnesota Extension Service Dean and Director Fennelly made the following observations about advisory committees in her address to Extension staff in October of 1998:

Some groups lack a history of broad citizen involvement, and in others, vested interests block participation by those who have been isolated from decision making power. Many of the current members on our committees are unsure of their roles, or even their ability to advise us.

Fennelly shared the example of a cluster advisory committee that had disbanded because

they lost their purpose and were unsure of their role.

A general search of the Journal of Extension seemed to reveal limited information about the extent to which CECs function effectively. Some questions and concerns are raised related to Extension efforts to engage citizens in efforts to define priorities and guide future direction for various efforts of the Cooperative Extension Service. A key question is whether a wide range of people are included who represent the diverse interests and values in a given community, county, or state. There are several articles that have to do with leadership and management styles and leadership training that may be useful to staff who are working with CECs and to CEC members.

Scholl (1989) makes note of an observation by Beal, Bohlen, and Raudabaugh that groups can be as guilty as individuals of not seeking relevant information before making a decision. Thomas (1995) shares how an educational component to a strategic planning process saved time and frustration, and enabled the group to be more effective. Wegenhof (1988) offers a test to determine whos doing the work on CECs staff or committee members. Wegenhof does make reference to a 1985 Louisiana study on staff reactions to the effectiveness of Extension committees. Conone (1991) raised questions about whether Extension administration was willing to listen to the people they asked to provide input in a strategic planning process.

Jean Anderson (telephone interview on November 10, 1998) shared that CEC members are the voice and the listening ears from the community in linkages with the Extension staff and the University. As Extension committees

interact with the community to identify educational needs they have a unique opportunity to tell people about the Extension service, its work, and its accomplishments. Anderson also identified a situation where the CEC was a key to establishing support for Extension in a county that was ready to close the office.

Olson (interview on November 9, 1998) has made use of committees for approval to make changes in the direction of his work. Olson values the CECs as a way to bring more community perspective into planning processes, whether they bring new ideas or legitimize the ideas of staff. He sees CECs as having a mix of administrative and program related functions that may vary with the preferences of CEC members and/or staff. He suggests that staff and CECs should work in a partnership to develop general policies and the overall direction of the work. Staff should do more of the work in putting the details together and carrying out the work.

### III. Underlying Values, Beliefs, and

Numerous Journal of Extension articles discuss the importance of values, beliefs, and vision as key factors that drive the behavior of organizations as well as individuals. Patterson (1998) discusses the need for a new management paradigm for Extension administration. Patterson writes in the 1998 article about crafting a common vision and mission, complimented by a core set of values: the organization becomes mission-driven rather than rules and regulations-driven. Hansen (1993) discusses the issues of what drives the work when grassroots preferences collide with research-based information. These discussions might be summed

up in the question who tells whom? or which is the cart and which is the horse? .

It seems logical and useful to apply these discussions to working relationships with CECs. Extension staff, who believe in a community, vision-driven process, are likely to make a significant effort with CEC members to shape that kind of a process. Olson (interview, 1998) said he has observed that there's a big difference in how committees are involved and how staff interact with committees. It seems useful for Extension staff, CEC members and the commissioners who appoint them, to identify the values that determine their approach to CECs and to Extension work.

Several principles support the importance of advisory committees such as CECs. One principle is an education concept that people need to be involved in identifying their own educational needs, methods, and processes. To carry out effective educational efforts in the community, CECs can be useful in identifying and/or affirming needs in the community. CECs can endorse the work of Extension staff on specific efforts. CECs can provide feedback and evaluation of the efforts from a community perspective.

A second principle is political. Any entity, that depends on public funding, needs to maintain a base of supporting citizens. Efforts should be made to make more people aware of educational opportunities and the benefits to people in the community. Further more, when a program is in jeopardy, well informed, effective CEC citizen members can be very important in articulating the value and needs of the program to public decision makers.

