

* FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF SIOUX COUNTY
FARM DEMONSTRATION EXTENSION WORK

My part on this program begins with a story of a very unusual incident in agricultural education. It occurred at the shortcourse held at Iowa State College in January, 1902, nearly 52 years ago.

The college had held a successful livestock shortcourse for farmers in January, 1901. It was the first effort of this kind in Iowa. The question before the shortcourse committee the following fall was whether another subject such as corn should be added to the program. There was apprehension that corn might be too dry a subject to be interesting and that farmers might walk out of the class which would be most embarrassing.

A member of the committee called attention to a successful corn school for farmers held in Illinois. So with a bit of apprehension it was decided to add corn to the shortcourse, giving it a rather small amount of time on each days program, and an invitation was extended to the educator from Illinois to conduct the work.

He accepted and came to Iowa State College with a cart load of boxes, charts, and samples of corn for class work. To make the story short the farmers attending the shortcourse did not walk out on his class. They wanted more time than the program allowed and made a special request for it. The shortcourse schedule was completely filled up including evenings. The farmers talked the situation over and requested a five o'clock in the morning class. Electric lights were not on that early in the day so each farmer brought a lantern and his lunch to the 5 A. M. class which continued each morning until the close of the course. The college Professor who conducted the work was Perry G. Holden, our honored guest tonight and one of the great teachers of the past half century.

Iowa was on the look out for superior teachers and brought Professor Holden to Iowa State College in the fall of 1902. There was no organized Extension work at the college at that time but the staff did fill speaking dates. And the filling of a speaking engagement at Hull, Iowa by Professor Holden started a chain of events which causes us to hold this banquet tonight. It came about in this way. The Sioux County Farmers' Institute was in session at Hull, February 16-18, 1903. A discussion had arisen as to whether crop experiments conducted at the State College about 200 miles distant would apply equally well in Sioux County. It was a very intelligent question to raise.

B. F. Hawkins, chairman of the Institute Program Committee, called on 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 someone in the county direct the demonstrations consult with farmers on their problems and also work with the farm boys and girls.

* Talk by R. K. Bliss, Extension Service, Iowa State College at Hull, Iowa October 22, 1953.

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The farmers attending the institute were deeply interested in this suggestion and they decided to do something about it. Mr. Hawkins and his committee went into a "huddle" to devise ways and means of getting the job done. Holden promised educational and technical help from the college. He pointed out, however, that owing to a shortage of funds at the college it would be necessary for the local people to furnish land, labor, storage, and take care of the board and local expenses of help sent by the college to assist in the work.

The plan as passed by the County Institute requested the Sioux County Board of Supervisors to provide land, labor, storage and a cash fund for local expenses. The plan also provided for the appointment of a committee to meet with the county board, make the request and present a program of action.

The Sioux County Board met all of these requests and in addition appointed a committee to work with the farmers in conducting the demonstration farm. The foregoing is a very brief factual statement of an important pioneering agricultural event. It was important for the following reasons. The county farm demonstration and extension educational work that began in Sioux County 50 years ago was developed;

1. At the request of the Sioux County Farmers' Institute - an organization of farmers who initiated the project.
2. With substantial county support provided by the county government which has resulted in a continuing system of sound financing.
3. With State and Federal support through educational help from Iowa State College.

We are celebrating the golden anniversary of the Sioux County event this year because the farmers of Sioux County in cooperation with Iowa State College established here a system of successful county extension education that has spread throughout the country. It is a case of a creative forward looking group of farmers meeting with a creative teacher and out of this meeting of minds a new system of permanent adult education for farmers emerged. Here at the Sioux County Farmers' Institute was born the fundamental system of organization under which county co-operative extension work is now conducted throughout the United States.

The plan developed here in 1903 went steadily forward, there has never been a backward step. In 1904 five Iowa counties had county farm demonstration extension work. In 1905 there were eight counties and in 1906 there were 10 counties. Up until 1906 this development was supported by farmer cooperation, county funds and funds squeezed out of meager college support without additional state aid. In 1906 the Iowa Extension Service was established by a special state law. This appears to have been the earliest specific state legislation in the United States establishing extension work and providing funds for it. The county farm demonstration work begun in Sioux County was not a "flash in the pan" movement but grew steadily until every Iowa county had county extension work.

