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INDIVIDUAL TEACHING
BY
AGRICULTURAL AGENTS

A Study

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(4)

C. L. McNELLY

District County Agent Supervisor

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE (2)

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA - U.S. DEPT. OF AGR.

University Farm (1) St. Paul 1, Minnesota

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A STUDY OF INDIVIDUAL TEACHING AS AN EXTENSION METHOD

Extension workers have questioned the value of individual teaching (office call, field interview, farm visit) as compared with group teaching. Some county agents have indicated that they considered much of the time spent in work with individuals as being more or less wasted.

Apparently, there has not been a clear-cut separation in our thinking between the personal service work carried on in the early days of agricultural extension and the individual teaching which has gradually taken its place. It seems apparent that as extension workers we need more information regarding what is being accomplished and what can be accomplished through individual teaching as well as in the techniques in teaching individuals.

We have been able to tell beginning agents very little about the place or importance of individual teaching as a part of their job. There has, in fact, been very little actual information available for use. We personally know of no extension study covering the important aspects of individual teaching as an extension method. This is true notwithstanding the fact that for many years the major share of the agents' time has been devoted to work with individuals.

Certain questions may be raised pertaining to possibilities of doing a better job of individual teaching.

- *** Can extension workers do a better job with individual teaching than they are now doing?
- *** What is the relative effectiveness of individual teaching as compared with group and mass teaching?
- *** How much time should be devoted to individual teaching? Should relatively more or less time than is being used now be devoted to this method?
- *** Are there techniques and devices in individual teaching which would be helpful to beginning agents?

Another type of information needed brings out these questions.

- *** What motivates farmers to ask information of extension agents?
- *** Do they get the information they ask for?
- *** Do they use the information after they get it?
- *** How long after receiving the information do they put it into practice?
- *** What kind of farmers come to agents for information?

It occurs to us that individual teaching when well done is highly regarded in the educational field. This is the college professor on one end of the log, the student on the other. Tutoring, well and favorably known in college circles, is an example of individual teaching. Baker and Wilson in Extension Technical Bulletin 125 say of office calls, "Since this is one of the most efficient extension methods, it would seem to be good judgment to encourage farmers to call at the extension office with their problems."

An accepted requisite in learning is the desire to learn. Many farmers will take considerable time and drive long distances for an opportunity to talk over some problem with the county agent or to get advice or information pertaining to some new and improved farm practice. This, in itself, is an indication that the farmer is anxious to receive the information.

Recognizing the needs for more basic information concerning the techniques and accomplishments of individual teaching as an extension method, we undertook the study which we now report.

Methods Used In The Study

Two major approaches were used to gather the basic information needed for this study.

The first involved the keeping of complete and accurate records of office calls and the classification of these calls as to purposes. Records of from two to four weeks were assembled by a cross section of Minnesota agents. These were taken in connection with the time-use study which was carried on at the same time and was spread through the 12 months of the year. Actually as it worked out, a larger proportion of the records on office calls and farm visits was taken during the first six months of the year.

In addition to the classification of information desired, agents kept a record of the time involved in each office call. They checked with the farmer as to whether the call was a follow-up of another method such as a meeting, radio talk, or news article, etc. The agent was asked whether the call could have been handled by the office secretary, whether time was wasted in connection with the call, and if so, how much time was wasted.*

The second phase of the study consisted of visiting the farmers themselves, questioning them, and getting their reaction to what they had gotten from consultation with the agent. The individual "interview questionnaire" which we used raised the following queries with the farmers visited.**

The original plan was to visit the farmers with the questionnaire within three months after they had called on the county agents and to make the visits to the farmers on a random sample basis. Some practical problems rose in carrying out the plan. Among them was the limited time available to the two members of the state staff who made the survey.*** Approximately 90 per cent of the farmers visited were visited within the two- to-three-month period of time following the office call.

Quite a number of farmers visited were not found at home. However, cards were completed for 149 farmers.

