New Initiatives in Home Economics

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EXTENSION IN THE 80s
NEW INITIATIVES IN HOME ECONOMICS

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
PURDUE UNIVERSITY
WEST LAFAYETTE, INDIANA
• Evaluation of current practices of families in management of real property and development of recommendations for general use by families.
• Identification of the patterns of saving and consumption among families when specific market conditions, price patterns, and public policies are in effect.
• Evaluation of the effect of mass media on financial-management practices of families.
• Study of specific coping strategies used by families in periods of inflation and unemployment to maintain a lifestyle at different life needs.
• Identification of the effects of economic environment on family aspirations, resources, and interpersonal relationships.

Delivery

New technology and techniques will be necessary in the delivery of Extension Home Economics programs in the 80s. While the continued use of volunteer and para-professional teachers is an important delivery system, it is but one alternative for presenting programs. Video options (cable TV, home video units, satellites) and home computers are technologies which can make it possible to reach more people with the specific type of educational information and programs they seek. More and more, these technologies will influence the delivery of the program.

Networking

Because Cooperative Extension is only one of many programs or groups in the community and society interested in the development of people and resources to maintain the desired level of living, it is increasingly important to work with other groups to maximize the effect of educational programs. Extension Home Economics programs are, by and large, educational, developmental, and/or preventive. Because the programs have not generally been aimed at crisis intervention or remedial activity, they are distinctive but complementary to other programs which may have objectives of intensive counseling, therapy, or care. Both public agencies and private business may be contacts of value in providing the educational program to the group needing it. Many businesses have clientele needing help or may have materials which can be used in conjunction with Extension materials to deliver the needed program. Linkage with a variety of agencies at all levels of government is efficient and important. Memoranda of agreement and understanding should be reviewed with consideration given to relevance and current issues in continuing linkages to extend efficiency.

*Resources


The Focus of the Problem

The environment in which families find themselves today is a complex and sometimes frustrating one. The impact of technology, changing values, changing communities and changing resources all have contributed to a maze of expectations, roles, and responsibilities for families. Family expectations are likely to be adjusted from those of steady growth and improved standards of living to economic instability and a constant or lowered level of living. Recent research indicates that families who have problem-solving skills are more able to cope in periods of economics stress and/or crisis.

In addition to changing expectations, there are significant changes in the economy and in the market structure. Family decision-making will increase in complexity. Both the availability and the nature of information are undergoing change. These changes must be accommodated by families in their decision-making in the marketplace. Information about the products and services must be evaluated accurately if families are to satisfy needs and wants.

Increasingly, families realize their well-being is affected by issues considered by local, state, and federal governments. Public-policy issues associated with scarce economic resources, hazardous products, and consumer rights and protection make a difference in the way families maintain a lifestyle and in the cost of doing so.

The family members themselves are the most valuable resource available to the family. As individuals, they are a source of more resources: money income, products produced for use by the family and services to each other and the society.

Priority Problems of People
Attaining a Level of Living

Recent expansion of wants and lack of resources have increased the need for effective decision-making in the definition of an acceptable level of living. The use of resources to maintain the desired lifestyle over the period of the family life cycle is a problem which includes changing aspirations and expectations, unstable income patterns, and changing prices. Families today face increasingly complex decisions in the purchase of goods for daily living. Technology has resulted in creation of products which consumers may not understand. Buying and using products which we do not create ourselves requires study and identification of special needs or characteristics.

Purchasing goods today which may be obsolete next year or next week creates an additional set of conflicting factors for families to consider in allocating their limited resources. In addition, government is associated with safety of products, incentives for saving or investing, content of education in the public schools, and the kind of information which enters the family home through the public airways. Government activities affect the availability and nature of goods (and services) desired by families.

Management of durable goods and real property is increasingly significant as the society has become more legalistic. The transfer of family property through wills or other mechanisms is a process which may enhance or erode the family's economic security. A means by which families may be able to maintain a desired level of living is through the acquisition and maintenance of durable goods which continue to provide satisfaction over a period of several years. Management of these resources may be particularly important for younger and older households who may not have an adequate level of money income to meet the many demands they have for goods.

