

IDENTIFYING AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S EXTENSION YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT AUDIENCE

by

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Interest in the food that one's family consumes, quality of that food, concern over the future of one's food supply and the environment in which one lives, is at an all time high.

These current interests can be seen by looking at College of Agriculture enrollment figures, which have increased almost 500% in the 1969 to 1977 period, increased numbers in 4-H livestock projects (one example is in 1972 we had 141 4-H swine projects in Connecticut and in 1977 the number is now 276 4-H swine projects) and in general day to day talking with people.

Hitting close to home – right here in Connecticut – I will try to cite some specific concerns of my youth audience and young adult clientele:

1. *Farmland preservation* – has been a concern of all our citizens – both farmers and non-farm people for some time. Within the past month, our Governor has signed into law a \$5 million pilot project which will help in financially saving our farms which have decreased in number and acreage from 8,266 farms covering 1,300,000 acres in 1959 to 3,500 farms on 500,000 acres in 1975.

It's very scary when one looks at the facts that in the 1949-1954 period, our Connecticut farmers produced 50% of the food consumed in our state; and this figure is now down to 18.5%. Along with a copy of this talk, I am enclosing to anyone interested a series of pamphlets, one of which is an article by Charles Frink of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven which shows these figures and concerns.

2. *Movement to rural towns and intensive use of land* – increased numbers of people are moving from city and urban homes, including New York City, to have "a place in the country" in our smaller, rural Connecticut towns. Driving through Connecticut, you will see housing developments and shopping centers on what was once productive farmland. As these "city dwellers" move to the countryside, they learn to contact their county Extension Service and Agricultural Agent on many topics.

Gardening still rates first priority, since almost every rural householder grows a garden. If a person

has access to a few acres, he or she soon adds a small poultry flock, a few swine, a dairy goat, and possibly a beef steer and some hives of bees.

This stereotyped client of whom I am speaking is doing intensive farming and gardening usually on a small parcel of land. He or she is purchasing all the livestock and poultry feed because the space and time involved to grow their own does not exist.

3. *Producing and preserving foods* – to help economize on the family budget and to put fresh fruits, vegetables, and other food items on the table all year round, people in rural parts of Connecticut do considerable amounts of canning, freezing, curing and smoking of their farm raised crops. Families travel to farms which advertise produce on a "Pick Your Own" basis and are thus able to preserve foods for use over the fall, winter and spring months. With our short growing season, it becomes necessary to learn ways to safely and correctly keep food over the months when local fruits and vegetables are not grown.

4. *Learning skills from grandfather's time* – Today's youth seek to learn skills and methods which grandparents knew but which were not passed down to the younger generation. Young people want to go back to basics; "back to the land," "back to nature" – we are always hearing these expressions. But it is very true, people *do* want to learn some basic ways of how to get by. Cutting wood, spinning wool, making butter, curing bacon, buying and installing a wood-burning stove, canning meats, fruits and vegetables, preserving jams and jellies are just a few examples of skills today's young person is asking to learn more about.

5. *Concern with the Energy Crisis* – Much of this came about because of the energy crisis in recent years, shortages of materials and fuels and increasing costs of everyday living. People like to know that what they're getting for their money is a nutritious

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product, and by raising food themselves, they know exactly what is in that food.

I am not implying that foods in the grocery stores are not fresh and wholesome, but so many people are confused, uninformed or misinformed, and upset about the long list of preservatives and other additives in their foods. They are concerned that what they see on the supermarket shelves sometimes is not in the best condition and not quite as fresh as at the roadside stand, the local butcher shop, or what they can raise themselves. You'd think price was a factor when you look at today's high food bill, but I believe people are willing to pay any reasonable price and will travel out of their way to buy *good* food items.

6. *Understanding and sympathy of the farmer* — I feel this concern of young people is at an all time high with good communications between farm and non-farm families. The clients we serve *are not* blaming the farmer for the high food prices. The average household of 3.2 people spent \$164 more for their food in 1977 than in 1976. And \$152 of that \$164 was middleman costs, not the farmer. Support of "pick your own operations," "farmers markets," "food co-ops," roadside stands, cow and goat raw milk dairies as well as demand for feeder pigs, lambs, calves and goats is excellent and in high demand in Connecticut.

We have identified our young audiences' needs and interests by going through these six topics of current concerns. Now I will mention some methods of how we in Extension and I, as an agricultural agent, meet these needs through Extension meetings, programs and writing of newsletters and pamphlets.

Once a year, I send a form to my mailing list asking what kinds of classes the people would like to have and on what subjects they would like to learn more. I ask what suggestions they would like to make to help improve and make programs of more value to all.

Response from people is fantastic. I try my best to honor their requests and suggestions. Priorities — in other words, the subjects most often asked for — are met and held in the form of evening educational programs at the Middlesex Extension Center in Haddam. At the current time, beekeeping, raising goats and raising rabbits are key concerns of people. Therefore,

programs featuring guest speakers, movies and timely Extension bulletins on these subjects were planned and held this past winter and spring.

The ever popular subjects of "Down on the Farm Slaughtering Demonstrations," "Pork Cutting and Curing," "Beef Cutting" and "Rabbit Slaughtering" were again offered as they are almost every year. University of Connecticut Animal Science and Meats Lab personnel as well as local lay people teach these classes.

"Maple Syrup Productions," "Growing Fruit," "Swine Management Workshops," "House Plant Care," "Practical Tips for Growing a Vegetable Garden," "Springtime Veterinary Care of Your Horse," "Understanding the Hoof Care Your Horse Needs," "Veterinary Care of Your Farm Animals" and "Sheep Shearing" are other examples of short courses and evening meetings available to the public this spring.

Obviously, not all interests and needs can be met by the program method. Newsletters, slide series, new bulletins, phone calls, talks at schools, garden clubs and civic organizations, office visits and occasional farm visits are the ways a Connecticut agricultural agent meets the needs of today's youth and young adult audience.

Just as our young clients will form the habit of going back again and again, year after year to reliable farmers and reputable livestock breeders who sold them a good feeder pig, calf, lamb or other stock — so must we, as Extension Service agents, continue to remain reliable, up-to-date and aware of the latest, best information our people want to learn more about.

We must be ready and willing to present the facts people are asking for as well as workable ideas our young audiences are looking for. It is our young people who determine the trends and the concerns of the future. Today's youth and young adults have valid concerns and we *want* them to continue to call upon the Extension Service for information and advice. We were there the time before when they needed our help and we will be there time and time again with the timely information of the Cooperative Extension Service we hope to always have this timely information as we continue in our efforts "to help people to help themselves."