

# THE COUNTY AGENT IMAGE

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Organizationally within the Land-Grant College, the Cooperative Extension program was activated somewhat differently than was the Experiment Station. Joint appointments with either the resident teaching faculty and/or the Experiment Station were unusual in the early days and still are not common in most institutions.

The county agent has always been a part of the Land-Grant College System but his position is different from his colleagues who serve on the campus. His certification as a cooperative U.S.D.A. employee places him apart from his college associates. His responsibility to his county people again sets him apart. In many states his appointment is approved by local people. In some cases he may be dismissed by local people.

In spite of all the differences, the county agent is just as much an employee of the Land-Grant College or University as any faculty member based on the campus. In some states he is given an academic title. Unfortunately, most county agents have not been given this degree of academic recognition.

The county agent is an educator in an educational institution, the Land-Grant College or University. He should, therefore, measure up to his colleagues in training, scholarship, and teaching ability—recognizing, of course, differences inherent in the professions and scholarly attainments characteristic of professional personnel of the various colleges of a university. Each profession has its own academic qualifications, but the standard of excellence in meeting these requirements should be equally high regardless of area of work.

Unfortunately, the county agent has not often been accepted by the college or university colleagues as an academic equal. The minimum standard for employment as a county agent is, in general, lower than that required of his on-campus faculty colleagues.

This is the concluding portion of an address by the Dean of Agriculture of this university, delivered before the annual meeting of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents.

The bachelor of science degree is the acceptable minimum for employment as a county agent, whereas an advanced degree is usually required for an academic appointment.

## Isolated Out in the County

Many agents have continued in the profession for years without being exposed to further formal academic work. They are isolated, with very limited opportunity to mingle with the community of scholars comprising the university or college. To the credit of the extension profession, your leaders have emphasized the desirability of additional formal classroom experience. This emphasis has been intensified since World War II. Much attention has been given to the type of additional academic experience which is most valuable to the agent, the specialist, and the administrator.

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**Various special programs have been developed in the areas of extension philosophy, methods, and administration in addition to the existing programs applicable to specialists. Some institutions have developed the program on a continuing basis as a part of their normal academic function. Other institutions have developed special programs of short duration, frequently on a regional basis. All of these programs are expected to evolve with experience into more effective procedures for providing useful advanced academic experiences for professional extension personnel.**  
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Many agents are taking advantage of formal educational opportunities. The agent, with the aid of an academic counselor, should be in an excellent position to pursue a useful and enlightening graduate program for professional improvement.

Some agents may aspire to become extension specialists. Some have moved directly into specialist positions without additional academic training. A few may continue to become specialists by this latter route. It should be recognized, however, except for a specialist title in name only, that advanced formal training in the area of specialization is essential. A specialist without formal advanced training in his specialty is not going to be well received by his faculty colleagues.

## Needs Local Status

The county agent is the county representative of the Land-Grant College or University. As such the college and university administration expect him

to be of the stature to command the respect of the local people.

There are several factors inherent in county agent work which make it difficult for him to be of the academic stature of his on-campus colleagues. The one- or two-agent counties make it necessary for him to be a generalist and not a specialist. Large county staffs permit some specialization, but too frequently even here the agent is a specialist in title only. The agent usually does not have easy access to a good library. His information, therefore, tends to be rather superficial. He is academically isolated and, therefore, without the mental stimulation which results from faculty discussions, seminars, etc. The great demand for academic personnel to teach the ever-increasing on-campus students reduces the supply of highly capable potential agents.

## Farming Has Changed!

It might sharpen our perspective if we take a quick look at those early days, when county agent work started.

When the Smith-Lever Act was passed, U. S. farming was based largely on the family farm, usually of very limited acreage. The head of the household, on the average, was an eighth grade graduate or less.

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**Those first county agents were, in many cases, resented by farmers who sneered at "school book farming" and "college-trained-farming." Full acceptance of county agent work came only with the terrific need for food and fiber during World War I, waged with the slogan, "Food Will Win the War."**  
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Changes since then, however, have far outrun the knowledge needed by that early county agent. Taken for granted today, but virtually unknown then, are such things as hybrid corn; artificial insemination; detailed soil analysis; new knowledge of animal health, nutrition, and sanitation; the vast field of chemical agriculture which curbs weeds, insects, and plant diseases; a huge federal farm program which governs planting, pricing, and marketing of major crops, and lastly, a new era in agricultural machinery which would be completely bewildering to the horse-drawn farmer of that day when county agents first began their work.

All of us, looking at college-trained  
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farmers operating vast acreages with highly technical machines, plant foods, chemicals, and management, glibly quote statistics telling how vastly fewer farmers are providing this nation and the world with vastly more and better foods and fiber than ever before.

