

INTRODUCTION

Numerous investigations of the innovative process have shown that it takes from five to ten years for an innovation to become established in our society. While it has taken little more than one year to produce this report from the National Advisory Board on Rural Information Needs (NABRIN) Planning Committee, six years of effort consisting of persuasion, argumentation, coalition building, cooperation, and collaboration were consumed in laying the groundwork. This is not to say that an advisory board on rural information needs was foreseen in 1978, although the chain of events, program planning and activities, that have led to this report, began in that year.

In 1978, the National Agricultural Library submitted to the White House an "Innovative Initiative to Focus Useful Scientific, Technical, and Social Information to the Small Businessman, the Farmer, and Local Community Groups." This initiative was written in support of two White House Conferences scheduled within a three month period: The White House Conference on Library and Information Services, November 15-20, 1979, and the White House Conference on Small Business, January 13-17, 1980.

The major objectives of this initiative were twofold: (1) assure the accessibility and use of beneficial information by all constituencies of USDA, including the small businessman, and (2) strengthen or revitalize the community library or local library system as information centers.

The innovative process is not the same as the creative process, however. It can be an old idea that is new to the adopting institution(s). It frequently results from either reordering, restructuring, or combining the goals and objectives of existing institutions into new formal structures or cooperative ventures. Frequently existing elements and procedures of the existing institutions are adopted by two or more institutions without significant loss of autonomy by any one of them.

Instrumental to the innovative process described in this report were the contributions of a great number of people who represented one or more of the following agencies or organizations: American Library Association; American Society for Information Science; Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, Clarion University of Pennsylvania; Chief Officers of State Library Agencies; Congressional Research Service; Information Industry Association; Intermountain Community Learning and Information Service Project; National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges; National Commission on Libraries and Information Science; National Technical Information Service; Public Library Association, Committee on Rural Library Services; Pioneer Public TV, Appleton, Minnesota; United States Department of Agriculture--

Office of the Secretary, Cooperative Extension Service, National
Agricultural Library, Office of Rural Development Policy; and,
Utah State University.

Gerald J. Sophar
Gerald J. Sophar
Chairperson
Planning Committee

I. BACKGROUND

We live in a remarkable society. Coexisting in the same ecosystem are extreme differences. On one hand, we point with deserved pride to the accomplishments of technology--the Space Shuttle, microprocessing, telecommunications--are only a few of these distinct achievements. Literally, we must observe, however, the opposite end of the spectrum. Poverty, social anomie, despair, etc., remind us of enduring unmet challenges within our fragile human framework. We are also cognizant of the fact that our perceptions about ourselves and our world are conditioned by unrelenting change. Causing this change and likewise symptomatic of it is a phenomenon of dynamic and unyielding proportions--information as an ever expanding and nonconsumable product. "Information is a resource of immense economic and social value. It is vital to the proper functioning of a democratic society, a crucial tool in a productive economy and an effective government, a central part of the growth and well being of individuals."¹

Pi-Sheng and Gutenberg changed our world because of providing the facility of replicating information through the use of moveable type. Computer technology, at its current level, provides an ability to store, organize, and disseminate information at an unbelievable and potentially incomprehensible rate. Added to

¹U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. Public Sector/Private Sector Interaction in Providing Information Services. (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1982), p. vii.

this is all of the information in graphic, tactile, and textual forms which may be found in American libraries and museums. In a real sense, we have become a society in which we are both consumer of and consumed by information. At a practical level, therefore, conceptualizing and being able to deal with information is a problem of the greatest proportions in the United States. While information may be conceived of as amorphous and anonymous, it provides the intellectual and economic power of survival.

Because of the cultural and economic differences which comprise the United States, access to information is disproportionately available to its citizenry. Unfortunately, the cliché of "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer" has a validity in relation to information access. Technology has the potential to mitigate real or imagined economic boundaries. At the present, however, information technology augments already established resource centers, and these tend to be located in the metropolitan areas of the United States. As a consequence of this natural tendency, rural America shares unfavorably in the "information pie." The purpose of this document, therefore, is to posit a cooperative thrust which combines the talents of government and of the private and public sectors to respond to the critical needs of information access and use in the rural countryside.