Summary Of Phase One Of The Individual Teaching Study

Records involving a two-week period and spread over the year were kept in 14 counties. The peak load of office calls came during the spring months.

A total of 657 records of office calls and farm visits were tabulated. The total time devoted to these 657 interviews was 12,496 minutes. The average for all was 19 minutes per interview. There is a wide range and variation of time used per interview by the different agents in the 14 counties. This time ranged from an average of 6.4 minutes in one county to 31.5 minutes in another.

In the 657 office calls, 863 requests for information were classified. Of these 152 or 17.6 per cent were listed as involving broad principles of organization or management. Three hundred sixty four or 42.2 per cent were classified as dealing with a specific farm practice. Two hundred sixty six or 30.9 per cent were checked under technical advice or information not necessarily involving scientific information. Twelve or 1.4 per cent were classified as leadership training, and 69 or 7.9 per cent dealt with extension organization.

* For County Agents - Individual Instruction Study, see pp. a-Appendix

** For Individual Interview Questionnaire, see pp. b-Appendix

*** C. L. McNelly and H. P. Hanson

<u>Purposes of Office Calls</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per Cent</u>
Broad Principles of Organization and Management	152	17.6
Specific Farm Practices	364	42.2
Technical Advice or Information (not necessarily involving scientific facts)	266	30.9
Relating to Leadership Training	12	1.4
Relating to Extension Organization	69	7.9

Checking on the incentive for the consultation, 157 of the 657 were checked as being a follow-up of an extension meeting. Nineteen of the 657 were follow-ups of radio talks. (It should be mentioned that in only four of the 14 counties were the agents carrying on a radio program at the time.)

In checking whether the office call might have been handled by the secretary, agents felt that 108 or 16.4 per cent of the 657 calls might have been so handled. These were largely cases where bulletins, pamphlets, or printed material would have answered the farmers' questions. It must be borne in mind that the farmers ask for and want to see the agricultural agent and likely would have been dissatisfied if they had not been permitted to discuss their problems with him.

Agents reported some waste of time during 128 or 19.4 per cent out of 657 office calls with 1652 minutes or 13.3 per cent of the time involved listed as probably wasted with these 128 calls. Assuming that this is a fair estimate of time wasted, it may not seem too serious. It would certainly be desirable, however, that an effort be made toward correction through a better handling of the interview.

Farmers' Reaction To Their Consultation With Agents

The second phase of the study had to do with the farmers' reaction to their consultation with the county agent. The interview survey was summarized as follows:

- *** 141 out of 149 said they got the information they wanted from the agent and eight said they didn't get the information.
- *** 137 talked over the problem with the agent.
- *** Four received printed material that answered their questions.
- *** 42 talked over their problem with the county agent and received printed material as well.
- *** 136 of the 149 calls involved specific farm practices.
- *** Of these 104 or 76.4 per cent had already used the practice when visited. Of the 32 who had not used the practice at the time of survey, 23 said they would use it as soon as opportunity provided.

