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Franklin County, Iowa's Program in Public Affairs

By Eber Eldridge, R. Pearl Kelsey, Karl L. Rehder, and Ellen A. Thomas

Interest in extension public affairs programs was started in Franklin County by taking key leaders to district public affairs meetings conducted by the extension specialist.

Local people requested similar meetings in the county. A study group of thirty couples was organized to participate in a series of three public affairs dinner meetings on selected subjects. This study group has been conducting meetings for six years, using the extension specialist and other recognized authorities. As a result, interest has been created among the people in the county. It has also developed a respect for public affairs education conducted by extension personnel, and has given county extension personnel confidence in their ability.

With the confusion surrounding the local cost-price squeeze, county extension personnel felt an obligation to help people understand the farm situation. They outlined and partially prepared a flannel board presentation and proposed it to the Extension Council. The Council enthusiastically approved the project and voted it top priority. The Council also suggested that a special presentation be given to key leaders, brought in by the Council members. As a result of this meeting, the presentation was booked by approximately ten groups.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

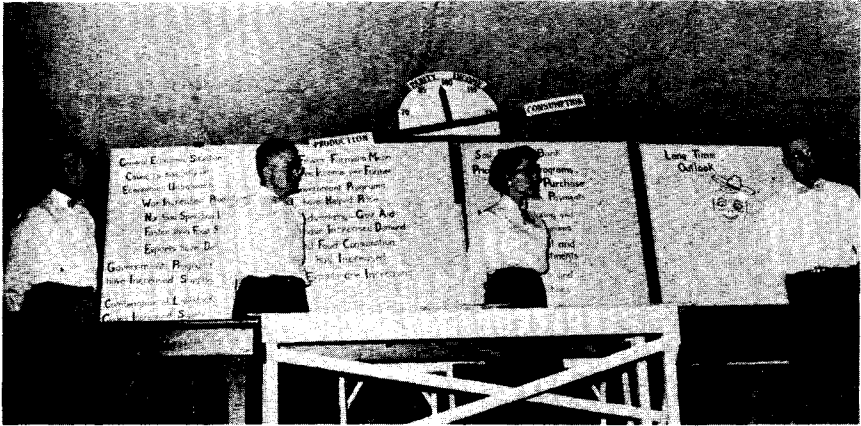
The outline was prepared from information and material presented by the Iowa State College extension specialist at district conferences and county public policy meetings. College and U. S. Department of Agriculture publications served as sources for supplementary material.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION

The county extension personnel prepared their own script and visuals for the one-hour presentation. The discussion shifted twenty-four times between staff members with no member talking more than three minutes at a time. One hundred fifty visuals were used on four flannel boards to illustrate points as they were made.

A large balance bar was mounted over the flannel boards. One

end of this bar represented all agricultural production and the other all consumption of agricultural products. When the bar was in balance a pointer indicated 100 percent parity income for the farmer. This bar was adjusted to illustrate the effect on parity income of the various factors as they were discussed.



Franklin County extension staff using balance bar to illustrate discussion of the economic situation.

PEOPLE REACHED

Approximately 100,000 people were reached through TV appearances and 30 meetings. These groups included local farm organization groups, church groups, service groups, commercial clubs, women's clubs, G. I. training schools, farmer-businessmen banquets, and other groups.

A survey was conducted by mailing a questionnaire to every fifth name on the county mailing list. Approximately 60 percent returned the cards indicating that 74 percent had seen the presentation on TV or at a local meeting.

Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Benson requested that the presentation be given before the President's Agricultural Advisory Commission. This request was made through the Federal Extension Service and approved by the Iowa Director of Extension and the local County Extension Council. The presentation was given four times in Washington, D. C., including appearances before the President's Advisory Commission and the Federal Extension Service staff.

A 30-minute condensed version of the presentation was filmed by the Iowa State College film production unit upon the request of

the Federal Extension Service. A copy of the film was made available to each state extension office.

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION: "FACING THE FARM FACTS"

A. Introduction

Mass media have led people to believe that labor and industry have become prosperous and that the farmer is destitute. The purpose of this presentation is to increase understanding through interpretation of facts.

B. What Are the Facts?

In examining the general economic situation, we find that the gross national product has increased 28 billions of dollars in one year. National income is up 45 percent, while farm income is down 31 percent since 1951. The basic difficulty is an economic unbalance (workings of the economic balance bar explained with pork example). The unbalance was caused by:

1. War emphasis on production (weight production end of balance bar) .
2. Decrease in food spending relative to nonfood spending, and more rapid increase in food production than in population (raise consumption end of balance bar).
3. Decrease in export markets after war (raise consumption end of balance bar) .
4. Diverting of cotton and wheat acres to feed grains (weight production end of balance bar) .
5. All livestock cycles at a high point in 1955.
6. Rising farm and family expenses.
7. Wide variation in incomes of farms approximately the same size.

C. What Is Being Done to Help?

1. Fewer farmers mean more income per farmer (illustration: one out of five Iowa 4-H boys actually farm; huge increase in productivity per farmer) .
2. Government programs have helped the price.
3. Advertising and aid programs have increased consumption (weight consumption end of balance bar).

4. Total food consumption has increased (weight consumption end of balance bar) .
5. Exports are increasing (weight consumption end of balance bar) .

D. Suggested Solutions

Based on the assumption that transfer of nonfarm income to the farm is justified:

1. The Soil Fertility Bank will reduce total production (raise production end of balance bar).
2. Purchase and storage, production payments tend to help the price but also tend to increase production (weight production end of balance bar) .
3. Increased advertising and aid programs can increase consumption (weight consumption end of bar) .
4. Efforts can be made to speed up social and economic adjustments (movement off the farm) .
5. Tariff and trade barriers can be reduced (weight consumption end of balance bar) .

E. Future Problems

1. What is the immediate outlook?
2. Will a farm recession cause a general depression?
3. Will free trade solve the problem?
4. Can we eat our way out of our supply?