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EXTENSION SERVICE
WAR FOOD ADMINISTRATION
United States Department of Agriculture
Washington 25, D. C.

EXTENSION'S OPPORTUNITY FOR SERVICE
IN POST-WAR HOMEMAKING EDUCATION 1/

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Home demonstration extension work, like all wartime public service, today is approaching the cross road between Victory and Peace. This fall we are still engaged in mustering human sinew and physical resources on the civilian front to bolster the armor and courage of our troops on the fighting fronts. We don't know how soon our victory will be decisive and conclusive. But we do know that our military leaders will obtain the necessary decision with the least sacrifice of human lives.

It seems, therefore, that this year's meeting of the National Association of Home Demonstration Agents is a historic one. Some of the things you decide in 1944 will undoubtedly be useful in the sense that your deliberations and determinations will be reflected in our post-war home and family life. Cooperative extension work has now completed its thirtieth year of educational service to farm people. In these 30 years our farmers and farm families have advanced in the material sense to a far higher standard than any rural people had ever done before. In the advances made in the farm home of the United States, the Extension Service has played a big role. The county home demonstration agents have been the keystone of much of the progress that has been made.

1/ Talk before the Annual Conference of the National Home Demonstration Agents Association, held at the Morrison Hotel, Chicago, Ill., December 6, 1944.

Home economics had a tremendous evolution in the past 30 years. The words "domestic science" ~~used back in those days~~, no longer properly describe the entire field of homemaking education. Homemaking has become a science and an art. Though it started as a limited field, dealing chiefly with cookery, food preservation, and clothing construction, it has now broadened out to where it includes such vitally important subjects as child care, family living, and the practical aspects of nutritional science and physical and spiritual health. It is at present in a phase where a number of important sciences and arts affecting family life come together.

Enlarged Professional Role

I was impressed by the words of Miss Jessie Harris, retiring president of the American Home Economics Association, in a talk given before the business session of the Association here in Chicago last summer. Her full speech is printed in the July 1944 issue of the Journal of Home Economics. In picturing the future of professional home economists, Miss Harris foresaw, among other developments, a broadening field of public service. She said:

"In the days of peace we may expect home economists in increasing numbers in such new and enlarged roles as school lunchroom educators; consultants in elementary education; family life consultants; specialists in expanded services to children and homemakers both urban and rural; nutritionists in more far-reaching community service; commercial and industrial food managers; research workers; specialists in housing. . . . In addition, there will be more and better teachers; home demonstration agents; home management specialists; dietitians, and . . . wider use of home economists in business, in journalism, in radio and television . . ."

A Big Order

What Miss Harris outlines is truly a big order. So far as the Cooperative Extension Service is concerned, Miss Harris, a former extension worker, has thrown down a truly great challenge. If we are to meet the broad responsibility inferred, the job of being a county extension home demonstration agent assumes tremendous importance.

As we interpret Miss Harris' challenge, we can envision the time, in the not too distant future, when extension home demonstration will expand into the urban, as well as rural areas. In some of our large urban centers, like New York City, extension home demonstration agents are already at work performing an excellent service of great help to urban families. Members of your association know only too well that there are many counties in the United States where rural and urban areas

don't have a boundary line when it comes to furnishing home demonstration service to the public. The spirit shown by those of you who have not let geography interfere with your assignment is appreciated by many high in Government as well as by the public you serve. It is my hope that, as plans proceed for a greater post-war Cooperative Extension Service, definite proposals will be included to place extension home demonstration agents in our cities, to serve urban families in the same manner rural families are now being served.

Need for Professional Improvement

If we are to look forward to such a greater extension home demonstration service, it is time that we take active steps for the professional improvement of our work. In doing so, it is my opinion that we should move forward progressively on the experience of the past. For 30 years the Cooperative Extension Service has done a most constructive job in building confidence among farm people. It has done so through some simple and practical techniques. The term "demonstration," for instance, has become almost synonymous with extension work. During the course of the present war, our armed services have adopted many extension demonstration techniques with considerable success in the military training program.

In making the following suggestions, I do so in the spirit of wanting to build future extension achievements on our historic past. The many methods and techniques learned to date in extension teaching should, by all means, be continued. But we are now about to enter a period where we must recognize that there are problems of education which cannot be met entirely through demonstrations and the other techniques we in extension know so well. To tackle some of the more abstract problems it may be necessary to experiment boldly on the frontier of new educational devices. The broader program should, of course, make full use of the tools we have developed. Home demonstration extension work as we have become accustomed to think of it, teaches practices that apply to big problems. But it does so, by and large, in specific units. Frequently, however, we fail to tie the units together into a big and unified approach to meet the entire problem.