Ironically, the need to consider the infrastructure of information in nonmetropolitan America has never been greater. For the first time in the history of the United States, more people are moving to rural areas than metropolitan places. During the period of

1970-1980, the rural population of the United States grew by 16%, while metropolitan growth was charted at ten percent.² In reality, the nonmetropolitan growth was even larger but hidden because of the effect of the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA,) which classifies the population of an entire county as urban regardless of the characteristics of the individual towns or townships which it comprises. In 1980, the SMSA was changed to a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA,) which adds the tests of population growth, density, travel to work, etc., for defining urban places. Because of the 1980 definition, e.g., 49 previously named metropolitan counties have been reclassified as rural. But 38 new areas have been listed as MSA's that contain large number of rural people.³ Presently, 85 million people live in 45,000 rural communities, 35 percent of which are incorporated cities.⁴ While there is currently some suggestion that the rural migration has slowed, there is no indication of permanent population decline.

A complex number of reasons account for the "rebirth" of rural America. Interstate highway systems, population mobility, an expanding service economy, the availability and growth of institutions of higher education, the movement of job opportunities into the

²U. S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Development Division, Economic Research Service. Chartbook of Nonmetro-Metro Trends. (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, Rural Development Research Report, Number 43, 1984), p. 4.

³Calvin Beale, "New Definitions for Metropolitan Areas," Rural Development Perspectives. Volume 1, Issue 1 (October, 1984), p. 20.

⁴J. Norman Reid and Patrick J. Sullivan, "Rural Infrastructure: How Much? How Good?" Rural Development Perspectives. Volume 1, Issue 1 (October, 1984), p. 10.

countryside, etc., are causal considerations. There is also some suggestion, while rural America has become decidedly less agrarian since its founding, that renewed interest in farming is also a mitigating factor in augmenting rural population growth. Over the last several years, for instance, there has been a 17% increase in the number of small farms in the United States.⁵

Another factor must be added to those above to further explain why there has been a reversal of the traditional rural to urban exodus. Simply put, but difficult to completely analyze, Americans are looking for a "better way of life." The real and imagined values of small town living have created an appealing sociology in which the new rural people hope to participate. Meaningful interpersonal relationships, safe places, clean air and water, the back yard garden, close proximity to recreational areas, etc., are all part of this new rural mentality. Small town America has also encouraged the older American to remain in his or her community rather than seeking health related services traditionally characteristic of metropolitan areas. Consequently, the countryside is presently "older" than urban places. In a real sense, we are witnessing a new melting pot at work in rural America.

As our country had to adjust its institutions to the waves of immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries, in microcosm, the same challenges exist for the rural towns and townships which are faced with new and accelerated demands for a wide variety

⁵"Census Shows Rise in Number of Small Farms," The New York Times, September 4, 1984, sec. 1, p. 17.

of social and cultural services. Further, because the "new rurals" have brought with them expectations nurtured by urban living, unavoidable conflicts arise because of value systems which cannot presently be supported by existing rural infrastructures. There is deep concern, e.g., that a quick "patching-up" of the support systems in rural communities may simply not be sufficient to meet these new needs and that a complete reworking might be necessary. Typical examples for consideration are existing bridges and roads which can no longer support the weight of modern construction vehicles, or the lack of public water service in 60% of America's unincorporated rural areas.⁶ While the dichotomy of rural and urban is closing, politically and culturally, nonmetropolitan America continues to endure the proverbial back seat in relation to its economic base, health support, social services, educational institutions, etc. In relation to health services, for instance, while most rural Americans today have access to hospital facilities, few enjoy the specialized medical resources that are located in metropolitan areas.

No greater disparity exists between rural and urban America, however, than when access to information is considered. In many ways, the information needs of rural Americans are similar to those of their urban counterparts. The differences, however, are created by the distances separating both human and physical resources in the rural countryside. Most urbanites have entree to a literal cornucopia of information resources--libraries, museums,

⁶Reid and Sullivan, Rural Infrastructure..., p. 10.

data centers, specialized agencies of various types, etc., all within the mass transportation radius of a city. Rural Americans, however, must travel an average of over 50 miles to reach a city of 25,000 people, where some of these information services may be available.⁷

