

## To the Point

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### Abstract

A review of "To the Point", *Journal of Extension*.

**“To the Point,” *Journal of Extension*, (Madison, Wisconsin, The Extension Journal, Inc., National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges and the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy [ECOP], 1988-89).**

The *Journal's* new section, “To the Point,” promises a dialogue from three national leaders regarding the issues faced by Cooperative Extension System (CES)—*before* the system's directions are set.

Typically, one person takes a stand, with the other two reacting to that person's position. Together, the three articles present a brief, but seasoned, thoughtful and well rounded perspective.

"To the Point" reviewers select the issues and those best qualified to speak to them. In that sense, Journal editor Michael Quinn Patton says, the articles are "pre refereed." The number of these reviewers will be expanded to better ensure a national dialog.

The list of contributors reads like a "who's who" in service institutions. Within the system, they range from national administrators Myron Johnsrud and Roy Rauschkolb, state administrators like Minnesota's Patrick J. Borich, to an extension project leader from Cornell. And contributors include leaders outside CES, like Norman Brown, president of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Reviews of some articles follow:

"Uncertainty: Condition Normal for the Future" by Roy S. Rauschkolb, ECOP Chair, opens the new section in the Winter, 1988, issue (pp. 4-5)

To meet the rapid changes in the structure of our social, economic, environmental, and natural resources, the chairperson of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, writes that every person in Extension must have a strong scientific background. That background is needed, Rauschkolb says, to design, implement, and interpret the experimental data needed to solve problems.

ECOP's chair argues that if we cannot "apply the principles of our various scientific disciplines to solve the problems of our clientele," we not only miss an opportunity, but we lose credibility which the Futures Task Force already found was in question. Scientific skills are needed to solve the problems, and interpersonal skills in communication are needed to work with clients to implement the best solutions.

The reactions are entitled "Clients Face Uncertainty, Too," by Patrick J. Borich, dean and director, Minnesota Extension Service, and "Even the Best Rubber Band Will Only Stretch So Far!" by Doris S. Smith, Office of Program Information & Analysis, Division of Agriculture & Natural Resources, University of California-Berkely.

In response to Rauschkolb, both administrators stress the need for these scientifically oriented specialists to be able to communicate well with clients.

Director Borich emphasizes the dangers of overspecialization—clients already are often left to integrate specialized advice for themselves. He suggests two specializations for Extension staff—one in a scientific discipline, the other in adult education, change, or community development. He also warns against the danger of specialized agents looking more to their colleagues than to their clients for direction and recognition, and the narrowing of Extension's reach to specialized audiences.

Rather than embodying complete answers in every Extension specialist, California's Doris Smith calls for a team solution. She stresses these teams must develop and communicate knowledge and ways to integrate it to "allow people to make informed choices in the solution of *their own problems!*" The ability to do that, she writes, depends upon "administrators, program leaders, and individual staff maintaining the delicate balance between encouraging individual excellence and developing, supporting, and rewarding team efforts."

Brown's article, "Too Little, Too Late?," in the Spring, 1989 issue, says Extension's knowledge base should include the entire university. It must include more than colleges of agriculture and home economics. "Of all institutions," says The Kellogg Foundation executive, "Extension should be a leader in building a pluralistic self."

**More Listening, Less Selling**

He also says Extension must do more listening and less selling in working with its citizen advisory groups.

Susan G. Laughlin in "Yes, But. . . Yes, And," calls for a balance between a rapid response and a research-based response in meeting clientele needs. The associate dean of the College of Natural Resources, University of California-Berkeley, cautions that issues-based programming may aggravate the problem of "Extension's already weak link to campus-based research." For issues-based programming to be truly national, she suggests, each state must examine the National Initiatives and apply only what's relevant.

In the Summer "To the Point," Wisconsin's Patrick Boyle stresses the need for individual change and the importance of issues-based programming for Extension to continue to be relevant. South Carolina's Byron K. Webb encourages forging partnerships with institutions outside Extension and suggests Extension must learn to act, while its actions are still relevant. Usually, that's before "scientific publication and academic debate establish a firm research conclusion."

Finally, a team from Cornell University suggests that CES play a stronger role in establishing the research agenda and that Extension professionals need to be better evaluators of Extension's impact on people.

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