A third principle is rooted in the concept of a democracy. It may actually be the basis for the

strongest convictions that people have for CECs. Some people believe strongly in the notion of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Not only should people know what decisions are made and how decisions are made, people should be involved in making the decisions and setting direction for the work that government (Extension in this case) is doing.

A fourth principle is the responsibility to follow the vision and mission that predicated universities and extension services in the first place. In Fennellys (1998) address to Extension staff, she spoke of the roots of Extension in the historical promise of Extension as a means of connecting the University and the community. Fennelly went on to say, Liberty Hyde Bailey, the man who invented the Extension Service, recognized this in 1908 when he talked about revitalizing communities through local identification of needs directing educational responses from the universities. Fennelly also made reference to the comments of University of Minnesota President Yudof (Annual Conference address, 1998) in regard to Extension involving people and building communities to accomplish common objectives.

Fennelly, Bailey, and Yudof seem to be saying that universities were meant to be shaped and built by people in communities to meet educational and research needs of the community so the community is better able to shape a future that is good for its people. Its meant to be something that people are doing for themselves. Its meant to be the peoples university and peoples Extension service as a part of the university. Its their tool. Its inherent that people in the community determine the use of this tool. CEC members are meant to be representatives of the people in making decisions about the use of

this tool.

#### IV. Selection of CEC Members

As stated earlier, the law assigns responsibility to the Board of Commissioners to appoint CEC members. It is common practice for each commissioner to appoint one person from their own district. Members beyond that are appointed at-large. Commissioners may ask staff for recommendations. Extension staff should have input into that process. Support staff have a lot of contact with people who use Extension and may know people from other activities in the community. CEC members can have useful insight, matching their sense of the work of the CEC with people they know in the community.

There seems to be a general consensus that CECs should represent a broad mix of people in the community it represents. This helps to assure that Extension work will have value to a wide range of people in the community. This is a principle that can be discussed with commissioners in recommending people for the committee. Extension Educators Olson (interview, 1998) and Anderson (interview, 1998) provided a list of characteristics to look for in CEC members.

- Represent a wide array of perspectives, backgrounds and experience in the community
- Observant in the community, tuned to what people are talking about, whats going on
- Willing to share their observations and views with the committee
- Commitment to the task, to attending meetings, participating
- Show some excitement and enthusiasm, and have a positive attitude

- Be able and willing to ask hard questions
- Involved in other aspects of the community

Committee members do not have to be regular Extension users. Olson (interview, 1998) told about a committee member who was actually a bit of a skeptic about Extension. A commissioner had recruited this individual because of her concern about things that were happening in county government. The person was valuable on the committee because, according to Olson (interview, 1998), She asked some hard questions sometimes, but they were important questions to deal with.

## V. Roles of CEC Members in the Success of CECs

The responsibility of CEC members is well defined in law, as listed earlier. The primary role seems to be largely advisory, but their input carries significant weight in most cases. Here are some additional perspectives on CEC member roles based on my readings and interviews.

Jimmerson (1989) takes a step deeper into the importance of values and beliefs in Extension programming. He suggests that all program work is based on a set of values or beliefs. Jimmerson (1989) refers to Dominant Social Paradigms that may not necessarily be leading to a better future .

As an example he draws a comparison of two views. One is that the changes occurring in agriculture are inevitable, that there aren't any realistic alternatives. The other is a picture of the Amish who thrive on small farms, in close knit communities, using few non-renewable resources. Jimmerson (1989) states

If Extension is to effectively work with our client groups to decide on and move toward a better

future, we must critically examine basic values, especially those information-age values related to knowledge generation and transfer. If Extension doesn't take the responsibility of understanding and clarifying values that guide our decisions, who will? What future crisis will arise if we don't? We can't afford to find out.

For those who find value in Jimmerson's discussion, CECs may have a vital role in examining the kinds of values that ought to be a basis for Extension work in their communities.