It is difficult to adequately express what comprises the "information spectrum" of our society. As benchmarks, however, consider the fact that over 40,000 books in English are being published in the United States annually, millions of documents and other resources are produced by governmental agencies, approximately 100,000 periodicals are published worldwide, and as many as 20,000 programs for microcomputers have been marketed within the last three years. Added to these products are all of the countless items already residing in libraries and other repositories. Without the need for hyperbole, our information economy consists of billions of things and billions of dollars. "Information" is so pervasive a concept that John Naisbitt (of Megatrends fame) has concluded that information, along with people, constitute the necessary elements for the survival of business in the United States.⁸

Rural America has always been faced with the problems of collecting, organizing, and disseminating information. Institutionally, these challenges have been assumed by a variety of agencies--Cooperative Extension Service, public libraries, data processing professionals,

⁷Reference Service in Rural Public Libraries. (Clarion, Pennsylvania: Clarion State College, School of Library Science, Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, 1982), p. 25.

⁸John Naisbitt, "Reinventing the American Corporation," The New York Times, December 23, 1984, sec. 3, p. 2.

local and state governments, public and private agencies, etc. The difficulty has been, however, that these helping entities have frequently provided their services in isolation of each other even though their goals have been similar. For example, Extension's job is education and the transmittal of practical information produced by research entities to the public. In like manner, the historical role of the public library has been to provide for the educational, informational, and recreational needs of its clientele. Parenthetically, it should be noted that the presence of Cooperative Extension and the local community library provide the first-line of informational support in rural America. The entrepreneurial private sector also contributes to life-long learning and informational support, e.g., through the stimulation of new ideas and the delivery of services. The challenge now becomes one of welding those organizations, presently supporting the "infrastructure" of rural America, into a cooperative thrust. Overwhelming amounts of information, along with their relative costs, the inability of coping individually, local governmental autonomy, a sense of the new federalism, etc., make this cooperative thrust an imperative of the largest magnitude. Literally, it is a matter of survival.

Lest it be misunderstood, while the cooperative paradigm suggested above is necessary to deal with the phenomenon of information on a philosophical level, it is the challenge of accessing, analyzing, and disseminating information for the solution of practical problems that is the most immediate concern in rural America.

The following is a list, not in priority order, suggesting

some of these informational imperatives:

First, to meet the concerns of local part-time governmental officials, who need increasing amounts of technical data to administer rural areas--at a time when greater reliance is placed on local sources of revenues;

Second, for the needs of rural planners, who are faced with alternative choices among the facilities and technologies needed to support and/or rebuild community services;

Third, to assist "the transformation of the rural economy from its agrarian and extractive past to its current dependence on manufacturing and service industries, and its integration into national and international markets...."⁹

Fourth, for the private sector, that must respond to the population growth in rural areas by helping to create new sources of employment;

Fifth, for local and state governments that are cognizant of needed demands in developing new job training partnerships;

Sixth, for the individuals and agencies responsible for the future of the rural family, which is diminishing in size and getting older;

Seventh, to provide information to those responsible for communications and telecommunications policy;

Eighth, to assist in the "development of efficient ways of disseminating agriculture-related information to consumers and government officials to enhance their understanding of agriculture

⁹Kenneth L. Deavers and David L. Brown, "A New Agenda for Rural Policy in the 1980's." Rural Development Perspectives Volume 1, Issue 1 (October, 1984), p. 39.

and policy needs;"¹⁰

Ninth, to help in the development of agribusiness near the place of farm production through the education of industrial and business managers;¹¹

Tenth, to help educate farmers on national and international policies and issues effecting agricultural production and marketing; and,

Eleventh, to enable those individuals living in rural America to enjoy a better life because of access to timely information.

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¹⁰U. S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. Extension in the 80s: A Perspective for the Future of the Cooperative Extension Service. (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, Cooperative Extension Service, 1983), p. 9.

¹¹Ibid., p. 9.

II. COOPERATIVE NATIONAL PLANNING TO MEET RURAL INFORMATION

NEEDS

In 1981, Mr. Gerald J. Sophar, former Executive Officer of the National Agriculture Library, was transferred through a loan agreement to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science to help augment a continuation of NAL's rural information services outreach program. NCLIS, by law, has a major responsibility in providing for the library and information needs of rural America. As a consequence of its involvement, NCLIS, under the direction of Dr. Toni Carbo Bearman, sponsored a Joint Congressional Hearing at the meeting of the World Future Society on July 21, 1982, in Washington, D. C.¹² Senator Mark Andrews (Rep.) of North Dakota, and Representative George E. Brown Jr. (Dem.) of California, co-chaired the Hearing, which attracted over 350 individuals. In addition, more than 1500 people also visited a NCLIS sponsored exhibit of a model rural learning/information center.

