

The County Agent Movement

(O. A. C. Extension Bulletin.)

The county agent movement, which was introduced in the North as recently as 1911, in New York state has now (May, 1916) spread into all the thirty-three northern and western states. C. B. Smith, of the U. S. Department of Agriculture says, in commenting on the growth of the work, "On July 1, 1912, there were three County Agents in the whole North and West. A year later there were 140; on July 1, 1914, there were 230 and now (November, 1915) there are 353." Including the southern states, where the movement originated, there are at present in the United States, more than 1100 county agents.

The County Agent movement is national wide. It is supported by Federal appropriation authorized by the passage of the so-called Smith-Lever Act of Congress, 1914. Practically every state in the Union has enacted legislation providing state funds to supplement the Federal Smith-Lever funds.

The County Agent movement has the endorsement and support of the United States Department of Agriculture, every agricultural college in the United States, the National Grange, the leading farm journals of this and other states, and thousands of influential farmers who are familiar with its nature and purposes and what it has done and is doing for the betterment of farm conditions.

The Oregon Law.

The law providing for County Agent work in Oregon is found in Chapter 110 of the Session Laws of 1913. Under this act counties with an area of less than 5,000 square miles may appropriate up to \$2,000 per year and larger counties up to twice that amount for the work. The law places the supervision of the work under the Oregon Agricultural College.

Why County Agent Work Started.

County Agent work was started in the United States for three important reasons:

(1) A vast fund of agricultural information, assembled at an enormous cost to our Federal Government and our several states, has not been made use of by a satisfactory number of people on the farm. The present assistant Secretary of Agriculture, Hon. Carl Vrooman, is authority for the statement that the information assembled has cost the nation 250 million dollars. This situation has been compared with that of a great manufacturing concern whose warehouses are full to overflowing but whose selling and distributing facilities are so inadequate that the product cannot be placed in the hands of the consumer. The agricultural bulletin, institute lecture, the farm paper article, the State demonstration farm, all these and other agencies have played and are playing their part; but experience has taught that the actual demonstration on the farmer's own farm, of the improved variety, the better method of culture, or the standard market grade, etc., is the most effective agency for bringing about the wide spread adoption of better methods. So, while experiment station bulletins may have announced the development of an improved strain of wheat, it is the actual demonstration of its merit on ten or twenty farms within a county, that brings about its general use, with a resultant increase in the total cereal production of the county that may far exceed in value the cost of the demonstrator.

(2) Again, in every community there may be found side by side on adjoining farms the man who has solved a problem and the man who is spending time, labor and money to work out independently a solution of the same problem. Every neighborhood has its farmer who is eminently successful in some particular line. He is master of the science and skilled in the art of his specialty, and neither professor nor experimenter could improve upon his practical work. But he is busy, having neither the time nor the feeling that he can with dignified propriety advise others of his own success. His knowledge, therefore, falls to find its way across the narrow country road to the near-by neighbor. Here then, as the common carrier of the communities' good practice, is found a second important function of the County Agricultural Agent.

(3) "There are headquarters for city affairs, for political affairs, and for other affairs, but we have no headquarters for local agricultural affairs."

Farmers have met at conventions, in grange halls, and country school houses and after the meeting some one has said: "That's good, but what are we going to do about it? We have talked it over before." The difficulty is that there has been no one to act for them, no one to actually bring about co-operative shipping after it has been decided to ship co-operatively; no one to get quotations and assemble orders for the car of lime; no one to find the market for the disease-free potato seed the community club has grown; no one to organize the cow-testing association or interest the boy in his club project; no one to represent the community or the region, to stimulate it, to point the way, to project meet-

ings, policies, methods of work as applicable to the place, to bring in experts and specialists when needed, to have an office in which the facts pertaining to the agriculture of the region are assembled and where they will be available for any person who desires them," no one, in short, to do for the community those things which must be done co-operatively and cannot be done by the individual acting independently. In the service here suggested, then, is found a third important reason for the introduction of County Agent Work.

An Erroneous Conception.

The statement that "the farmer doesn't need anyone to teach him how to farm" is often directed against the County Agent movement. The movement, however, is not based upon a disregard for the intelligence, ability, or skill of the farmer of today in those spheres in which he acquires experience; but just as the capable mother finds a time when the child's welfare demands the doctor's care, so problems present themselves for which the most successful farmer finds no solution in the store-house of his experience. Indeed, if it were not so, farming would differ from all other activities; for in no trade, occupation, or profession, does the individual depend in all cases upon his own experience. The question may be fairly asked, How many years of practical experience must a farmer have?