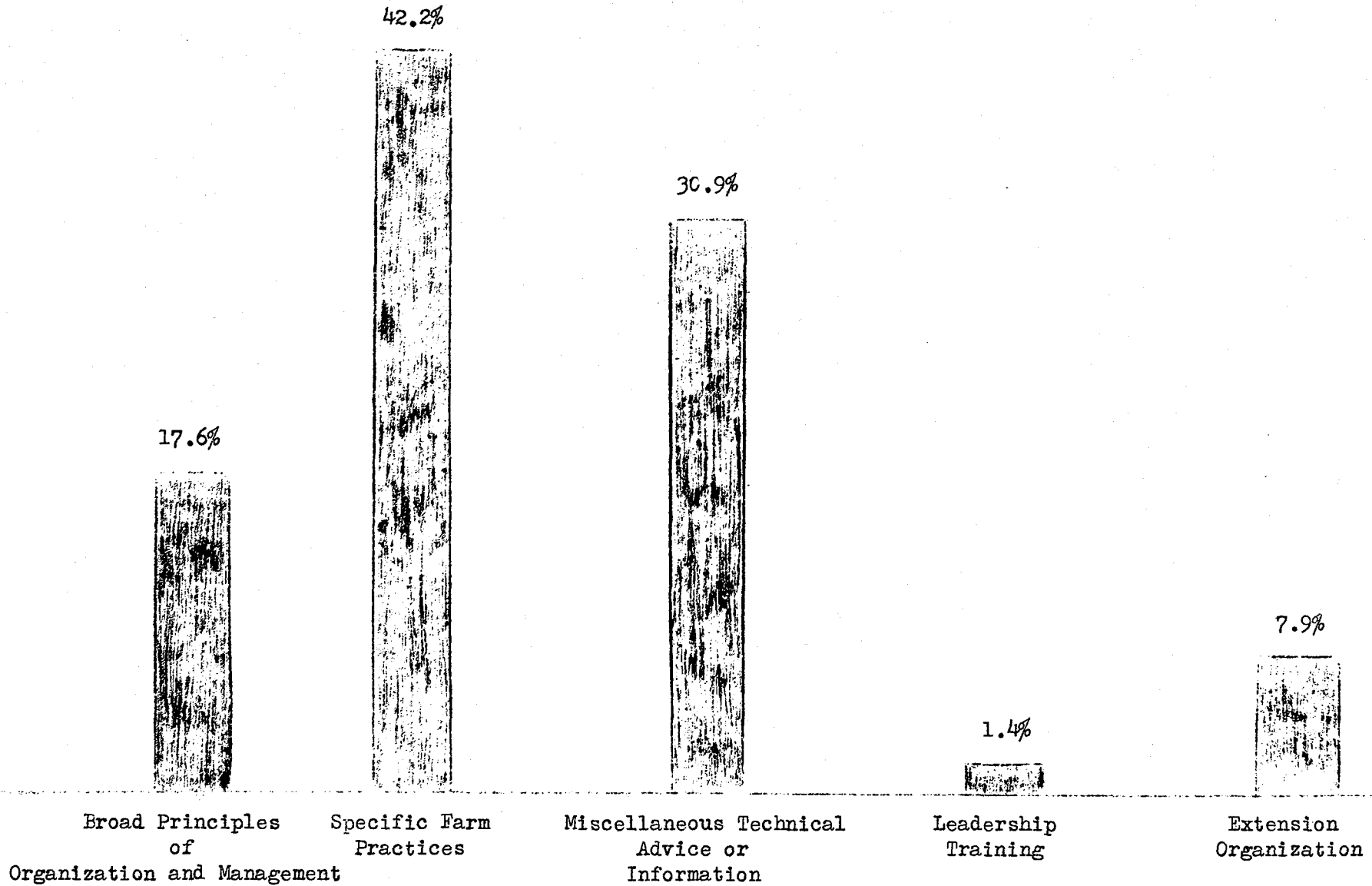
In the event they do the percentage of farmers adopting a practice based on consultation with the county agent would be 93.4.

What Prompted The Farmer To Call On Agent For Information?

Of 136 answers checked;

- 116 said "Good source of farm information"
- 1 " " "News item referred to agent's offer of source"
- 4 " " "Radio broadcast"
- 9 " " "Got suggestion at extension meeting"
- 2 " " "Follow-up of letter"
- 4 " " "Other" reasons given

CLASSIFICATION OF FARMER CONSULTATIONS AS TO PURPOSE
(~~basis percentage of time~~)



In answer to question "Could you have gotten this information at an extension meeting?" 48 said yes - 26 said no.

"Have you passed on this information to a neighbor?" 52 said yes - 57 said no. Of those who did not but would later, 14 checked yes - 32 checked no. Quite a number said they had observed and followed the practice. Thus has the influence spread.

