

## RURAL INFORMATION NEEDS

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Rural Information Needs as seen through the eyes of a rural county agent; that is an interesting challenge. I am going to approach it by looking at eight national initiatives targeted for extension program emphasis, through the 1990s on into the 21st century.

One might say these are national issues, not something that will affect rural areas like Clarion County. These eight, however, have come from the grass roots and have come to the National attention from the people we help.

I would like to look at five of these National issues, and interpret them into requests I received for information from people in Clarion County.

First, let us look at these national initiatives. The list is:

1. Alternative Agriculture Opportunities
2. Building Human Capital
3. Competitiveness and Profitability of American Agriculture
4. Conservation and Management of Natural Resources
5. Water Quality
6. Family and Economic Well Being
7. Improving Nutrition, Diet, and Health
8. Revitalizing Rural America.

It has been my experience that you must define the audience before you can talk about meeting needs. We will definitely get a different set of needs for each audience we target for information.

For example, the needs are not the same for the full time production of agriculture as they are for the part-time agriculture producer, or non-resident land owners, or resident home owners, or elderly or low income. I believe that these are at least the groups we find seeking information, and are targets for many of our programs. There are also needs that cross all of these categories, without regard to occupation, place of residence, or age.

Let us look at the needs of each of these groups and then some of the needs common to all.

### FULL TIME AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS

If we target full time agricultural producers for informational needs, we find some definite. They look for information that will keep them on the cutting edge of competitiveness; more production at a lower cost. This includes cultural methods that involve new varieties, fertilization and total nutrient management, pest control, and training in pesticide application and safety.

The pesticide application and safety training are mandated by law and every user of restricted pesticides must keep their permit current.

Financial management and marketing information is needed by all and requested by few. However, most farms do keep accurate records using various record keeping tools. These tools vary from computers to a shoe box that contains income and expense receipts.

New methods of equipment and labor saving technology are always of interest and used in various innovative ways.

What's new? I integrated pest management, genetic analysis, and planning for farm animals as well as agricultural plants and nutrient management, to name only a few.

### PART-TIME PRODUCERS

Although most full-time producers also look for alternate opportunities for profit, I find a great number of people in our area looking for ways to produce income from small acreage. Some, in this group, look for a way to use land they own or can rent.

What new farm enterprises, they ask, can I get involved in, to make use of left over labor and land. They may live on the small acreage or even live in Pittsburgh and invest in land here, then look for ways to use the land. Alternative agricultural opportunities are of great interest to these people.

Answers are always difficult because no two have the same expectations, knowledge, or resources to utilize. There are no easy dollars to be made, and there are no recipe solutions to use for what they have.

There are certain enterprises that come along from time to time that have profit potential. Sheep and hogs are always popular, but by the time everyone gets geared up and starts, the over supply lowers the price and the profits are gone.

### RESIDENT HOME OWNERS

People who are resident home owners in rural areas are common. They usually live on small lots of less than 2 acres. They are employed somewhere in the area and their needs for information are somewhat the same.

Care and upkeep of their home and property are important. Interpreting this; it means lawn care, home vegetable and fruit production, and all the pest and disease that come with these activities.

This year could be the year of the gypsy moth and termite.

The identification and treatment help for these are always easier to recommend than they are to do, and more importantly, to pay for in some cases.

This week it has been helping interpret soil test reports, controlling gall aphids on spruce, and grubs in lawns.

### NON-RESIDENT LAND OWNERS

In Clarion County we are getting more and more of these people who live in other areas, but own acreage in Clarion County.

These requests come in two questions. What can I do with my land to keep it up; how much can I rent it for, and how can I make money from it?

The answers are somewhat the same as the resident home owners, at least when it comes to wanting to know how they can use the land.

I do not know of anything that can be planted, left alone, harvested, and profit pocketed. If and when this happens, I will be in it, unfortunately, so will six zillion other people.

### NATIONAL INITIATIVES THAT TOUCH ALL AUDIENCES

Last, I would like to briefly mention the needs that cross all segments of our population regardless of where they live or how much they make in rural Clarion County.

One is water quality and the other is building human capital.

In Clarion County, we are currently gearing up to fill a gap in the education of water quality. The educating is by helping people interpret their water test results. Helping them understand what their alternatives are and what treatment will cost is a gap in the information flow.

Building human capital is leadership development. The task can be interpreted as helping develop the tremendous human potential we have. We see this potential in all the volunteers we work with in our 4-H programs. Helping people develop their skills is probably the one most important thing that those of us in the informal educational business can do. Benefits will be unmeasurable.

Thank you for your time.