Resources Available for Meeting Family Goals

The resources available for use by families vary from family to family and also vary within the family over time. Resources available to families for acquiring a lifestyle include past accumulations as well as the ability to obtain a money income now and in the future.

It is generally accepted that families always perceive their resources as inadequate to meet their needs. Every family has an income source for a lifetime. Several things may disrupt the flow of income into the family: changes in household composition due to death or divorce, loss of employment due to technology or the economy, change in occupation, or change in health status and ability to work. The presence of these risks, coupled with differences in prices and wants of the family, creates a problem in allocating income to needs over the period of a family life cycle which can be from one to fifty-plus years.

Instability of the economy creates further problems for families. Periods of inflation erode the purchasing power of money; high interest rates put the price of consumer goods (cars, housing, household equipment) beyond the reach of many families. Families may extend their money income by developing skills in household production, home-based enterprises, and paid employment away from the home. Extension Home Economics programs can help family members develop the skills and, more importantly, evaluate the relative payoff for the family as they seek to extend their money income.

No family is exempt from constraints and benefits of public-policy activity. It is increasingly important that Extension Home Economics help families understand the implications of government action at local, state, and federal levels. Understanding the benefits and the constraints of specific programs is essential if people are to be involved and feel in control of the public actions of the society. Public-policy activities affect the relative value of income—acquisition as well as its value in attaining a level of living.

Research Needs

Research needs for the immediate future include:

- Identification of economic issues and concerns of blended families.
- Study of the factors which contribute to effective handling of critical life events.
- Evaluation of the relationship of the family to community agencies and the role those agencies have in developing and maintaining economic well-being.
- Identification of practices that help families maximize resources throughout the life cycle.
- Identification of the costs and benefits (in dollars) of specific household production activities.
should be working to help families understand the consequences of housing alternatives. Extension Home Economics programs are, by and large, educational, developmental, and/or preventive. Because the programs have not generally been aimed at crisis intervention or remedial activity, they are distinctive but complementary to other programs.

Relative to a safe environment, it is going to be increasingly important for families to make their opinions and needs heard about business and community actions that affect the quality of the environment. Utility companies may provide information relative to rate changes, conservation techniques, and alternate sources of energy. Memoranda of agreement and understanding relative to family housing should be reviewed with consideration given to cooperative efforts to provide educational programs to those people needing them and continuing linkages to extend efficiency.

*Resources


The Focus of the Problem

Probably no family expenditures have been more significantly affected by the unstable economy than the selection, maintenance, and use of products and services associated with the environment in which families live. Inflation has eroded the value of family savings and has been directly related to increased real-estate taxes, utility costs, insurance, and maintenance of the home. In addition, interest rates have made it difficult for low- and middle-income families to obtain and manage home mortgages.

Families are having to deal with additional problems in the environment—hazardous waste disposal, pure water, pure air, and energy for heating and cooling the home. Both the amount and quality of resources are important to the level of family living.

Priority Problems of People

House Structure

The house itself is a part of the self-concept of family members at the same time it provides for family functioning. The space the family needs to meet physical needs may be quite different from social needs that are met by the home. Housing needs change as family members grow and change. Thus, there is a continuing need to adapt or modify family housing. Additions to residential structure, remodeling of the present structure, and changes in the outside structure all are means of adapting their housing to changing needs without changing their location.

In addition, effective maintenance is an increasingly important household activity. The high cost of replacement and high energy costs have increased the importance of keeping the structure sound.

Obtaining Housing

The need for housing is complicated because people must choose a structure, a neighborhood, and determine how they will pay for the housing. Because housing is one important expenditure which must compete with other expenditures, families must estimate the effect of the alternatives they have in buying or renting housing.

The availability of housing units at a cost the family can afford is a critical first point in the decision process. In recent years, inflation has increased the initial cost of housing at the same time the value of the dollar has decreased. This has made it more important that good housing decisions are made. The cost of moving, selling, and relocating are very high.