Through the published hearing, the Secretary of Agriculture stated his support with the following comment:

The Department of Agriculture will continue to cooperate with the Commission [National Commission on Libraries and Information Science] in furthering the common goal of providing good information to our agricultural and rural communities... The Commission can count on the full cooperation of the Department of Agriculture.¹³

¹²U. S. Department of Agriculture and U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, Joint Congressional Hearing on the Changing Information Needs of Rural America: The Role of Libraries and Information Technology, July 21, 1982. (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1984.)

¹³Joint Congressional Hearing...., p. ii.

Early in 1983, the rural information services outreach program initiated at NAL and continued as a function of NCLIS evolved into and was renamed the National Rural Library and Information Services Development Program (NRLISDP.) Further, this entity acquired support at the highest departmental level, i.e., at the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture. This was a particularly important development in that NCLIS is not an operating agency and, therefore, could not continue NRLISDP on a permanent basis.

In October, 1983, during the 46th Annual Meeting of the American Society for Information Science, in Washington, D. C., Mr. Raymond Lett, Executive Assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture, chaired a program dealing with the use of information to encourage innovation and increase productivity in rural areas of the United States. The session was co-sponsored by NCLIS and USDA. Joining Mr. Lett on the platform were Ms. Elinor Hashim, Chairman of the Commission; Ms. Laura Chodos, Regent of the University of the State of New York and Chairman of the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services' Task Force; and, Dr. Glenn Wilde, Assistant Dean, Extension, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Utah State University and leader of the Intermountain Community Learning and Information Services Project (ICLIS.)

Although the topic discussed at the above mentioned session was interesting, it was no more significant than those matters considered at similar sessions during other meetings of the Information Science, Library, and Cooperative Extension communities. However, in another sense, this session had an historical significance

associated with it. For the first time, the leaders of these communities shared a platform to state that the need to improve the delivery of information services to rural America was national in scope and to pledge a response to this need.

Earlier in the same year, USDA and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) issued a joint report, "Extension in the 80s." This report described a number of Extension's goals in furthering its classical mission of disseminating and diffusing information and knowledge (particularly that which is research generated) to communities, universities, and individuals. The report states that Extension will focus on six major program goals in conducting its mission. One of these is "To cooperate with other agencies and institutions of local, state, and federal governments, and the private sector in the development and conduct of informational programs for the public." Clearly, Cooperative Extension has reinforced its commitment to the future of rural America.

During the last month of 1983, meetings began between Elinor M. Hashim, Chairman of NCLIS and Mary Nell Greenwood, Administrator of USDA's Extension Service, to consider the development of a permanent board which would focus national attention on the information needs of the rural citizenry. Because of these meetings and earlier ones that took place between Gerald J. Sophar and Ernie Matthias, a Special Assistant in the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, a National Advisory Board on Rural Information Needs (NABRIN) Planning Committee was formed. As evidence of its commitment

to this activity, the Department of Agriculture assigned five individuals to the NABRIN Planning Committee representing: the Office of the Secretary; the Rural Development Office; the National Agriculture Library; the Extension Service; and the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy.

The NABRIN Planning Committee now has fifteen members, one of whom is the Director of the National Technical Information Service. Others members of the Committee represent a cross section of the public and private sector who are involved in information access and use. The Planning Committee met for the first time on January 21, 1984, and then throughout the remainder of the year. Resulting from its deliberations is a modus operandi consisting of a set of goals and objectives.

III. CHARTER OF THE NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD ON RURAL
INFORMATION NEEDS

A. Establishment

In accordance with USDA Departmental Regulation, the Secretary of Agriculture has established the National Advisory Board on Rural Information Needs, chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 (Public Law 92-463), to advise and counsel the Secretary on subjects relating to rural information matters.

B. Objectives and Duties

1. The objectives of the Board are to advise and assist the Secretary of Agriculture, and other Federal Agencies and officials referred to in USDA Departmental Regulations with actions designed to carry out the assignments set out herein and particularly those pertaining to rural development set forth in Section 2204 and 2211 (b), Chapter 55, of the U. S. Code of Federal Regulations.