Public relations is one of the roles that Extension staff count on from CECs beyond the four specific purposes defined by law. Anderson (interview 1998) talked about sending CEC members out to visit with others in the community in doing needs assessment surveys. She says that in this process CEC members also have the opportunity to tell about Extension and expand the use of the Extension Service. Jones (1996) tells about the Extension advisory committee sponsoring an annual Leaders Luncheon to acquaint local leaders with the programming opportunities of Extension.

There are many individual roles for CEC members on effective CECs. Both Olson and Anderson (interviews, 1998) speak of the important role of the chair in presiding over CEC meetings. Olson (interview 1998) shares about a situation where the chair asked staff to bow out of a conversation for a while so committee members could have a chance to discuss their own views. The chair can be a key to drawing out members who are shy about sharing their views. As in any group dynamic situation, members play a variety of roles in facilitating, challenging, and furthering the task. Any member who takes some risk in asking a question or sharing a view may open the door for

others to do the same. Members who react negatively may effectively close the door for others. In good CEC meetings, CEC members will find an appropriate balance of time spent listening and sharing perspectives.

Olson (interview, 1998) shared that the county commissioners who serve on the committee have a unique responsibility as a link to the whole board of commissioners. Anderson (interview, 1998) spoke of the importance of including CEC members and program participants in reports to the county board. The CEC chair or another member may ably present a budget proposal. In the case of the skeptical CEC member, the working relationship between them and the appointing commissioner proved very beneficial.

## VI. Role of Extension Staff in the Success of CECs

Several roles have been alluded to. One role of primary importance may be to recommend people for commissioners to consider for the CEC. This can be done with a goal to maintain a mix of people that represents the community adequately and brings people to the CEC with characteristics that will be an asset to the process.

Another highly important role has to do with providing orientation to new members and continued training or learning opportunities for all members. This training will related to several general areas:

1. Providing a clear sense of the purpose of CECs and the responsibilities of CECs.
2. Providing information about the mission and resources of the Extension service.
3. Working with them to learn more about the

community they represent.

4. Exploring information that may be related to specific Extension Programs.

5. Developing individual leadership, group work skills, and working relationships.

Olson (interview, 1998) spoke with conviction about importance of building a partnership among staff and CEC members that is characterized by words like open, honest, trust, friendly, professional, even fun. Staff can set the pace by taking some risk in putting issues on the table. CEC members will respond with a sense of respect that results in more openness and honesty in sharing their views as well. Anderson (interview 1998) offers three pieces of advice to staff working with CEC members. 1) Visit them often in person or by phone. 2) Believe them and believe in them. 3) Get acquainted with their areas of knowledge and expertise.

Anderson (interview, 1998) suggests that it may take as much as 15 to 20% of an Extension staff persons time to build working relationships and work with this group and with commissioners. It could be considerably more if the office is working through major changes like a staff change. Communication is a key. She suggests calling them from time to time to ask for perspective on specific pieces of work they may have an interest in.

### Activities and Methods to Strengthen CECs

Wegenhoft (1988) suggests key steps in developing working committees. The first step is to develop confidence in lay leaders by getting to know them in terms of their career, interests, hobbies, and other organizations they are part of. Wegenhoft (1998) also suggests that some thought be given to selecting a chair that will respond well

to the task, and following up with any needed training that will contribute to their success as a CEC chair.

Olson (interview 1998) told about quizzes developed by their staff and given to CEC members in a fun and interesting way. Questions were designed to test their knowledge of the county, the extension service, and concepts related to CEC purposes. The quizzes provided a fun way to help CEC members understand their role better as they came together for CEC meetings.

Gamon (1987) suggests 6 ideas that would help to make sure that CEC members have an experience that is profitable and worthwhile from the CEC members point of view:

1. Meeting at convenient times and places. Better yet sometimes dont meet! Conference calls, mail, phone calls, personal visits are suggested as alternatives.