The cost of mortgages has increased the cost of housing for families who must borrow money to buy a home. The amount of down payments, interest rates, years for the mortgage life, and total cost of housing are all important in the ability of families to buy a house. As a result of interest-rate changes in the last 5 years, a 30-year mortgage for a $50,000 loan costs $592.50 (14% interest), in contrast to $402.50 (9% interest). These costs are fluctuating on a continuing basis, making it hard for the family to feel secure in the fact that they are spending their housing dollar wisely. Rental costs tend to follow the pattern of buying costs; hence, no family is exempt from the factors in housing cost.

Supportive Environments

Housing is one aspect of the near environment in which families live. Although the structure itself is important, the neighborhood and community are critical to satisfaction with housing. Increasingly, rural as well as urban families are experiencing insecurity in their homes because of vandalism and violence. This lack of security may create dissatisfaction with housing.

In addition, families in parts of the country are experiencing physical risk due to changes in the physical environment, hazardous substances in the ground, the water supply or the air. Natural disasters—floods, earthquakes, and storms—also reduce family security in the home. Families must become more aware of options for controlling the quality of their environment in terms of water, air, and general environment.

The continuing importance of energy—supply and cost—must not be ignored. The cost of energy has a direct impact on the family's level of living. Adjustments in use are often difficult to control because the house structure, durable goods, and the lifestyle of the family cannot be easily changed. Long-term commitments often require major commitments of natural resources such as energy.

Research Needs

Research needs for the immediate future include:

- Determination of patterns of resource use by families to meet housing needs.
- Evaluation of the effects of energy-conservation practices on cost and use of space.
- Determination of the methods for projecting effects of tax policy, housing demand, housing supply, and housing cost.
- Development and interpretation of research-based information to help families cope with energy and water shortages.
- Development of information relative to consequences of changes in energy supply and prices for family financial management.
- Evaluation of information regarding the effect of resource conservation on family satisfaction with lifestyle.
- Identification of the impacts of various living/housing alternatives on people (psychological, social, economics, health, safety).
- Evaluation of the patterns of use and needs for specific housing functions, i.e., space for sleeping, household work, recreation.

Delivery

New technology and techniques are necessary in the delivery of Extension Home Economics programs in the 80s. While the use of volunteers will continue, there are many alternatives for delivering information on housing and environment. Video options (cable TV and home video unit, satellites) are emerging as a means of teaching families how to cope with selecting and using housing. Computer technology also has much to offer in helping families project the costs of various alternatives, i.e., different interest rates, different repayment periods, and different down payments, among others. More and more, these technologies will influence the delivery of the program.

Networking

Because there are a number of different groups who have information relative to family acquisition and use of housing, the financial community as well as local zoning boards and community governing boards are important groups with whom Extension
Networking

Because Cooperative Extension is only one of many programs interested in the food, nutrition and health of the society, it is increasingly important to work with other groups to maximize the effect of educational programs. Extension Home Economics programs are, by and large, educational, developmental and/or preventive. Because the programs have not generally been aimed at crisis intervention or remedial activity, they are distinctive but complementary to other programs with objectives for improving the nutritional status of people in the society. Linkage with a variety of agencies at all levels of government is efficient and important. Memoranda of agreement and understanding should be reviewed with consideration given to relevance and current issues in continuing linkage to extend efficiency.

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FOOD, NUTRITION AND HEALTH

The Cooperative Extension Service was created as a dynamic institution, one with multiple audiences, subject matters, and methodology. By legislative action, Home Economics Extension programs were established as an entity that would modify programs and outreach in response to such factors as new knowledge, changes in its clientele needs, and alterations in the socio-economic landscape. From its beginning with the Smith-Lever Act, Cooperative Extension has had Home Economics programs as an integral component. The Home Economics component has as its goal the improvement of the quality of life for individuals and families through enhancement of their economic and social well-being. It seeks to achieve this goal through education. The well-being of American families is essential to national strength since the values that underlie national stability are forged by families. Pressure brought to bear on families as a result of social and economic change has made them an object of much concern. Cooperative Extension can strengthen families by providing them research-based knowledge that can be applied to such areas as provision of food, clothing, shelter, and emotional support.*
The Focus of the Problem

Consumers are sincere in wanting to change their food habits to decrease health risks, but they become confused or frustrated by conflicting recommendations, health fads and daily discoveries of “new evidence.”

