



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS

Jon Rye Kinghorn
National Issues Forums

The National Issues Forums (NIF) program is a method whereby the public can learn the public's business—learn how to deal with major policy issues of concern throughout the country.

These public Forums/study circles, that bring citizens together in communities all over the country, do not advocate any specific solution or point of view, but provide a means by which citizens may join in the nation's public policy dialogue and gain an influential role in the making of policy.

Each spring, the National Issues Forums identify three issues of pressing national concern for discussion in the Forums and study circles that will begin the following fall. An attractive, clearly written, nonpartisan issue book for each issue is developed and distributed. The books are written in a manner to encourage participants to weigh the pros and cons of the choices each issue presents. By weighing our opinions about these options together, we can begin to work toward a common ground. The books have received high marks for objectivity, comprehensiveness and readability from the political, educational and public service communities.

Organizations using the NIF approach to policy discussions include colleges, universities, schools, libraries, leagues, churches, synagogues, extension programs, leadership programs, student associations and senior citizen centers. Participants come from a broad spectrum of citizens. Each organization proceeds in an independent fashion to adapt the Forums to its own institutional objectives. In that sense there is no one Forum; there are many Forums, all locally controlled and financed. Each Forum/study circle is locally controlled and organized, yet all have common guidelines. After our Forum/study circle everyone is able to:

- identify the range of realistic alternatives and move toward a choice;
- make a good case for those positions one dislikes as well as the position one likes, and consider the choices one has not considered before;

- understand others have reasons for their choices and that their reasons are very interesting, not dumb, unreasonable, or immoral;
- realize one's own knowledge is not complete until one understands why others feel the way they do about the choices;
- consider the underlying values of each choice; and
- leave the Forum/study circle "stewing" over the choices. (Sometimes this is called "thinking.")

The Forums/study circles are not a lecture series. They encourage everyone to be an active participant.

Each year, outcomes of the Forums and study circles held throughout the nation are presented at a gathering of citizens and policy makers in Washington, D.C. Participants' responses to the questionnaires in each issue book are used in preparing a written summary of the participants' concerns that is released at this annual National Forum.

At this meeting, participants gather to share, not only the outcomes, but also the methods or techniques that have encouraged participation in Forum discussions in their own communities. And representatives from local NIF programs join in briefing representatives from Congress and the Executive Branch, as well as other policy experts, about the discussions that took place in their Forums.