

## A NEW PARTNERSHIP

# NACTA and SEA

Homer C. Folks

Teaching and learning are the basic activities of all educational institutions. There may be some debate about the level of activity, the perceived qualifications of faculty and students and the relative merits of teaching versus research, however, transfer of knowledge is the basic premise on which colleges and universities are founded.

The men and women who enter into the process whether they be students or teachers are committing themselves to change and development of the culture. The teacher must be dedicated to the articulation of concepts, must be committed to the idea that all concepts can be transmitted from one mind to another, and must accept the premise that learning occurs in many different modes. Students cannot be categorized as to age, ethnicity or sex. They are, however, committed in one degree or another to the proposition that their effectiveness and productivity can be enhanced through the process of mental discipline. Most teachers would agree that benefits to the learner are directly proportional to the devotion and enthusiasm applied to the process. Similarly the effectiveness of a teacher is determined by the enthusiasm, professional preparation, and sense of importance conveyed to the student.

The National Association of College Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA) provides a very useful and effective medium for the exchange of ideas for the betterment of teaching. Equally important is a favorable campus environment in which an idea can grow and be applied to the teaching-learning process. If the academic community is to respond to the challenges of the next 20 years, resources must be provided to sustain a vigorous and optimistic faculty, supply modern communication technology, and funds with which institutions can adapt curricula to current and projected national, state, and local needs.

From where will the resources come to support the teaching of agriculture at the colleges and universities throughout the country? Historically this has been the responsibility of the state and local communities, the only exception being the relatively small sums appropriated by the federal congress and distributed by formula to the states and territories for support of the Land Grant Colleges. These funds if applied entirely to agriculture would account for approximately 10% of the funds used to support the teaching of agriculture. This sum has provided stability and placed these programs in a high priority position for state funding. Whether or not the federal government will/or should provide a larger portion of the resources is yet to be determined.

Presented by Homer C. Folks, Professor of Agronomy, University of Missouri, at the 26th Annual NACTA Conference on the University of New Mexico campus June 15-18, 1980.

Public law 95-113 has designated the USDA as the lead agency of the federal government to give leadership and support to agricultural higher education. The department has responded to this authorization by creating a Science and Education unit (SEA). Within this unit has been established an office of higher education, which has the responsibility of working with federal, state, and local institutions and agencies which conduct programs of agricultural higher education. In the absence of a discrete appropriation item to support higher education, USDA-SEA has not assumed fully the responsibility for the leadership permitted under Title XIV. Funds appropriated under the Bankhead-Jones authorization appear as a line in the SEA-Extension budget without appropriation authority to use USDA funds in support of agricultural higher education. There must be unqualified acceptance of the responsibility for agricultural higher education by the USDA if federal funds are to be provided and a national focal point established in SEA.

The USDA, as all other federal agencies, must remain within the constraints of official legislation. These constraints are interpreted by several different federal bodies such as GAO, OMB, OBPE-USDA, General counsel-USDA, congress and Attorney General. In addition to authorizing legislation, the appropriation bill carries conditions and constraints which further determine programs to be supported. Clear concise language must be developed which leaves no doubt about the authority of USDA to be involved with food and agriculture higher education.

In view of the many directions from which laws and regulations are promulgated by the federal government, past history, inhibitions, and individual bias exert an overwhelming influence on the programs supported by a particular unit. The USDA was created in 1862 along with the establishment of the Land Grant Colleges. Teaching was to be done in the Colleges and research was the prerogative of USDA. During the late 1870's the Experiment Station structure was created through which federal funds could be used to support research at the state level. During the next 115 years, programs of research, extension, and regulatory activities have evolved within the USDA but not higher education. Even though the food and agriculture act of 1977 clearly places the USDA in a role of leadership for agriculture higher education, tradition places constraints on the development of this new responsibility.

As the nation moves into the 1980's there are many questions relating to higher education in agriculture which must be addressed. Specific issues such as the following will require careful consideration.

