Establishing a poultry extension/outreach program

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The primary function of extension/outreach program is to deliver the research-based educational programs to the non-traditional student by “…taking the university to the people.” The goal is to educate and empower individuals and organizations for improvements in quality of life, well-being, efficiency, and economic prosperity. The poultry extension programs accomplish this by targeting all segments of poultry food system - from the hobbyists and small flock owners to the integrated poultry meat and egg production and processing companies, allied industries, governmental agencies, domestic and international agencies, other groups and institutions and finally to the consumers. This is accomplished by information transfer and technology implementation through empowerment of the clientele. Proven delivery methods are on-site consultations, seminars, short courses, printed or electronic-based publications, presentations and applied research and/or result demonstrations disseminated to local, national and international audiences. Poultry extension/outreach programs have to be timely, relevant, comprehensive and well-coordinated to support all sectors of the targeted clientele.

Extension programs have always had a special relationship with agricultural production. A strong engagement and partnership with a specific sector, in this case poultry meat and egg industries, creates a unique opportunity to plan and carry-out effective educational programs. Such linkages are essential in the identification, assessment and implementation of technologies that are within the economical and operational confines of the sector. Agricultural extension in general, poultry extension programs in particular, must continue to evolve organizationally to remain proactive and participatory in the increasingly competitive information-transfer age. Scientific knowledge, real-world experience and problem-solving capabilities are a must in an extension professional to be able to assess, plan, initiate, manage and evaluate the delivery programs. Extension professionals must be able to serve as ‘go-to’ resources for, and information brokers among, the agricultural educators, scientists, producers and consumers. Respect and royalty of the clientele is “earned” by being timely and responsive, and by providing validated and trustworthy information.

Keywords: Poultry; extension; outreach

The Mission

The mission of extension/outreach is to educate and empower all segments of the society for improvements in quality of life, well-being, efficiency, and economic prosperity. The traditional role of extension is to transfer and disseminate research-based knowledge and technology to the non-traditional students (i.e., the society at large). Extension system (i.e., agencies, services, workers and professionals) have always been proactive and broad-based and often serving as an information “broker” among the educators, researchers, farmers and consumers (Swanson et al., 1997).

Extension/outreach has a crucial role in the development of efficient, profitable and sustainable production of poultry meat and eggs. The poultry production has expanded significantly during the
last 50 years world-wide into a sophisticated and integrated agribusiness. The technology to produce, process, and market poultry meat and egg products could not have been possible without targeted research - both basic and applied; education- both for traditional and non-traditional students; and technology transfer through extension/outreach efforts in diverse disciplines of poultry sciences. Similar growth in poultry production is now taking place in many developing countries and this science-based information and technology delivery system must be an integral part of this expansion. A modern and explicit agricultural extension infrastructure and policy is essential in this respect.

The poultry extension system must be structured to target all segments of the poultry sector – from the hobbyists and small flock owners to the integrated poultry production companies and even the consumers of poultry meat and eggs. Extension serves as a unique and important ‘conduit’ between the source(s) and end-user of information and technology. Establishing strong contacts with allied industries, governmental agencies, domestic and international agencies and groups, various other institutions is essential for the depth and effectiveness of this system. All these linkages are often referred to as extension ‘clienteles.’ This broad web of clientele provided the basis for the assessment and implementation of extension educational programs and technology that is timely, relevant, and applicable for the sustainable and efficient production of wholesome and high quality poultry products.

**The Methods**

“Extension or outreach” simply means “reaching out.” This can be accomplished by a variety of delivery systems. Boone (1989) has categorized the agricultural extension/outreach systems around the world into four basic types:

1. Typical developing country extension system: This is a unidirectional system, where the control and direction moves from top to bottom. The extension programs are usually separated from the research and teaching institutions, and entrenched in the Ministries of Agriculture. In this system, extension professionals are often expected to perform both regulatory and educational functions.

2. Training and visit system: This is a system designed for agricultural systems that are characterized by a large number of small farms using the traditional methods with low level of technology. Extension workers are trained on specific agricultural practice and asked to disseminate this information to the farmers through frequent visits to local farms. There is a direct link between the extension workers and the governmental agricultural extension agency, where subject-matter extension professionals are housed for training and supervision purposes.