Efforts to present current disease-prevention knowledge have been developed by five major groups: “Healthy People, the Surgeon General’s Report on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention”; “Guideline for a National Nutrition Policy”; “Nutrition and Your Health—Dietary Guidelines for Americans”; “Toward Healthful Diets”; and “Diet, Nutrition and Cancer.” Other recommendations have been issued for pregnancy and infant feeding, as well as for consumption of specific compounds, such as caffeine, cholesteral, and alcohol.

The basic task of providing healthful foods for families has been further compounded by economic and lifestyle changes that affect food accessibility and food choices. Changes in family economic and employment status and family composition have necessitated shifts in food choices and food-buying habits. Basic recommendations for food-preservation techniques have changed little over the years, but changing technology and experience of clientele have created an upsurge in demand for information in recent years.

Priority Problems of People Nutrition and Health of Family Members

Positive dietary changes are being made by Americans, coincidental with decreased mortality from the diet-related diseases. There is clinical evidence that good nutritional practices which improve general nutritional status may be beneficial in preventing or delaying onset of some chronic degenerative diseases and will incur no appreciable risks.

Dietary guidelines provide a framework for developing programs for a variety of audiences. Because Cooperative Extension serves people of all ages and income levels, programs emphasizing dietary practices can follow individuals’ needs through a lifetime.

Policy issues focus on assuring consumers accurate and helpful information in selecting food for the family.

Economic and Lifestyle Impacts on Diet

Economic and lifestyle factors are important in food-selection decisions. Extension programs emphasize menu planning, food buying, cost comparisons, food preparation and modified food habits. The effect of resource limitations, food advertising, peer influence and cultural food preferences are all considerations in wise food and nutrition decisions.

Tax practices, school lunches and/or breakfasts, and distribution of commodity foods are all significant policy issues affecting the food behavior of the population.

Safety and Preservation of the Food Supply

As a society, we seldom question our food supply. Coping with the volume of highly technical information about food safety and its relation to health is a continuing challenge. Concerns about additives, processing procedures, naturally occurring toxicants, sanitation, and safe energy conservation are being voiced by consumers. There is an increasing need for interpretation of information and application to help consumers obtain benefits from science and technology.

Cooperative Extension is acknowledged as a reliable source of information on home food preservation to consumers. Renewed interest in home food preservation may be related to inflation and energy constraints, as well as lifestyle changes. The need for updated and reliable information is critical, but the resources (primarily research) to implement an intensive program focusing on food preservation are inadequate.

In addition, families must learn to evaluate the role of government in maintaining a safe food supply for the society. Technological advances in food production and preservation create new situations in the quality of our food supply.

Research Needs

Research needs for the immediate future include:

- A study on the effect of self-prescribed fad diets, nutrient supplements, non-prescription dietary preparations on individual and family nutrition.

- Identification of concerns of various groups (handicapped, elderly, other age groups) related to food habits and health of people in different environments.

- Identification of the effect of food policy decisions on food habits, food availability and nutrient intakes.

- Identification of the impact of family-member lifestyle change (divorce, death, working women, stepchildren, sports participation, etc.) on purchase practices, eating patterns, and nutrient intake of family members.

- Identification of different eating behavior and nutrient intake of sub-groups in the population, inner city and rural youth.

- Identification of process times for home canning for certain low-acid vegetables where original data are questionable (asparagus, beets, spinach, sweet potatoes, cream-style corn, whole kernel corn, peas, summer squash, pepper varieties and figs).

- Evaluation and development of safe techniques for use of new processing equipment (steamers, vacuum devices, microwave ovens, smokers and dryers for meats, etc.) and the effect of equipment characteristics and jar sizes, among others, on product quality and safety.