1. Should federal funds be used to support institutions and/or institutional programs or the individual student?
2. Can or should academic programs be supported by special or competitive grant funds?
3. Will the National Science Foundation support educational programs in food and agriculture?
4. Can priority areas of educational development be clearly established?

Why higher education in the USDA? The agriculture community has built its reputation on teaching, research, and extension. Teaching, however, has been missing from this trio as far as the Department is concerned. The congress judged it logical and proper to designate the USDA as the lead agency for food and agriculture higher education. Classroom teaching is closely linked to research and extension; new knowledge generated in the laboratories and practical application of this knowledge by extension provides the setting from which material is fashioned for the classroom. The total review and evaluation process intertwines these three activities. It has appeared to many people that the three activities (research, higher education, and extension) must be given support at the national level. Development of professional expertise is as important to the initiation and maintenance of research and extension programs as to the world of education. In fact, the national energy initiative is seriously limited by the fact that there is not an adequate supply of professionals, particularly in agricultural engineering. The USDA programs of research and extension can be developed to the extent that professional expertise is available. Integrated pest management (IPM) is perceived as a interdisciplinary area of study and professional activity. Universities and colleges accept the idea but the lack of financial resources severely limits the ability of the educational institutions to adapt existing programs and to initiate new ones. If the USDA is to provide the focus and leadership for IPM development, the production of professional expertise in harmony with the expanded research and extension is crucial. During the past several years human nutrition has received national attention. There seems to be little question about the need for more research in this area but the rate of expansion is directly related to the available supply of professionals who can do the education and research. In the final analysis, if the educational system is not adequately funded USDA initiatives will falter because of a lack of professional expertise in high priority areas. Higher education in the department provides a national focus and sustains a close link to the agricultural disciplines which produce the needed professionals.

What is the future for agricultural higher education in USDA-SEA? Obviously, PL 95-113, Title XIV provides legislative authority for the development of a focal point for higher education within USDA. The problem is one of priority within the department. Traditional programs and configurations have not included this responsibility. The department is staffed with people who are the product of programs of long standing and thus place programs of research and extension high on the priority list. A realization that higher education must be given higher priority by USDA in general and SEA specifically must occur.

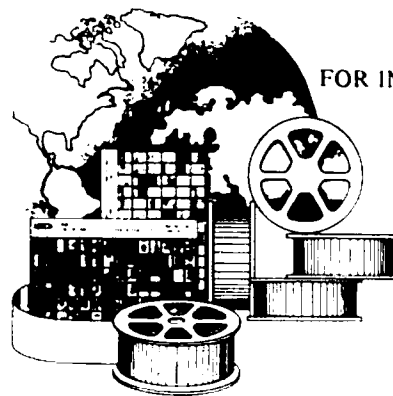
Title XIV will be rewritten during the next few months. The outcome of this process will determine whether legislative authority for agricultural higher education remains in the USDA. Since funding has not been provided to implement authorization embodied in Title XIV the

task of keeping higher education authorization in the new legislation will be difficult, however, not impossible. If the academic community is convinced that federal funds are needed and can build a case with the congress, there is a possibility that the present authority and possibly some expanded authority can be obtained. A total effort, however, will be required. This includes faculty and clientele of veterinary medicine, Home Economics, Forestry and Agriculture speaking in accord to the congress. Organizations such as NACTA should make their positions known to congress and the USDA, and do it quickly.

**Conclusions:**

1. Professional expertise is both a local and national concern.
2. Federal and state resources can appropriately be expended to support food and agricultural higher education.
3. The USDA is and should continue to be the lead agency for food and agricultural higher education.
4. The academic community must collectively determine its need and articulate them to the USDA and congress.

## This Publication is Available in MICROFORM



FOR INFORMATION  
WRITE:

**University Microfilms International**

Dept. F.A.  
300 North Zeeb Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106  
U.S.A.

Dept. F.A.  
18 Bedford Row  
London, WC1R 4EJ  
England