2. The Board shall focus national attention on the essential information needs for rural America, and will examine these needs in order to develop policies, strategies, and action programs that will enable rural citizens, governments, public and private entities to access, offer, and utilize appropriate information based services.

3. Specifically, the Board shall:

a. Identify the needs for information services in rural communities and determine the private and public benefits and value of such services.

b. Evaluate existing information services and consider appropriate revision, alternatives, and/or extensions necessary to provide the information services required.

c. Develop a plan for implementing cost effective information based services that assure the needs of rural communities are met, and seek its implementation.

d. Enlist the cooperation and support of: federal, state, and local agencies; private firms; foundation; organizations and institutions; other interested or affected entities.

4. The Board shall submit an annual report to the Secretary which will include a summary of the Committee's efforts during the year, plans for the next two years, and recommendations prepared by the Board. It shall also submit the annual report to the Chairman of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science.

5. The Board shall serve on a continuing basis within the limitations of the law.

6. The Board functions solely as an advisory body in compliance with the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

C. Members and Chairperson

1. The Board shall consist of not more than twenty members appointed by the Secretary, assuring a valuable, balanced, and effective representation from the public and private sectors as follows:

a. From the private sector, persons recognized as experienced and skilled in disciplines as follows, two each from: agribusiness; information services; communications/technology. One each from: the media; financial services; marketing; and one other as appropriate.

b. From the public sector, persons recognized as experienced and skilled as follows, one each from: Republican Congress; Democrat Congress; Land Grant University/1890 College; state/county library; NCLIS; three persons from USDA, including Cooperative Extension and the National Agricultural Library; sociology educator; and one other as appropriate.

2. A non-member, who is an employee of the Department of Agriculture serving at the pleasure of the Secretary, designated Board/Committee Management Officer in accordance with Section 8. (b) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

3. The Chairperson shall be elected by the Board members; the Vice-Chairperson shall be the NCLIS representative and they shall fulfill the duties specified by the Federal Advisory Committee Act and/or other appropriate law or regulation. These person shall serve no more than a two-year term in their respective offices.

4. The terms of the initial Board members shall expire (designated by the Secretary at the time of the appointment) as follows:

five at the end of the first year; five at the end of the second year; five at the end of the third year; and five at the end of the fourth year. All persons appointed after the initial appointments shall serve a four-year term, except that any person appointed to fill an unexpired term vacancy, shall be appointed only for that term of the vacancy.

5. No person shall serve as a member of the Board for more than two terms.

6. Selection and appointment to the committee shall be made without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, handicap or sex.

7. Any Board member who is absent from four consecutive Board meetings will automatically terminate his or her membership.

D. Board Meetings

The Board meets at least every three months at the call of the Chairperson, unless the Chairperson determines, in consultation with the other Board members, that such a meeting is not necessary to achieve the purposes of the Charter. Meetings and the work of the Board shall be subject to the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act and USDA Departmental Regulations.

E. Recommendations to the Secretary

From time to time, the Board shall make written findings and recommendations to the Secretary. The Secretary shall report to the Board the disposition of the findings and recommendations, including the rationale for approval or disapproval of the Board's recommendations. The Secretary shall make such reports no later

than one hundred and twenty days after the written submission of the recommendations.

F. Reports

Within ninety days after the close of each calendar year, the Board shall submit an Annual Report to the Secretary, with copies to other designated offices. This report shall outline the activities undertaken by the Board since its inception, or last Annual Report, and shall include any findings and recommendation made to the Secretary during the reporting period. This Annual Report shall also provide the Secretary with the Board's plans and projected activities for the succeeding two years.

G. Support Services

The Secretary shall provide such staff personnel, clerical assistance, services, materials, and office space required to assist the Board in carrying out its duties.

H. Compensation and Operating Costs

The members of the Board shall serve without compensation, if not otherwise officers or employees of the United States Government, except that they shall, while away from their homes or regular places of business in the performance of services or duties to the Board, be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, in the same manner as persons employed intermittently in the Government service are allowed expenses under sections 5701 through 5707 of Title 5, United States Code.

Annual operating costs are estimated at \$120,000 and one staff year.

Support for the Committee will be provided by: (support agency to be determined by the Secretary of Agriculture).