"Do you have any preference in the way you get information from the extension service?" (List 1-2-3) The checking in answer to this question follows:

<u>Personal visit with agent</u>	<u>News articles</u>
107 - 1sts	6 - 1sts
15 - 2nds	20 - 2nds
6 - 3rds	29 - 3rds
<u>Telephone</u>	<u>Radio</u>
2 - 1sts	1 - 1st
1 - 2nd	11 - 2nds
	7 - 3rds
<u>Meetings</u>	<u>Letters</u>
20 - 1sts	1 - 1st
66 - 2nds	
20 - 3rds	

There may be some interest in the kind of farm practices involved in these office calls.

Of 139 listed, 50 related to crop production. Of the 50, 24 dealt with weed control problems, 14 with the use of fertilizer, and 16 to crop varieties and other crop practices. Twenty-nine related to livestock problems, 19 dairy, 10 others.

The balance included:

10 rodent and insect control	4 extension organization
10 farm management problems	1 soil conservation
4 drainage	16 general and miscellaneous
3 tree planting and windbreaks	
18 relating to home and farmstead:	
9 installing septic tanks	
4 landscaping home grounds	
5 building plans	

Problems involved with farmer consultation seem to be determined by the programs agents are carrying on, the type of farming being practiced, and the seasons of the year.

Most farmers seem to have the utmost faith in the county agent. Many counsel with him and use his recommendations "as is", others say they get all the "dope" they can, then use their own judgment in what they put into practice. This is as it should be. Extensioners feel that scientific facts should be presented in such a way that the farmer can use his own good judgment and make his own decisions.

Additional Farmer Reaction

Quite a number of the farmers visited mentioned that it was hard to find agents at the office. They sometimes found it necessary to make several trips. Some felt that the county agent should maintain specific office days so that the public could

know when they could find him. Others felt it would be desirable for the agent to maintain regular office hours on certain forenoons, possibly on "cream days", etc.

Most farmers visited emphasized that the agent was "well posted". They emphasized that their agent was never too busy to talk over problems with them. They were impressed that the agent could be as well informed on as many subjects as he is.

Some rather common statements made by the farmers were: "I like to attend extension educational meetings in the winter months; however, am too busy during the period from seeding time to harvest." Quite a number of the farmers said they "did not follow the agent's suggestion fully." They like to get all the information they can, particularly up-to-date scientific information which the agents may have. They then use what seems to fit their circumstances.

One farmer on a 70-acre farm said that he had almost doubled the production on his farm in 15 years by following the county agent's suggestion.

Many of the farmers visited said they could get general information at extension meetings but liked to talk to agent about specific problems, especially before they attempted to use new recommended practices.

Several farm women said they had often obtained information by calling the agent's office by telephone, especially for specific information such as formulas for controlling insect pests, the use of garden fertilizers, or recommended varieties of vegetables or plants for the garden or ornamental planting.

The Technique Of Individual Teaching

Much has been written about the technique of the interview. It would seem that these principles, because of their similarity in nature, would hold in individual teaching. The writer spent considerable time in connection with this study in observing the devices, and techniques which some of the agents use. We attempted to get the approach used by the agents who cooperated in this study.

There seems to be quite a wide variation in the manner in which different county agents handle the requests of farmers for advice and information. Some have been rather short and brusque. A few seem to lack assurance. Some do not give full, complete, and definite answers.

We have observed others who probed a little with pertinent questions before answering; then, with a fuller understanding of the farmer's problem, answered with confidence and assurance, at the same time correlating their answers with the farmer's experience and bringing out related angles helpful to the farmer. In the one instance the farmer apparently left vaguely dissatisfied but in the other, fully satisfied, confident, and ready to use the information received.

We are impressed with the need for training new agents, both through an understanding of the principles involved and through actual experience, in the ways and means of doing a better job of teaching the individual. The agent should also realize, if he does not already, how important individual consultation is to the farmer and especially its role in the adoption of improved practices. He also should know of its importance in bringing about a broader understanding of sound principles in farm policy as well as in farm management.

How May The Agent Do A Better Job Of Individual Teaching?