But has the teacher kept up with his pupils? Has the county agent kept abreast of this intricately complex farm business of today?

Obviously, the agent today faces a very serious problem in his county program. His clientele is much more highly educated today than it was only a few years ago, yet the minimum standard for county agent work has not changed. Many of the older agents have not had formal academic experience with some of the most significant problems facing modern agriculture.

Yes, they have kept up with scientific developments after a fashion and are able to speak fairly intelligently on some of these problems to groups with little or no information on the subject in question. But, to the recent college graduates who have joined his clientele, the agent's gross lack of information is rather conspicuous.

## Specialists From Industry

Most agents are in competition with specialists who have been employed by various companies serving agriculture and by various commodity organizations. These professionally trained people are most frequently recruited from a group of outstanding agents, resident faculties and graduate schools. Just recently a question was raised as to whether this group of specialists has not made the county agent's job unnecessary. The performance of agents will provide the answer to this question, but only quality performance, equal to or above that of industry specialists, will be satisfactory. The frequently used statement that agents are in a position to present an unbiased program will prove to be logical only if the agent's presentation is based on information as good or better than that possessed by the industry representative.

The larger and more successful farmers and ranchers too frequently have a tendency to by-pass the county agent and extension specialist, going directly to the research man in an attempt to get answers to their problems. Sometimes this reflects a lack of confidence in both the agent and the extension specialist. Some way should be found to offset this lack of confidence. The answer probably lies in more aca-

demical training for the agent and the completion of more successful research-extension demonstrations in the county by the county agents. These research-extension demonstrations, if properly conceived and executed, will add to our storehouse of knowledge, will give the agent an excellent teaching tool, and will build up confidence in him as one who knows both the theoretical and practical aspects of agriculture.

It is my impression that the agent does not make adequate use of the agricultural specialist available to him. Neither does he make adequate use of the total resources of the College of Agriculture. Some of this seems to reflect an attitude on the part of the county worker that he has a little empire of his own rather independent of the parent organizations, the Land-Grant College or University and the United States Department of Agriculture. Sometimes it seems that he doesn't want other people interfering with his program.

## Should Use Specialist More

The county agent is isolated, frequently by himself. He is expected to know almost everything known collectively by all members of the faculty. The agent's reputation will be enhanced by using the specialists and other sources of assistance available to him. The more information he brings into the county, the more certain he will be considered an educational leader in his community.

Extension leaders have given much attention to the changing role of the county agent. The agent's job must be adjusted to changing agriculture and agriculturally-related industries. Some leaders have suggested that agricultural agents assume an entirely new role, i.e., to move into the field of general extension. Under the Smith-Lever Act the broader function of the county agent is permitted. Permission in the enabling legislation is one thing, but the intent of the appropriating bodies is still another. The intent of Congress is that the Smith-Lever funds be used for agriculture and home economics. Even home economics is down-graded so far as the intent of Congress is concerned. In my state of Arizona, and in most other states, the intent of the legislature which makes the appropriation for cooperative extension is that it be used for agriculture and home economics. The same is true of the county appropriations. Other educational programs may be carried by the county agents without criticism if agriculture and home economics are kept out front as the principal objective of the Cooperative Extension Program.

# Color Additives in Food Safe, Uncle Sam Insists

Don't worry about the color additives in your foods.

You're pretty well protected by law from any color additive which might cause cancer or harm you in any way, says Miss June Gibbs, extension nutritionist with the University of Arizona.

Federal laws strengthen consumer protection in three major ways:

1. They bring all colors, including coal-tar colors, under jurisdiction of the law.

2. They require re-evaluation — using new scientific tests—of all colors, even those previously listed and certified as harmless. Any color that produces cancer in a test animal is automatically ruled out.

3. They allow the Federal Food and Drug Administration to set limits on the amounts of color used.

The responsibility of the county agent is going to continue to be that of an agricultural agent. Therefore, as the agent up-grades himself, it should be with the objective in mind of improving his teaching competence in agriculture. While advanced academic training is not in itself assurance of improved performance or greater acceptability by his resident faculty colleagues, it is certainly one of the most needed steps in the Extension administration's effort to up-grade the local staff of the Cooperative Extension Program, of which the county agent is the chief representative.

You represent a very important academic organization, the Land-Grant Colleges and State Universities, the administrators of which have expressed their continued confidence in you. In return, the administrators expect sustained academic improvement which will better fit you for accomplishing the task ahead in a manner which will reflect credit on yourself and your institution.

You should be proud of your past contributions, and should look forward with confidence that you will be able, through adjustment to the changing needs of agriculture, to continue to be a useful arm of your Land-Grant College and State University. Continued attention to academic improvement is a key to continued success, not only of your work and profession, but is a necessity if the future of county extension work itself is justified.