2. Size the committee at a number that suits effective participation.

3. Make it a working committee by giving them specific, relevant, and practical tasks that have visible results.

4. Expect some rough times as people sort out roles or are at odds with different views. Expect activity and progress to ebb and flow.

5. Set up a process for selecting and rotating chairpersons. Gamon (1987) cleverly says, Dont fall into the trap of serving simultaneously as chairperson, secretary, meeting notifier, refreshment server, idea generator, and, of course, garbage collector.

6. Make the experience personally rewarding for each member by recognizing the time and expertise they bring to the process. This might include putting pictures in the paper as they are involved

with activities or other ways to personally and publicly say, thanks, job well done.

J. Anderson (telephone conversation, November 10, 1998) echoed the dont-meet-sometimes sentiment with much enthusiasm. Anderson (interview, 1998) suggests mailing articles and calling regularly to ask for perspectives as a way to keep them tuned to discussions that are relevant to their tasks.

There are many materials for leadership training that can help CEC members gain skills in their role and to understand government and community processes better. Articles like Sandmann and Vandenberg's (1995) A Framework for 21st Century Leadership can help staff and CEC members examine principles that affect the way we look at community processes.

Much is written about needs assessment processes. Carol L. Anderson (1989) describes a range of resources and activities that can be used by staff that could involve CECs as well. CECs will benefit from some variety as they are asked to continuously keep an eye peeled and their ear tuned to the community. Statistical data, newspaper headlines, informal questioning techniques, focus groups, card sorts, and other tools can be used. Penrod (1992) describes using poker chips that represent units of staff time that can be visibly divided among various tasks.

Both Olson and Anderson, in November, 1998 interviews suggested using sub-committees to help CEC members focus on pieces of CEC work that they might be particularly suited for or interested in. They suggested budget, public relations, or other subcommittees related to specific pieces of Extension work.

Olson (interview, 1998) also suggested it is important to keep CECs connected to the



University. CECs should have a chance to interact with state level administrators and faculty. They need this to see the practical connection to the University.

## VII. Conclusions and Recommendation

It is important to effectively use CECs for reasons that have to do with effective educational practice, the function of a democracy, the need for political support, and staying true to the mission of Extension. Much has been written about management and leadership styles, group dynamic processes, needs assessment, and other processes that CECs may engage in. Discussions with other Extension Educators, District Directors, and CEC members themselves can shed light on keys to utilizing CECs effectively or keys to allowing CECs to use Extension staff effectively.

Extension staff need to take specific and strategic steps for success in working with CECs.

1. Identify the values and beliefs as individuals and as a staff that will the foundation for your working relationship with the CEC and CEC members.

2. Budget an appropriate amount of time for tasks related to working with the CEC, and schedule specific pieces of time that will be set aside for this responsibility.

3. Identify together with colleagues and CEC members the roles and responsibilities that will be important for staff and CEC members in an effective partnership.

4. Work with staff and CEC members to identify the kinds of information and resources that support their work related to their roles and responsibilities. Recognize that these steps will be a continuing

process.

5. Set out to enjoy the adventure and DO IT.

To be effective, staff and CECs need to write a plan of work together related to their work for the year. Its like writing a lesson plan together. It requires commitment, time, and clarity of thought to effectively use CECs in a way that truly allows them to play a significant role in guiding the work of Extension to benefit their community. It is a key to effective Extension work and to strong community support. It was meant to be theirs.

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## Abstract

Minnesota state law requires County Extension Committees (CECs). The County Board of Commissioners appoints committee members. Extension Educators are responsible for using CECs to assure the value of Extension work in the County. This paper will explore underlying values, principles and practices that can effect the utilization of CECs in ways that benefit the work of Extension and make the process a good experience for CEC members and Extension Educators. The paper is based primarily on readings in the Journal of Extension, interviews with two Extension Educators, and information provided by the University of Minnesota Extension Service for CEC members.