Here are some of the ideas and suggestions picked up through observation and discussion with agents?

1. Put the person at ease.
2. Show an interest in his problem.
3. Put yourself in his place.
4. Find out how much and what kind of background he has.
5. How far advanced is the farmer as to his knowledge and practice of scientific principles?
6. How big a step will he take?
7. Is he now using recommended practices? If so, with what success?
8. Draw out the full situation.
9. Is he open-minded?
10. Why does he want the information?
11. How will he use it?

The farmer should first raise questions relating to his specific problem. Agent will then probe to clarify and define the problem. Round out the full picture of the problem before offering suggestions.

One agent says, "One question leads to another. What the farmer asks for and what he gets may be quite different. The interview should refer to previous counselling or meeting. Bring out the limitations, qualifications, and problems that are involved."

Another agent tries to find out what the farmer has on his mind. "This may not always be indicated by the question asked. What is the farmer's background of experience and past history? What is the situation on his particular farm? Has he tried recommended practices? Have they worked satisfactorily for him? If not, find out what has gone wrong."

A third agent says, "There is a knack in drawing out the farmer and in arriving at a common understanding of his problem. It involves the meeting of minds, not just an answer to a question. It is or should be an educational process."

When the agent has the picture, he should answer as simply, directly, and competently as possible. Use words the farmer understands. If any scientific terms with which the questioner is not familiar are necessary, give a simple explanation.

Very seldom should an agent tell a farmer what to do. Let him make his own decision. It would be best to suggest -- "Why don't you try it this way?" or "What would you think of doing it so and so?" or "John Smith does it this way." Answers should be specific and detailed rather than general and vague.

How much time should be devoted to individual teaching?

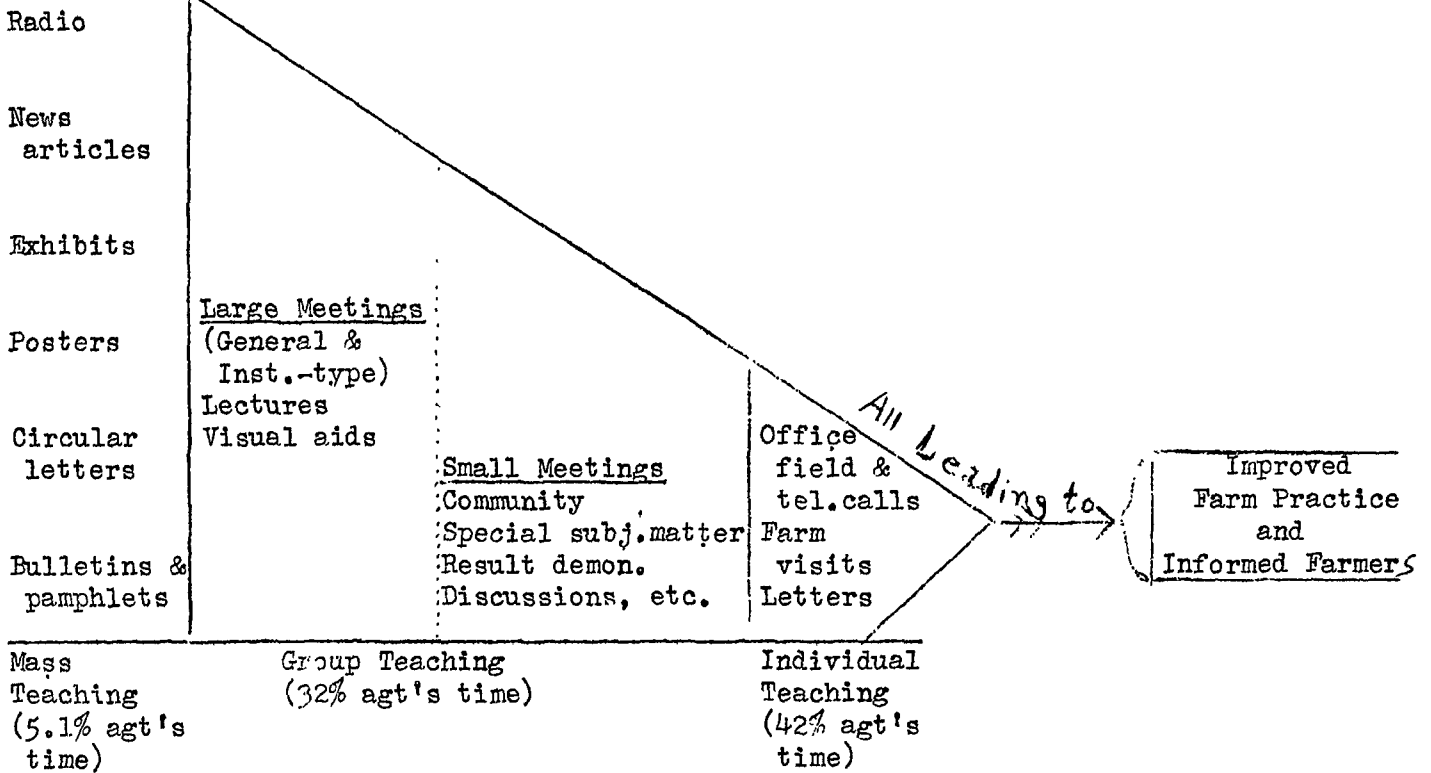
The time devoted to individual teaching will, of course, depend to a great extent on the training and ability of the agent in the use of the different extension methods. Our time-use study shows that 42 per cent of the agricultural agents' time was so used in 1948.