Cooperative Extension work in Agriculture and Home Economics in the United States has now grown into the largest organized, out of school, informal educational movement of record. It is a self help effort with farmers furnishing most of the leadership. Its primary objective is to bring rural people the latest and best scientific information concerning the farm and the home and assist them in solving their own problems thus developing a permanent agriculture based on the intelligence, capability, and resourcefulness of rural people.

During the past few years I have made rather extensive researches concerning this great movement in adult education which is the most significant and pioneering educational development of the past half century. No one person, state or community can claim all credit for it. The early part of this century was a period of brilliant achievement in the development of agricultural education. Time does not permit me to discuss it further than to point out that Seaman A. Knapp, former president of Iowa State College, developed the great farm demonstration work in the south, L. H. Bailey of New York developed nature study in schools and Kenyon L. Butterfield, president of Massachusetts State College and Secretary of President Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission headed a committee that wrote the first draft of the Smith Lever Act in 1909 under which we now operate. All were distinguished pioneers in the development of extension education.

Extension Work, in fact, sprang up all over at about the same time and many persons had a part in it. It appears, however, that in this great movement two firsts go to Sioux County and to Iowa.

1. The development of the county cooperative extension educational plan in which the farmers, the state and national governments participate as partners.
2. The permanent establishment of county support for extension through substantial county appropriations. This was begun in Sioux County in 1903.

We are especially honored by having Professor Holden one of the architects of the present county plan of conducting County Extension Work with us here tonight. The other architects, B. F. Hawkins and his committee have passed on but their part in the Sioux County plan was equally significant and important.

The Sioux County Farm Demonstration and Extension Work also led directly to the earliest well organized mass effort in the United States to reach all farmers with specific information concerning the improvement of farm crop seeds. Following is a brief account of that important development.

At the time the demonstration farm in Sioux County was established in 1903, the farmers of Iowa were growing about eight million (8,000,000) acres of corn each year. Some farmers took good care of their seed but a common practice of getting seed corn was to select it out of cribs

in the spring at corn planting time. Professor Holden held that one of the principal reasons for the then low yield of corn in Iowa was due to poor seed much of which would not grow, or was weak or of poor breeding. Subsequent events abundantly proved the soundness of his position.

In order to find out what kind of seed corn farmers were using, samples of seed from about 70 farmers were obtained for comparative plantings on the county farm that first year in 1903. 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. A card was filled out giving the name of the farmer and information concerning the seed corn. About 20 additional samples were procured from commercial seed corn growers and seed houses. These 20 seed growers and seed house samples were procured from corn sold to farmers for seed. It was exactly the same seed that was being sold to all farmers.

Please note the care taken to avoid any criticism as to favoritism in the way the seed was selected. Just as great care was taken in planting it. Each sample was planted in plots by hand, three kernels to the hill. Each sample was planted in three or four different places in the field to reduce errors due to differences in the soil. There was little or no criticism of the way the demonstrations were conducted.

A field day was held on each demonstration farm in August or September. The demonstration plots were marked so that each farmer who gave seed could compare his plot with other plots. Men from the college were present to explain the plots. There were striking differences in the appearance of the plots. There were good stands of corn and poor stands, early corn and late corn. It was a most successful demonstration. The average number of people attending these demonstrations was about 800.

In the fall the plots were harvested and yields computed on an acre basis. Field days were held to see samples weighed. There were sharp 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 in the printing of results.

These county demonstration farms located high yielding varieties of corn. Oftentimes the highest yielding variety of corn was found on some nearby farm in the county. When high yielding varieties of corn were found more of the same seed would be procured from the grower and tried out another year. The famous Krug corn was discovered by M. L. Mosher by this method. High yielding varieties in this way were widely distributed. The careful ways in which this seed corn demonstration work was conducted and the way in which the results were used altogether amounted to genius in adult educational teaching methods. It was one of the most successful demonstrations of record.