- Successful modification of traditional responses to meet current nutrition guidelines, e.g., lower-calorie jams and jellies, reduced nitrite in home-cured meat.

- Development of safe techniques for home smoking and drying of fish, meat, and poultry.

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The Focus of the Problem

The decades of the 60s and 70s have seen a major upheaval in the structure and functioning of the family. The prime social unit in American society, the family, has felt the impact of the effect of many shifts in values and goals as well as the economic climate. As a result of these changes, diverse family configurations are emerging as more prominent. Among these are families headed by teenage parents, single-parent families, two-income families and families consisting of elderly retirees. What is often called “The Traditional Nuclear Family,” father employed outside the home, mother caring for the children, now constitutes less than 13% of all married couple families. Growing concern about families resulted in the calling of the first White House Conference on families in 1979. Pervasive national concerns, which were identified during that process included unprecedented economic, social and political pressures, the enormous diversity of families — regionally, socially, ethnically, structurally and politically. In addition, Americans were unwilling to accept continued neglect and harm to families from the absence or unintended consequences of public policies.

The well-being of American families is essential to the development of quality human capital for the future. Families continue to have the primary function of enhancing growth, including socializing and motivating family members. Regardless of form, families require knowledge and skills as well as community support in order to cope and adapt to the stresses they face in accomplishing their tasks.

Priority Problems of People

Enhancing Family Strength Competence

Today the goal of strengthening families is rapidly being transformed from a deep felt need to a realistic and achievable possibility. Until recently, the knowledge about strong and competent families was limited. A growing body of information about indicators of family well-being is becoming available for use by families and persons working with families. The implications are profound. Families can begin to work deliberately toward some of the goals that foster competence. The emerging knowledge base can provide a framework for developing educational programs. Included within this framework are such concepts as a clearly defined and mutually shared communication system, a commonly shared life philosophy or perspective and commitment to it, along with a sense of family cohesion or solidarity which incorporates mutual regard, application and involvement for each individual. Policies at national, state, and local levels can be evaluated in light of increased awareness of the support needed to develop strong, competent families.

Another aspect of this priority is a focus on the lifelong development of competent individuals. Families contribute to this development by creating positive environments conducive to individual growth by teaching life skills and fostering interpersonal communication and interaction skills.

Competent families effectively manage stress by coping and adapting to life changes. Individuals and families experience stress as a result of having to deal with expected or unexpected change in their lives. Such life situations as marriage, divorce, birth, death, job loss, multi-generational conflict, entrance of wife/mother into the labor market, economic hardship, life cycle changes, compounded by everyday events impact on families and create stress. Family stress programs will assist families to recognize the importance of dealing with stress collectively, to identify sources of stress and develop skills to deal with changing roles and effectively use coping strategies.

Citizen Involvement

At a time when federal and state social service and educational agencies may be subject to extensive cutbacks in funds and personnel, there is a need for local communities to use existing resources with great care and creativity. Local community resources are seriously limited by inflation and recession, and therefore citizens will be asked to provide new forms of assistance. This situation provides Extension Home Economics with an opportunity to join with policymakers, educators, human services, personnel and volunteer citizens at the grassroots level to assess community needs, define appropriate volunteer roles, provide volunteer leadership development and training and to identify and network existing resources. The development of skills and knowledge will assist citizens to solve problems more effectively and to influence local policies and government decisions as they relate to families.