It would seem that no more and perhaps rather less time should be used.

Increased effectiveness should be attained through better organization and use of time. There undoubtedly are opportunities for saving time, both for the agent and the farmer.

Office calls relating to important problems should be encouraged. Specific days may be reserved for calls. It might be desirable in some cases to have farmers come in by appointment.

The Relative Effectiveness of Extension Teaching Methods



Leading from the less intensive to the more intensive teaching methods, one method compliments and supplements the other.

The mass methods probably do not initiate the adoption of practices as much as they stimulate action by repetition. They are interest developers but they may also be important in teaching principles that develop public opinion.

It would seem that extension methods become more effective as they narrow down and become more intensive.

CONCLUSION

1. The office call is a more important teaching medium than generally had been recognized. Its usefulness in this function has been growing over the years. It has a definite place in the role of extension teaching and without doubt can be made even more useful.

2. Apparently, farmers get their ideas for a new farm practice from different sources. A meeting, news story, radio talks, talking with a neighbor or observing a demonstration. When the time comes to initiate the practice, they want to talk to the county agent personally.

3. It is the alert, progressive, farmer looking for new ideas and more advanced methods who asks for the personal consultation with the agent before adopting the practice.

4. There seems to have been a gradual change in accomplishment through individual contacts from the early days of extension work to the present.

The evolution has been from personal service to individual teaching. The emergence is reflected to some extent in the changing terminology from the early "personal service", "personal contact", "face to face contact", to "interviewing", "counselling", "individual instruction", and "individual teaching."

The term "individual teaching" seems to best describe the work being done and at the same time fits well with the grouping of the different methods of extension teaching into "mass teaching", "group teaching", and "individual teaching."

5. This study indicates that individual teaching does have a very important place in extension teaching.

There are limitations because of time involved, but group teaching also has its limitation.

6. Further study should be made of the relative effectiveness of the different extension methods. There is need for continued study and reappraisal in view of the changes that are taking place. Checks should be made from time to time with the farmers who consult with the agents.

The study indicates that the better farmers made wide use of the opportunities for individual consultation with the agents. They accept the county agent as the authority and principal available source of information on the latest scientific and up-to-date information. They consult with the agent when they are about to adopt an improved practice. The farmer himself then often passes the information on by word of mouth or demonstration.

