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WILDLIFE DAMAGE AND CONTROL RESEARCH AND EXTENSION PROGRAMS: COST RECOVERY STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses cost recovery strategies for vertebrate pest control research and extension programs. It gives an historical background using California examples about how these programs have been supported in the past. Current situations and future trends in supporting research and extension in the vertebrate pest area are also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The Land Grant University system is key to agricultural research and extension programs in the United States. In the 1880s, the U.S. began the Land Grant system. Each state was given a grant of land, its size based on the population of that state. The state was then able to sell that land or, in other ways, use it to support establishing the Land Grant University for that state. The Land Grant System was conceived to bring the University to the people. Prior to that time, most universities were focused on philosophical teachings and were exclusive for relatively few people in the country or world.

The Land Grant system changed this approach significantly. It has served as a model for change in the university system throughout the world. The basic components of the Land Grant system are teaching, research, and extension. It created a new relationship between the universities and the people. An important aspect was access to the universities and their information. The Land Grants were available to "the common people" throughout the country. Second, the university programs were designed to deal with practical information to solve people's problems. The third part was the emphasis on application of research to specifically deal with individual and community needs. The result was a university system very different from the past. Instead of looking inward and being primarily theoretical or philosophical in their teaching and research, they became problem-solvers and educators for the people of the United States. In California, the Land Grant University is the University of California.

Not only did the Land Grant system provide resources for starting these new universities, it provided the framework and base funding to support research and extension efforts in agriculture, including Cooperative Extension. This continuous base support for Cooperative Extension and the Agricultural Experiment Station, as well as other public support for vertebrate pest control, had tremendous impact on our vertebrate pest research and extension efforts. It definitely affected the view or expectation of how programs should be developed and supported. Now, support levels are changing, and the author believes we need to examine past support and develop strategies for support in the future.

Many remember how vertebrate pest control research, extension and, indeed operations, were funded in the past. Without understanding how this funding has changed, we are subject to being caught off-guard with current and future funding trends. While these remarks use California examples, the author believes similar trends have and will continue to happen throughout the world.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

It is instructive to review public support for Cooperative Extension and the Agricultural Experiment Station, two of the major components of the Land Grant system. In California, base funding steadily increased from shortly after World War II to 1967 (Scheuring 1995). These increases were regular and predictable. While there were never "enough" resources to address the varied vertebrate pest problems in the state, funds (and people) were directed toward the important vertebrate pest problems.

In 1968, this regular upward trend started to change. For the first time, the budget was cut. This "one time" 3% cut signaled the end to regular and predictable budget increases for research and extension. During the 1970s and 1980s, the true impact of inflation was generally unrecognized. This, coupled with no base budget increase, started to erode funds significantly.

During this time, there was also a general increase in government ear-marked funds. These were targeted to specific programs such as Integrated Pest Management or Small Farms. And, during the 1990s, the University of California budget in this area decreased by more than 20%. Unfortunately, these cuts have been permanent.

The point of this is to highlight that public funds for research and extension began to decline in the 1970s and has continued to do so to this day. These trends, unfortunately, are repeated in many, perhaps most, publicly funded vertebrate pest research and extension programs in the world.

OTHER SUPPORT IN CALIFORNIA

Other changes have occurred that have significantly impacted vertebrate pest control research, extension, and operations. In the past, the California Agricultural Commissioners were very involved in applied research and extension efforts. They had vertebrate pest specialists on staff; they developed, manufactured, and applied bait for vertebrate pest control; and they trained farmers in using vertebrate pest control materials. The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) District Biologists dealt with vertebrate pest control and did considerable applied research and demonstration in this

important area. They were also involved in rodenticide and avicide registrations. The universities, both the University of California and the California State University system, had significant research and extension programs in the areas of vertebrate pest control. Also, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal Damage Control (formerly U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) had cooperative programs in the majority of California's counties. They, too, conducted considerable research on vertebrate pest problems. Each of these entities continues to play significant roles in vertebrate pest control but, while the commitment remains, the overall effort, it is felt, has diminished. A major factor in this trend has been relatively constant funding declines and increases in responsibilities. Without future increases in funding or new funding sources, the overall trend, it is feared, will continue on its downward path.

STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORT

Three possible strategies for support of vertebrate pest control research and extension are: cost recovery, user assessments, and collaboration. Obviously, there are many more that could be covered.

Cost Recovery

A national email survey was conducted of Cooperative Extension Directors in each state plus several U.S. territories in August 1997. Response to the survey was very good with 72% of those surveyed responding. In this survey, questions dealt with cost recovery in extension programs.

First, all Extension Directors who responded (n=39) were recovering costs for some extension programs. About 89% were charging for services such as diagnostic tests. Seventy-three percent (73%) of the states charge for at least some publications. About 57% were charging for some classes and workshops, and 30% were charging for typical extension meetings. Twenty-eight percent (28%) were charging subscriptions for newsletters but only 3% were charging for individual consulting.

Extension has a tradition of being "free" and this affects the attitude about charging for programs or materials. Since Extension is tax supported, many believe free access to programs must be provided. In fact, this is the general policy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Federal agency providing base funds for Extension programs. About 76% of the states provide free or reduced fees for their programs to people with economic needs; 81% waived the fees on request; 79% waived fees with documentation, and 69% used general waivers for some programs.

The survey asked about the reactions when charging for Cooperative Education (CE) programs. This is important because it gives ideas to those who may start charging for their Extension, research or operational efforts. The staff (CE county and state staff) were 40% negative about charging for the programs. A similar amount (38%) thought it was a positive experience. Most administrators (72%) had no problems with charging. For customers that were using the information for business purposes, like improved farm management, 58% were positive. When people were using the information or programs for personal issues, like controlling gophers in their yard, about 42% were positive about paying as opposed to getting the information for free.

User Assessments

Another way of supporting research and extension programs in California has been user assessments such as the Rodent Bait Surcharge Program. In 1990, California passed a law to create the Bait Surcharge Program. This program is a good example of the ability to support programs in a different way than simply getting money from the general public. CDFA holds rodenticide registration labels, and these baits are sold and distributed by County Agricultural Commissioners. For all baits sold, there is a $.50/lb surcharge collected. One hundred percent (100%) of the funds from this surcharge are used to conduct research on vertebrate pests. How has it worked? Approximately $500,000 is collected each year from the surcharge. With that money, CDFA has been able to meet Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registration requirements for all CDFA rodenticide labels. The Department has formed partnerships with organizations and groups like the USDA National Wildlife Research Center and some private entities. This allowed a pooling effort to maintain or obtain rodenticide registrations. Vertebrate pest control research has been conducted which looks at improving existing, and finding alternative, control strategies. There have also been projects funded on bird trapping, different bait station designs, and economic analysis of damage, just to name a few.

Collaboration

Building collaborative relationships has been extremely important in better addressing vertebrate pest control problems. This is especially true with operational programs that are now using recharge when collaborating with other agencies. Also, research efforts, in many cases, are branching out to build partnerships and other kinds of relationships between universities and also with private industry. The Bait Surcharge Program is an excellent example. Funding for research projects to universities and agencies, several outside California, brings a much greater (and diverse) effort to bear on understanding and solving vertebrate pest problems. These collaborations have been greatly enhanced in recent years because of alternative funding and support programs.

DISCUSSION

So what does all this mean? First, public-based budget support is declining for Vertebrate Pest Control Research and Extension, and nothing is seen in the future that would suggest this will change. Second, funds received are increasingly targeted to specific projects, reducing the ability to research many important issues without extra funding.

To deal with these funding shortfalls, there is a need to continue to change and look at new methods of support. User fees and assessments, and charging for research, extension, and operations efforts will become increasingly important. There will be an increase in grants and contracts which will focus programs on areas where money is available. While these are generally

programs with high-priority, they are not necessarily the highest priority for the general public. Increased collaboration efforts to address important issues will also be seen. For example, the USDA continues collaborating with United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on vertebrate pest control programs protecting endangered species where Fish and Wildlife pays for the efforts to conduct those programs.

In conclusion, the author wants to leave you with a visual image, a perplexed vertebrate pest control worker saying "we are doing such good work, why don't they keep sending the money?" That's something that we all need to think about. Just because we are doing good work and addressing important issues, it doesn't mean that the money (or public support, in general) will keep coming. It is up to each of us to find support for important vertebrate pest research and extension programs.

LITERATURE CITED

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