1. To know whether protein comes cheaper in bran at \$20 a ton or in oil meal at \$35?
2. To know whether he should apply nitrogen or phosphorus, or potash or sulphur or lime to his soil, separately or in combination, and, if so, in what amounts and what the cost should be?
3. To be able to identify hog cholera by post mortem examination?
4. To know the life-history and control of the many insect pests and fungus diseases that are of economic importance?
5. To start an egg circle, a co-operative stock-shipping association, a public market, a milk-shipping association, etc?
6. To stop the spread of a contagious disease, like foot-and-mouth disease, hog cholera, or sheep scab; or to wage a campaign against jack rabbits, ground squirrels, or other rodents?
7. To get his neighbors to standardize the potato crop, the apple crop or some other crop so that the community can market advantageously?
8. To protect his community against impure seed and adulterated feed?

These, and other questions which might be added, serve to illustrate the many cases in which the special agent may be of service to the successful and experienced farmer.

Specific Results in Oregon.

Some conception of the total influence of the small number of County Agents now employed in Oregon may be obtained from the following summary compiled from the report of the twelve county agents of this state for the year 1915.

6,300 farm visits were made; 35,500 people attended meetings addressed by agents. These were mostly local meetings held out in country school houses and grange halls, where local conditions were talked over by one familiar with them and with the people assembled. 45 adult organizations were formed with a membership of 2,000, quite a step in the direction of organizing the unorganized farmer. Agents assisted in holding 33 short courses out in the counties; through their influence 33 silos were erected during the year; 48 registered bulls were purchased and half as many registered hogs; 750 cows were tested for butter fat production privately in County Agent counties and more than 3,500 were tested in cow-testing associations. About seven hundred were tuberculin tested through County Agent influence, and a like number were vaccinated as protection against black leg. In three counties a total of 19,700 acres of wet land were included in drainage districts organized through the activities of the agents or put under private drainage systems planned by the agents. The value of this one accomplishment may be measured in thousands of dollars. Further work is reported in connection with live-stock feeding, balancing rations, soil fertility, farm records, etc.

Perhaps a better idea of the actual results of work may be gained from a report of one or two projects described in detail. Let us consider for example:

A Single Service of Great Importance

A certain County Agent inspected the seed potatoes in the three principal seed houses of the county and found the stock on hand to be generally affected with rhizoctonia and fusarium wilt, two diseases that had been largely responsible for reducing the export of potatoes of that county from something like 400 to 500 cars a year down to less than 20 cars a year. The dealers had not recognized the presence of the disease but agreed to handle clean seed if the agent would find it. The agent was able to locate some disease-free seed and it is significant that he located it through another County Agent who had organized a community into an association that had for

its purpose the growing, grading and marketing of disease-free potatoes. As a result of the activity of the two agents, many acres of potatoes may produce a normal yield, whereas complete or partial failure would have followed the planting of the diseased seed. This day's work may benefit many people who will never know of the service rendered and the total gain to the county may be greater than the cost of the agent and his office for an entire year.

A Demonstration and its Results.

The following is but one of many demonstrations as they are made by the agents in the field. In this instance the co-operator makes his own report as to results.

The presence of black alkali rendered a tract of land practically worthless, and one owner of the region called upon the County Agent to suggest a method of treatment. Drainage was recommended with the suggestion that the trial be made on a small but representative plot. Because of high freight rates on small shipments of tile, four acres were drained at a rather high total labor and material cost of \$138.50. The owner gives the following figures on the operations:

Crop 1914—4 acres—20 bushel barley or 5 bushel to the acre.
Crop 1915—4 acres—278 bushel wheat and barley or 69 1/2 bushel to the acre.

"Placing a value of 80 cents a bu. on this crop, the result is \$222.40-\$128.50 or \$93.90 net gain this year from the above operation. In our minds and from these results we firmly believe that tile drainage is an unequalled success. There are few investments that pay so well on alkali land. We intend to drain 40 acres more as quickly as possible."

A Community Campaign.

"Fifty two thousand five hundred forty-three jack rabbits poisoned by actual count," and the special agent of the U. S. Biological Bureau adds, "A conservative estimate of the number of rabbits killed during the two months that actual poisoning was in progress would be 65,000."

This represents a work of organization and co-operation. There was leadership. In contrast to a system whereby every farmer buys and mixes his own poison in his own way, the Agent obtained the services of a government specialist in rodent control and together they organized community clubs, purchased strychnine co-operatively at a saving, appointed a poison mixer for each community club, demonstrated to him the effective method of mixing poison; and then, with all working unitedly and understandingly under the direction of the agent and government specialist, rabbits were destroyed in greater numbers than ever before.

"The County Agriculturist, C. C. Cate, has done wonders for this county."—H. H. Wetherspoon, Horticultural Commissioner and farmer, Elgin, Oregon.