Research Needs

Research needs for the immediate future include:

- Identification of conceptional similarities/differences among family types.
- Study of the unique needs and concerns of each of the diverse family types.
- Identification of those attributes and activities that are sustaining and nurturing for families.
- Evaluation of methods of application of indicators of family strengths to educational programs for families.
- Continue identification of major characteristics which contribute to optimum lifelong human development.
- Study of parenting practices which contribute to optimum development of children.
- Study the effect of long-term child care on optimum development of children.
- The incidence, causes, nature and result of stress in families.
- Identification of critical family resources such as coping, social support, and family problem solving which buffer the negative consequences of stressors on family life and facilitate family adjustment.
- Evaluation of paradigms research which will define and order variables and advance theory construction in family stress.
- Determination of the nature and extent of family and community support systems and services.
- Evaluation of potential of community services support systems for helping families adjust to change.
Delivery

Efforts to assess the impact of the Extension Home Economics volunteer on the community and the many activities therein might provide some insight into the current pattern of networking. Multiple agency approaches to volunteer development will, of necessity, be expanded, and agencies/groups must review their efforts and accountability/reporting procedures. At the same time volunteers must examine their motives for involvement and their level and type of commitment; various groups in the society must be prepared to assess the real value they place on the volunteer and make appropriate adjustments in terms of public policies which enhance volunteerism.

Growth and development of the local community as well as the larger society depends on the leadership and ability of people to function at the local level. Volunteer networks among educational and social institutions must be strengthened for maximum realization of potential. Community educators must work with people to achieve the desired change and programs for the community.

*Resources


The Focus of the Problem

Volunteer leadership development has been identified as a priority focus of the Extension Home Economics program, but changing social and economic factors within the society are placing a great stress on the volunteer leadership activities in the society and for Cooperative Extension as well. In addition, there is a major need in the society for the individual to be able to identify and solve a variety of problems as an individual as well as a member of a group. Recent studies show there are insufficient resources to address problems of the society at state or federal levels. Private sector efforts provide less than 20 percent of what is needed. Consequently, citizens are being asked to provide time and leadership at the local level in support of the community. They are also being asked to help make informed choices about public issues. This may be reverting back to what was a basic practice in the development of our country. Volunteer leadership must function within the existing community structure(s) to solve problems, which require organizational skills above and beyond those required in informal and family relationships. Development of organizational skills enables individuals to address problems of community, county, state and national scope.

Extension has traditionally provided opportunities for individuals to build competencies and develop greater self-confidence in their leadership abilities in order to assume more vital roles and responsibilities in family work and community activities.

The leadership development programs are based on a progression of knowledge and skill development, starting with the assumption that leadership is based on personal growth and development. This leads to group involvement and participation in decision-making at the organizational level, including committee membership and office holding. Each of these activities provides the opportunity for specific skill development in participation, leading or implementing group actions for the well-being of the community.

Priority Problems of People
Adapting to the Changing Character of Volunteers

The success of the Extension Home Economics program as an informal educational system is due in a large extent to its success in working with more than 600,000 Extension volunteers in the development of leadership skills and in the teaching to neighbors the educational information gained through participation in training programs. Continued program growth will necessitate expanded recruitment, training and development of volunteers.

Consideration must be given to the needs of volunteers in development of programs for them. Volunteers are entitled to "a feeling of personal worth" in exchange for the time, money and personal service they contribute to the organization. A well-managed program will include: personal contacts to recruit people; recognition of problems and constraints important to the volunteers; consideration of ideas offered by the volunteer; and a recognition and reward system for volunteers.

Understanding the Volunteer Climate

National trends in volunteerism indicate that despite many social and economic changes which appear to have great impact on volunteering, more people are donating their time and skills to organizations to get specific actions or programs accomplished. The key to a continuing increase in volunteer commitment is clearly defining and matching specific tasks with volunteer skills and interests.

Volunteers enter Extension Home Economics programs with varied backgrounds. A program to provide skill training at points of deficiency is critical. Whether leadership training is for new or experienced volunteers, it must be planned with the specific needs of clientele in mind.

The "Extension in the 80s" report further indicates a need in the Extension Home Economics programs for "individuals and families to . . . be informed participants in the evaluation and formulation of public policy." Development of organization and leadership skills can help prepare individuals to be effective citizens in the complex society in which we live.

Research Needs

Research needs include:
- Specific demographic data related to volunteers.
- Longitudinal data to indicate the dimension of levels of involvement of volunteers in a variety of activities.
- Information on the impact and transfer of leadership skill training on involvement in community organizations and activities (church, PTA/PTO, etc.).