Meal planning, cooking, home food preservation, all these are units contributing toward better family health and a solution of the larger problems of farm families. But rural people tell our extension research interviewers that they are learning to can corn, learning to make an apron. They never say, "Our home demonstration unit is working on better health, on improving community life." It is one of the big jobs of extension agents to see that rural people are made aware of these larger needs and what they as a group can do about them. Among the bigger jobs I have in mind I would place emphasis on improving rural elementary schools, on increasing participation in church and community affairs, on establishing better rural libraries and library service, on furthering participation in rural health and civic improvement programs.

Here is an example of what I have in mind. In the post-war years a good home demonstration agent will need more than her demonstration kit and equipment. Very often it may be more important for people in a community that the demonstration be made incidental and that emphasis be given to the discussion of a community problem. For instance, home demonstration agents should be able to sit down with 20 farm women and say: "Here are some facts on education in our community; here are some facts on health. What can be done to see to it that our children get a decent opportunity for education? To see that they have an equal chance with the children in the city? What can be done to solve a certain health problem?" If 20 people are too large a group to get such a discussion started, perhaps 10 will be better. But home demonstration extension work has, in my opinion, a great responsibility developing better rural schools and rural health programs. Such programs must be cooperative with other agencies, it is true. But our leadership can do much to make them a reality.

Analysis of Educational Needs

At present there is being summarized, by the Division of Field Studies and Training, a survey made by Miss Mary Louise Collings and some of the State extension services. The study concerned itself with the work actually performed by county home demonstration agents. It showed, among other things, the following:

- (1) That home demonstration agents, by and large, are carrying a full schedule of worth while activities.
- (2) That the activities of at least 80 percent of the agents include cooperative programs with many different community organizations and agencies, but that the percentage of total time on the job devoted to such cooperative programs is very small. The preliminary figures from the study show it to be on the average about 3 percent of the total time.
- (3) The home demonstration study, because of its conciseness, does not furnish us with conclusive evidence regarding the nature and effectiveness of contacts with rural groups. However, the entries of agents on the time record do lead us to believe that, in many instances, time is devoted to teaching specific homemaking skills which are never related to the larger problems of rural families. The home demonstration agents have devoted much time to teaching nutrition and have related such teaching to health. But in the realm of other important rural problems such as are incident to better family relations and to community development, we find less evidence of activities aimed directly at these problems. About one-fourth of the agents, reporting in the home demonstration study week, which was used as the unit of measurement, worked on better family relationships; about one-sixth of them recorded any time spent on activities which we would associate with improving community life. The total time per week which could be attributed directly to these two phases of extension for the few reporting was, on the average, about two hours out of 50.

(4) There is a tendency among some home demonstration agents to work with the same group of women and families, instead of constantly being on the alert to reach new segments of the rural population through the leadership of those who already cooperate with extension work. About 64 percent of the agents reported some work with individual rural and urban families not regular members of extension groups. About 10 percent of the agents worked with new, unorganized groups of people on special programs, such as Victory gardening and canning groups. This shows a good beginning that we need to develop and strengthen.

(5) Home agents indicated major difficulty in procuring and training lay leadership. This raises the questions: What constitutes training leaders? What sort of challenge do we put before rural men and women in asking them to serve their groups? Do we urge them to help Extension do its job, or do we give them a vision of community growth and enrichment?

These are just a few of Miss Collings' findings. All of you will want to read the full report when it becomes available. Research of this kind represents an honest self-analysis of our work. If carried out with true, unbiased judgment and the sincere purpose of bettering extension work, such analyses should be a constructive force in raising the professional quality of home demonstration teaching.

Stress on Human Values

I have much confidence that extension home demonstration work will play an even greater part in the world of tomorrow than it has in the past 30 years. I say this, because home demonstration workers as a rule are not the kind of folks who turn the clock back.

The majority of home demonstration agents reported in the home demonstration study that the chief satisfaction they got from their jobs was working with people to help them achieve a better, fuller life.

So, as we face the future, the challenge before us is to help more and more people find the human values that can be had if home economics develops into the science and art of living which it can and should be in our modern age.

The war has shown what technology and intelligent human organization can do in conquering evil. Our victory can -- and in my opinion will -- show to an even far greater degree what technology and scientific knowledge can do if we give them their broadest application in peacetime pursuits.

All this will, however, require an Extension Service home economics program that meets the more abstract problems of better homes, community life, civic planning, medical care, health facilities, education, religion, and recreation in addition to the practical skills of better homemaking. We cannot stress enough the importance of this less material, though more vital side of life. Through pointing future programs in this direction, our home economics extension teaching can truly become the vehicle for bringing on the better civilization which lies ahead.