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Setting research goals is a team effort

Questions about how the University's agricultural research programs are initiated suggest that this process is a mystery to a number of people outside the University.

The question has no simple answer because the process is varied and somewhat complex, but describing the environment in which the research program evolves makes it apparent that individual initiative, imagination, and creativity are the cornerstones of our research programs.

First we have an overall organization—the Agricultural Experiment Station—which has a defined set of comprehensive objectives. Simply expressed, they are: (1) concern for food, fiber, and ornamental commodities valued by our society; (2) concern for environmental quality and the resources utilized by mankind in production of food, fibers, and ornamentals as well as in pursuit of recreational activities; (3) concern for the economic and social viability of rural communities; and (4) concern for the nutritional welfare of all people. "Concern" is expressed through research on problems falling within these broad objectives and transmitting the results of this research to the community.

Activities related to each objective are described with increasing specificity. Thus we classify activities in descending order from objectives, to programs, to program units, to program unit areas, to specific projects.

The assessment and evaluation of need to fulfill the desired objectives is based on input from many sources. What is needed to offer a comprehensive educational program? What are the problems and unknowns hindering progress in achieving a more satisfying human existence? How much effort is needed to achieve a reasonable rate of progress toward our stated goals? Developing this information is the responsibility of all those affected by the program.

Identifying the problems to be researched is a shared responsibility among faculty, administrators, and the groups external to the University involved with or affected by the problems. The identification process includes written and oral communications with faculty

and scientists in other institutions working on similar problems, participating with concerned people in meetings and conferences which focus attention on problems, working directly with interest groups and individuals that utilize information generated by research, and generally being aware of what issues falling within our scope of activities are foremost in peoples' minds.

After a problem is identified comes the more difficult determination of the number of people and the amount of resources needed to make reasonable progress towards solutions, and what priority to give the problem. There is no hard and fast set of criteria but generally the priorities are determined according to agreement by the majority of persons affected by the problem.

Because problems usually exceed available resources, the determination of priorities is crucial and is subject to disagreement by those with problems that do not rate high on the priority list.

After the administration allocates faculty resources, it is the faculty's responsibility to develop research and teaching programs and projects. As they become familiar with the objectives of the Agricultural Experiment Station and with the problems which are of current interest and importance in their area of specialities, their research programs soon move into those problem areas, provided there is support available. Such support may come from federal and state agencies, and from gifts, contracts, or grants from companies, organizations, and individuals.

The importance of the individual scientist's awareness, creativity, skill, and devotion in determining the research program cannot be overstated.

The Agricultural Experiment Station is a community of creative and talented individuals whose research contributes to making progress towards our comprehensive goals. Administrators are facilitators, expeditors, and guides. Researchers and administrators work together as a team. It is often difficult to determine "who" did what. It is not at all difficult to determine which "team" did it.