3. Farming system research and development system: This system was developed as an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the farms as a system to improve productivity. It involves targeting the research area or site, problem identification and development of research base, conducting on-farm research, and dissemination of results and outcomes to other farms.

4. United States Cooperative Extension System: This is a unique system developed within a historical context and with a resource base that may not be available elsewhere. Basically the Cooperative Extension System (CES) is established as the third major function of the land-grant institutions, complementing the traditional research and teaching missions. Thus, the cooperative extension system is intimately linked with the research and educational efforts of the Agricultural Experiment Stations and Colleges of Agricultures in the US, respectively. The funding is shared by federal, state and local governments, allowing for constant oversight, flexibility, and accountability (Bilgili and Reynnells, 2004).

The concept and principle of “taking the university to the people” developed in the United States is inherent in all of these systems (Swanson et al., 1990). There are various approaches to extension/outreach (Seevers et al., 1997):

1. The technology-transfer approach - The extension worker or system serves as the link between the information source (i.e., researcher, educator etc.) and the client. In other words, the solution is identified, appropriately packaged and provided to the client.

2. The problem-solving approach - The extension worker or system facilitates the process of assessing and evaluating the problem and help identifying alternatives to a problem or group of problems.
3. The imparting-knowledge approach – In this approach, the role of extension worker or system is to ‘educate’ or upgrade the skills of individuals that have not, or were unable to, attain formal education. The focus is placed on empowering the clientele for knowledge and skills.

Poultry extension workers typically utilize all these approaches, based on the characteristics of the program, impending issues and nature of the clientele. Information and technology delivery is accomplished through a combination of methods that include: on-site visits and consultations, seminars and short courses, printed or electronic publications, web-sites, presentations, and applied research and result demonstrations (Blake, 2005). Depending upon the nature of the clientele, the technology transfer could vary from implementation of a simple technology (i.e., selection of a drug or vaccine to control a poultry disease or calibration of a vaccine sprayer) to a very complex and interdisciplinary approaches that require system analysis (i.e., poultry integrated pest management or nutrient management plans). Broad education is a must in an extension/outreach worker to be able to assess, plan, initiate, manage, and evaluate programmatic efforts. The increasing sophistication of the poultry industry may necessitate the utilization of extension professionals with specialized training and knowledge (extension poultry nutritionist), real-world experience, and complex problem-solving capabilities.

Programming is an important process that helps the extension professionals to define focus area(s). Extension programming can be a centralized or top-down (blueprint) process, whereby the information or technology is packaged with clearly defined objectives and delivered to the end-user. In this case, there are usually designated resources (state or federal) and time-table for uniform implementation. Alternatively, de-centralized or bottom-up programming utilizes the participation and active involvement of the clientele, with emerging projects (Cristovao et al, 1997). Prior knowledge and assessment of client resources, constraints, and national priorities is extremely important selecting the most appropriate process. In most instances, poultry extension professionals are involved in implementing both top-down (i.e., national residue control program) and bottom-up programs (i.e., energy conservation). Development, implementation, evaluation, revision, re-implementation, re-evaluation, re-visiting or termination, are essential steps in the continuous and cyclical extension programming process (Bilgili and Reynnells, 2004).

The outcome

Extension programs should facilitate a ‘change.’ The educational programs implemented should educate and empower the clientele to solve their own problems, improve their lives and processes, and facilitate life-long learning. The outcome of the poultry extension programming efforts should be quantifiable and documented. This is especially important for accountability and for local and/or national support for resources. Setting specific goals or set of clear objectives into the programming process often provides the framework for evaluation. However, at times, the quantitative assessments of outcomes, especially of long-term educational efforts, may not be easy or appropriate. Regardless, the extension professionals should “earn” the respect and royalty of the clientele through timely, dynamic, unbiased and high quality programming. Through the delivery of relevant, applicable, and research-based state-of-the-art information and technology, extension professionals become a ‘go-to’ resource of poultry information for the clientele. Mission is accomplished, only when the needs and expectations of the diverse poultry clientele is met.

References