First Mass Educational Effort In Improving Seed Corn

The material derived from the county farm corn demonstration work furnished the principal basis for a mass educational effort to reach and

urge all farmers to improve their seed. Professor Holden's better seed corn trains (corn gospel trains they were called) criss-crossed the state in 1904-05 reaching 145,000 people direct and resulting in a tremendous amount of publicity. Bulletins and leaflets were widely distributed. Practically every newspaper cooperated. It appears that this was the first comprehensive effort in the United States to effectively reach the masses of farmers with information on the important agriculture problem of seed improvement. It was the general opinion that these better seed programs based largely on material obtained through county extension demonstration farms increased the yield of Iowa corn by many millions of bushels.

In this early work in Iowa, Professor Holden used every known method to get information to farmers. This included demonstrations such as the one in Sioux County, charts, short direct leaflets, bulletins, lectures, institute talks and talks at other gatherings, shortcourses and organization of farmers, all used in order to effectively reach more people. Professor Holden laid the foundation broad and well for the future development of extension work in Iowa and in the United States.

In order to further illustrate the effectiveness of Professor Holden's methods, I will tell another story about this early pioneering work. It has to do with the development of local shortcourses. Two farmers, Uncle Henry Ebert and Mr. Milner from Montgomery County Iowa had attended the shortcourse at Ames and were much pleased with it. They came to the college in the fall of 1904 and requested the college to put on a shortcourse at Red Oak. When Professor Holden asked what put it into their heads to request a local shortcourse, the following story was related by Mr. Milner.

There was a young fellow in Milner's neighborhood who was a happy go lucky farmer. He was a fine fellow in most ways but was a distressingly poor farmer. Mr. Milner liked the boy and suggested that he attend the shortcourse at the college. The young farmer's reply was that he did not have the money. Mr. Milner said, "I will pay your expenses. Then in the fall when you gather your corn if you feel that your trip to the shortcourse was worth while you can pay me, if not forget it."

As a result of the young man's trip to the college shortcourse he became very much interested in corn. He procured the best seed he could find and tested each ear carefully six kernels to the ear. He took special care in preparing the ground and as a result had one of the best crops in the community.

The neighbors were suprised and one of them asked Mr. Milner if he knew what had happened to the boy. Milner's answer was that he had taken the shortcourse at the college. And now we have another evidence of the significance of grass roots thinking. This farmer said to Mr. Milner, "If a shortcourse at Ames did our neighbor so much good why don't we have one at Red Oak?"

First Local Shortcourse Held At Red Oak In 1905

And so Mr. Milner and Uncle Henry Ebert made the trip to Ames to see if they could get a local shortcourse. Professor Holden told them that the college had no money to conduct it and that it would be necessary for them to arrange buildings for corn and livestock judging, for class work, for exhibits and for night meetings. It would be necessary to find livestock and corn for class work and pay the salaries and expenses of helpers. He finished by saying, "I wonder whether the people of Red Oak have enough gumption to do all this." Professor Holden always presented a challenge. Ebert and Milner responded by assuring Holden that they could do it and a very successful local shortcourse of one week duration was held at Red Oak in January, 1905.

I have related the foregoing story in order to illustrate the methods used by Professor Holden which are old but ever new and often times forgotten. These methods are first to place responsibility for getting the job done squarely on the local people and second requiring them to put up a local dollar in effort and money for each dollar of service that they receive. We should, I believe, rigidly adhere to this method of procedure now in educational and government programs. I say this primarily from the standpoint of getting results and not primarily from the standpoint of economy.

It does little good to give people something outright without any effort on their part. People can be harmed in that way. People grow and become strong and capable through opportunity, work and responsibility. The foregoing states in a nutshell Professor Holden's philosophy which was outstandingly successful in practice.

The Sioux County event of 50 years ago spot lights a significant illustration of human development which is of great importance at this time. It is the fact that much of the real wisdom of human life comes from the experiences and thinking of ordinary men quite often in small places. The capitals of our country have no monopoly on brains and creative thinking. Genius springs from the ranks of unknown men as well as from legislatures and universities. We honor Professor Perry G. Holden today for the great vision and confidence he had in farm people wherever he found them and the genius he displayed in pioneering intelligent ways of developing a movement that has been of great benefit to American agriculture.