"In my opinion this law (providing agricultural extension work for the counties) is doing more to develop the agricultural resources of the State than any law that was ever passed."—Senator I. S. Smith, Coos County.

"The farm record work recently conducted under the supervision of our County Agent was the best thing that ever happened for Tillamook County."—Joe Donaldson, Tillamook.

"It was largely through the efforts of our County Agent, R. B. Coglan, that we were enabled to start our co-operative stock-shipping and establish our public market in Lane county."—C. J. Hurd, farmer and market master, Eugene, Oregon.

"I figure that the eight months of my membership (in Coos County Cow-Testing Association,) has helped me to gain several hundred dollars for the next three years, for I would have continued keeping some of the unprofitable cows."—William Lindstrom, Coos County. (One of 78 statements received from as many members of the cow-testing associations organized by J. L. Smith, County Agent of Coos County.)

"Mr. Jones (County Agent, Tillamook County) started this drainage district and it is a big thing for the county."—Carl Hunt, Tillamook, Oregon.

"From the information gained in all counties where the Agriculturist has been given a fair trial it has been demonstrated beyond a doubt that practically all farmers who have come in touch with him are strong supporters of the work."—J. W. Brewer, Sec'y Development Bureau in report to Executive Secretary Portland Chamber of Commerce, after investigation in Eastern Oregon counties having agents.

Grange Endorses Work.

The State Grange of Oregon at its 43rd annual meeting in Grants Pass (May 9-11, 1916), went on record as favoring County Agent work, as indicated by the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas, It has developed through the deliberations of this State Grange in annual convention assembled that through co-operation we may advance the agricultural interests and build up and strengthen our order and

Whereas, Experience teaches that we cannot get far in our co-operative enterprises without an employed agent to carry out the details of our plans and act as a center for the community and aid it in the establishment of community breeding and standardization of products upon which co-operative marketing depends. Therefore be it resolved:

That we endorse the employment of county agricultural agents to perform this service for the farmers of each county and

That we urge the subordinate and Pomona granges of our respective counties to devote themselves actively to securing agricultural agents in all counties and

That they (the granges) co-operate in building up a county agricultural council, similar to that now in effect in Lane county, which will co-operate with and aid in the direction of the activities of the county agricultural agent.

What the Agent Costs.

The county court is permitted by the law of the State to appropriate \$2000 a year for County Agent work. The average of the appropriations now in effect in thirteen Oregon counties is about \$1700. The State money increases the total budget to twice that of the county appropriation. On the average about half the budget goes into the salary of the men employed. The balance covers traveling expenses, office maintenance supplies, etc. There are some expenses to be met the first year such as purchase of automobile, typewriter, filing cabinet, etc., that are not to be met thereafter.

Men suited for County Agent positions are specialists as truly as the doctor, lawyer or teacher. They have had practical experience as well as scientific training, and to be successful must have broad vision and possess qualities of leadership. Such men can only be secured by the payment of liberal salaries. So much depends upon the character and ability of the agent himself that it is felt to be unwise to limit the appropriation in any way that would make impossible the employment of the best of men.

The County Agent necessarily spends much of his time out of his office. The nature of his office, however, is such that it should not be closed to the public four or five days out of the week. It is desirable that a clerk or stenographer be present to pass out bulletins, library books, etc., or to receive callers and ascertain their wants in order that they may be attended to by the Agent upon his return. The Agent has extensive correspondence and can reach many more people when he has stenographic assistance that will enable him to distribute circular letters and write articles for the press of his county, but as a rule funds have not been provided for this service.

The Cost to the Individual Farmer.

Upon this point there is much apprehension. The individual is inclined to feel that his share of the burden will be much greater than is actually the case. Assuming that a well-to-do farmer has a twenty thousand dollar farm assessed at half

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that amount on the tax roll, then the cost to him will be about \$1.00 per year providing he lives in a county of about average assessed valuation (\$16,000,000) appropriating the average amount for this work. Taking a few specific instances: in Umatilla county the cost to the above-mentioned farmer would be 40 cents, or half the value of a bushel of wheat, providing the full \$2,000 were appropriated; in Coos or Tillamook counties the cost to the farmer for the average appropriation would be 80 cents or the equivalent of 5 pounds of cheese; in Marion county 38 cents, or the value of the product of a good dairy cow in a day; in Douglas county 62 cents, or less than

the price of a box of apples; in Linn county 54 cents, or the equivalent of about three dozen eggs.

A Paradox.

That objection is sometimes encountered to the employment of an Agricultural Agent by the farmers themselves on the ground of expense, seems strange upon analysis. We support our army, our navy, our law-making and law-enforcing bodies, our administrative officers of city, county state and nation, boards and commissions of many kinds, a vast number of teachers and educators for those of school age, and yet it has frequently been the additional agent

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