

SEED CORN DEMONSTRATIONS - SIOUX COUNTY 1903
(where county cooperative extension work began)

Radio Talk - R. K. Bliss - Feb. 4, 1953
Extension Service - Iowa State College

This year, 1953, the United States Extension Service and state extension services are celebrating the golden anniversary of farm demonstration work. Of course, there were farm demonstrations earlier than fifty years ago. One of the earliest in this country was when the Indians showed the Colonists that corn would produce larger yields when fish scrap was put in the hills along with the seed. However, that may be, the great farm demonstration movement in the south began on February 26, 1903, fifty years ago this month, on a farm near Terrill, Texas.

At almost exactly the same time another significant event in the development of extension demonstration work began in Sioux County Iowa on Feb. 18, 1903. This month is the golden anniversary of that event. Iowa, therefore, has two anniversaries to celebrate. As an Iowa citizen you will be deeply interested in the significance of the Sioux County farm demonstration work so pull up your chairs, be comfortable, and let's get on with the story.

To make this account easier to follow let me say at the outset that there were two phases to the Sioux County demonstration as follows:

1. Organization - the beginning of permanent county cooperative extension work.
2. Program a widespread demonstration effort to improve the yield of corn and other farm crops.

The Beginning of County Cooperative Extension Work

During February 16 to 18, 1903 the annual meeting of the Sioux County Farmers' Institute was in session at Hull, Iowa. A spirited discussion had arisen among the farmers as to whether crop experiments conducted on the experimental farm at the State College, about 200 miles distant, would apply equally well in Sioux County. It was a problem worthy of discussion.

Professor Perry G. Holden of Iowa State College came into the institute while the discussion was in progress. B. F. Hawkins of the Program Committee called upon Holden to give his opinion. Professor Holden stated that local crop demonstrations close to the people would be of great value. He expressed the belief that each county should put on demonstrations and have some one in the county to direct the demonstrations, advise the farm people as to their problems and work with farm boys and girls.

The farmers attending the institute were deeply interested in the idea of having a county demonstration farm. Moreover they wanted to do something about it. Professor Holden agreed to recommend that the college furnish the educational and technical help. He pointed out that it would be necessary for the county to furnish the land and take care of the cost of labor, storage, and all local expenses - including the living expenses of college workers while in the county.

In order to provide the necessary local support, the institute, on Feb. 18, 1903, passed a resolution requesting the County Board of Supervisors to provide land, labor and all local expenses. The resolution provided that a committee be appointed to meet with the Board, make the request and present a plan of action.

In response to this request, the Board provided land, labor and made a money appropriation to be used as needed in the conduct of the work. The Board of Supervisors also appointed a committee to represent the county in the conduct of this work.

It will be noted that the demonstration work as begun in Sioux County fifty years ago was organized:

- 1st - At the request of the Sioux County Farmers' Institute, - an organized group of farmers who initiated the project.
- 2nd - With substantial county support provided by the county government.
- 3rd - With State and Federal support through educational help from Iowa State College.

These Sioux County farmers a half century ago, in cooperation with Iowa State College, established the fundamental basis of organization and support that is now in effect in county cooperative extension work throughout the United States. It was an event in which a group of forward looking farmers seeking to improve their occupation presented their ideas to Professor Holden who represented the State Agricultural College. Out of this meeting of minds fifty years ago was born the fundamental system and support under which cooperative extension work is now conducted.

Before discussing the type of work done in Sioux County on the county demonstration farm in 1903 let me call attention briefly to the growth of the movement in Iowa. In 1904, five counties had county demonstration farms. In 1905 there were eight counties, and in 1906 there were ten counties. Up to this time college participation was squeezed out of meager college funds and without any special appropriation.

In 1906, the Iowa State Legislature came to the rescue of county demonstration and other extension work through passage of the Iowa Agricultural Extension Act and funds became available for extension work in the middle of that year.

The movement continued to grow as fast as funds would permit. The early county extension demonstration work required about four months of a college man's time for each county. In 1912 full time county extension or county agent work began developing and grew steadily. In the spring of 1918 each Iowa county had a cooperative county extension agent working on agricultural educational problems and supported by county, state, federal and farm organization funds. Extension work in Iowa is now conducted on basically the same cooperative plan as that started in Sioux County in 1903.

Now let us turn briefly to the early work of these county demonstration farms. The work began as a -

Primer Seed
Widespread Effort to Improve Corn and
Other Farm Crops. The First Work Was on Seed Corn

At the time the demonstration farm was established in Sioux County the farmers of Iowa were planting about 10 million acres of corn each year. Some farmers took good care of their seed but a common practice of getting seed corn was to pick it out of ordinary corn cribs in the spring at planting time. Professor Holden believed that one of the principal reasons for the then low acre yield of corn in Iowa was due to planting poor seed much of which did not grow at all, or was weak, or was of poor breeding.

9 It was logical that the first demonstration on the Sioux County Demonstration Farm would be to make a comparison of yields of corn then actually being grown by Sioux County farmers. Samples of seed corn from about 80 farmers were secured for this purpose. In order to be sure that the seed corn was the same as the farmers were planting on their farms the samples were collected from planter boxes at planting time. About 20 additional samples were procured from commercial seed corn growers and seed houses. Each sample was planted in plots by hand, three kernels to the hill. Each sample was also planted in three or four different places in the field to reduce errors due to differences in soil.

A field day was held on the demonstration farm in August or early September. The demonstration plots were numbered and staked so that each farmer furnishing seed could locate the plots grown from his seed. College men were present to explain the plots. There were striking differences in the stands of corn and the growth and general appearance of the plots. It was a very effective demonstration in which farmers could easily compare their own corn with other corn. The field days drew large groups of interested farmers.

A careful record was made of each plot as to the number of strong, weak and barren stocks of corn. This count was made and tabulated in the late summer before frost.

In the fall the plots were harvested and records of yields computed on an acre basis. Field days were held to see the samples weighed. There were striking differences in yield. The results were printed in leaflets for distribution throughout the state and were used in making

charts and for lecture purposes. The local press gave much space to the printing of results.

The county farm demonstration plots located high yielding varieties of corn. Oftentimes the highest yielding seed corn was found on some nearby farm in the county. When high yielding types of corn were discovered, more of the same seed would be procured from the growers and tried out another year. In this way the highest yielding varieties of corn in the region were publicized and widely distributed. This was one of the main values of the demonstration.

Other features than corn variety tests were added to the county demonstration farms. Number of kernels per hill and ear to row tests were carried out. Oat variety tests were added. Tests of alfalfa were made. Demonstrations in the elimination of noxious weeds were conducted.

Newspapers were eager to print the results of demonstrations. Pamphlets were widely distributed. The material gotten through county farm demonstrations very largely provided the basis for institute talks, short courses, and other educational gatherings relative to crop production. Better seed corn trains criss-crossed the state reaching directly 145,000 people. It was the general opinion that these better seed programs based on the material obtained through demonstration work increased the yield of corn in Iowa by tens of millions of bushels.

Well, my friends, that's a very brief early story of county farm demonstration work in Iowa. It was the beginning of cooperative county extension work as now carried out. It is a story of which every Iowan can be proud.

The seed generally seed corn
now more spread to other states