7. Farmers do not often attend meetings during the rush of spring seeding or during the hay and harvest period. These are the times when they often want to put new practices into effect. They use the quickest and most direct method for getting reliable information. This is the personal consultation with the agent.

8. Farmers very much appreciate having the county agent visit them at their farms. The specific problem can be observed then at first hand. While the farm visit is often connected with organization and leadership problems, it also furnishes an important opportunity for individual teaching.

The farm visit offers an opportunity for the agent to keep in touch with problems of the farm and to personally observe results of improved practices. It is also a good-will builder.

9. While a farm visit may be more costly to the extension budget than an office call, as has previously been pointed out, there is another side to the question. In the aggregate, it is much cheaper for the agent to visit 10 farmers in a community which may be a considerable distance from his office than for the same 10 farmers to drive in individually to call on the agent. This is especially true if the agent organizes his work to visit the 10 farmers in connection with one trip.

10. Numerous questions are asked of the county agents following meetings. In the discussions that follow, much individual teaching is done.

11. While the news story, radio broadcast, and extension meeting suggestions are to some extent feeders and lead to the individual teaching, they apparently are not nearly as important as the farmer's personal acquaintance with the agent and his faith in him as a good source of information.

12. The incentive to the farmer for calling on the agent is still largely built around his production problems and his desire to put into practice the most up-to-date information available.

Agents may have felt that the "follow up" or "servicing" of projects carried on in past years and in the discussion of new ideas and new practices that have not been a part of formal programs was a waste of time. Although they may not have been a part of the current program, these problems have been even more important to the farmer whom extension serves. We need improved procedures for recording, measuring, and reporting important accomplishments of this nature.

13. Many farmers feel that the county agent should maintain specific office days so that the public will know when they can find him.

14. The use of the telephone as a means of consulting the agent has a place and may be of more importance than is recognized generally.

15. It would seem possible for some extension agents to do a better job of individual teaching than they are now doing. An understanding of the importance of this method of teaching is essential. Supervisors no doubt can do a better job of training new agents in the principles and techniques involved.

2-Appendix
COUNTY AGENTS - INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION STUDY

NAME OF FARMER	LINE OF WORK DISCUSSED	CLASSIFICATION OF INSTRUCTION INVOLVED
		1. Broad Principles of Organization or Management
		2. Specific Farm Practice
		3. Other Technical Advice or Information not necessarily involving scientific facts
		4. Leadership Training
		5. Extension Organization
		1. Was consultation a follow up of (1) meeting (2) radio talk (3) news article. Indicate 1, 2, 3.
		2. Time involved in minutes.
		3. Could consultation have been handled by secretary. (Yes, No)
		4. Was time wasted in discussing irrelevant matters. (Yes, No)
		5. If time was wasted, indicate how much in minutes

b-Appendix

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Enumerator _____

Name _____ County _____ Date _____ No. _____

(1) Did you get the information that you wanted? Yes _____ No _____

(2) In what form? Oral _____ Printed material _____

(3) (If a specific farm practice) Did you put this information into use on your farm? Yes _____ No _____

(4) If so, what change has this made in your farming practices?

(5) If not, will you make use of it? Yes _____ No _____
((3) alternate - if question is broader than specific farm practices) Did this interview give you a better understanding of the problems? Yes _____ No _____

(6) What prompted you to call on the agent for this information?
(a) Good source of farm information _____ (b) News item referred to agent's office as source _____ (c) Radio broadcast referred to agent's office as source _____ (d) Got suggestion at Extension meeting _____ (e) Letter from agent referring to this information _____ (f) Other _____

(7) Could you have gotten this information at an Extension meeting? Yes _____ No _____

(8) Do you have any preference in the way you get information from the Extension Service - (List 1 - 2 - 3) Meetings _____ Over radio _____ News items _____ Phone _____ Letters _____ Personal visit with agent _____

(9) Have you passed on this information to a neighbor? Yes _____ No _____. If not, do you intend to do so? Yes _____ No _____

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