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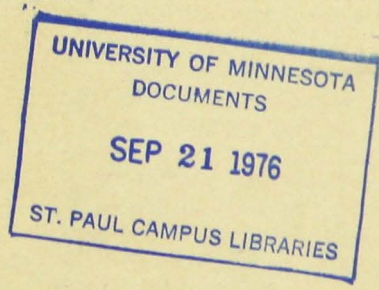
Radio Talk

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AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

By F. W. PECK

This is very properly a day for questions as to the returns being received for the expenditure of public funds for all types of public service. The very term "public service" raises a serious question in our minds as to the growing tendency to promote new lines of work and to expand old lines by the employment of large numbers of individuals, the value of whose services may be in doubt. Therefore, it seems important to analyze the Agricultural Extension Service of the University of Minnesota as a part of the state's educational effort, to ascertain what it costs, what its program is, and what it is trying to accomplish. This is peculiarly appropriate at the present time, inasmuch as groups of individuals have been organized in many of the counties to effect tax reductions and tax reform. In the attempt to develop tax reduction programs, it is being advocated in strong agricultural counties that the county agent, the home demonstration agent, and other public employees, be eliminated and their educational program stopped.

It may be said, in fairness to the aims of many of these groups, that every tax expenditure should be scrutinized with the utmost care, and that all unnecessary expenditures should be eliminated and others reduced until such time as income-earning enterprises will produce sufficient revenue to carry the needed expenditures. In connection with the Agricultural Extension Service, two questions are particularly pertinent at this point, namely: What is the cost of the service? What would be the effects if it were entirely eliminated from the counties of the state.

What the County Extension Service Costs

The county Agricultural Extension Service is financed cooperatively by the federal government, the state, the counties of the state, and the county farm bureaus. The average cost per farm in the state for the entire service, including the state supervisory office; the subject matter specialists; the boys' and girls' club work; all of the county agents, home demonstration agents, county club agents; all of the publicity, extension bulletins, and traveling expense, is less than one dollar. That is, every farmer may be said to be contributing on the average to the entire extension service between 90 cents and \$1 out of his total tax load for this rural educational service.

The county's share of the extension expense is borne through appropriations granted by county boards of commissioners. The county cost last year averaged a little less than one-half of a cent per acre out of an average tax of \$1.47 per acre. In other words, the owner of a typical, 160-acre, Minnesota farm would pay approximately 60 cents out of, say,

\$200 or \$210, his total tax, for the employment of his county agent. If his county maintained a home demonstration agent, he would pay an additional 30 or 35 cents for that work. The total for the two would be equivalent to the cost of about five gallons of gas, or about half the cost of an ordinary pitchfork which the farmer uses in his every-day farm operations. To put the facts in still another form, information provided by the state auditor from abstracts of the tax lists for 1930 shows that out of each tax dollar only about three-tenths of one cent, less than a third of a cent, was the amount which went to the support of extension work. Contrasted with this was 32.9 cents for district school taxes and 12.47 cents out of each tax dollar for county and township roads and bridges.

What Does the Extension Agent Do?

In each county that contributes toward the support of a county agricultural agent, a definite program of work is set up by local committees, representing the best opinions as to the important local needs in agriculture and home-making. Agricultural, home, and 4-H club projects are phases of this program of work in sixty-three of the eighty-seven counties in the state. Particular emphasis has been placed more recently on the economic aspects of farm projects; that is, on those processes that reduce the cost of production, and on price trends, on causes of price fluctuations, and on ways and means of adjusting farm operations to increase the net income. Protection from livestock diseases, from insect pests, and from crop diseases, and the development of superior yielding crop varieties are other important phases of the agricultural program. In dairying, for example, there are four important phases of the program of work: First, the testing of cows for production, or cow culling; second, the purebred sire campaign; third, the gradual elimination of dairy cattle diseases; and fourth, improved marketing of dairy products.

In the home projects with farm women, special attention has been paid to the economical clothing of the family; to nutrition from the standpoint of health and low-cost living; to home management in reducing the hard work of the farm house; to farm poultry as an income bearing enterprise; and to child development and care.

The 4-H club program has a special interest for both adults and farm boys and girls. In this state the extension agents have developed a remarkable 4-H club program, enrolling in their sixty-three counties over 30,000 boys and girls, with an average, in each of the counties completing a club project, of 260 club members. The club work strives to give boys and girls worth-while vocational training in the skills of agriculture and home-making, to teach principles of character building and citizenship, and to teach cooperation, thrift, and the great value of the ownership of some of the resources that help to make agriculture independent and satisfying.

The elimination of the county agricultural agent means practically the killing of 4-H club work; it means the stifling of the opportunities now available for rural men and women to obtain technical and social information; it would destroy the clearing houses of agricultural information in county centers, which have proved so valuable to many producers, and would set the cause of real farm education back at least ten years.

What Elimination of Service Would Mean

The first question that people may well ask is: What does the service cost? But a second question, before it is decided to eliminate the work, should be: What is the program of this work, what is it striving to do, and will its elimination really prove beneficial or actually detrimental in the attempt of agriculture to solve the great problem of increasing its income and taking its rightful place along with other American industries and American ways of living?

We usually think of education as the school system, but education permits a much wider definition than this and really concerns, so far as you and I are concerned at this present moment, the many activities of the extension service and of organized community groups undertaking specific tasks. It includes the printed page, and the really great present opportunity for people to read more than formerly. It involves the opportunity afforded for people to think out their problems and meet in open forums for their discussion, in such groups as farmers' clubs, township units, local leader meetings in the home projects, and others of like nature.

In other words, the problems of agriculture and of the home are going to be met only by more study, by more individual and group discussion, by a larger amount of business and socially organized effort in rural communities, by the kind of legislation that is right and that affects the industry of agriculture in a wholesome way, by improving educational advantages in rural schools, by bringing back into greater influence the rural and small-town church, and by somehow giving the rural boy and the rural girl and the farmer's wife the opportunity for worth-while social advantages which they do not now enjoy in many rural communities.

On one of the public buildings of Washington, D. C., chiseled in stone, are these words:

"The Farm, Best Home of the Family, Main Source of National Wealth, Foundation of Civilized Society—The National Providence."

If these statements be true, is it not fitting that the forces responsible for the standing of agriculture as a business and as a mode of life should be so organized, directed and operated as to offer every educational opportunity to those persons directly and indirectly engaged in the industry?