

## FOOD GRANT COLLEGES

The formation of food grant colleges is proposed in developing countries where local currencies generated through the P.L. 480 program are available.

→ The proposal is designed basically to address the problems of institutional sustainability which are endemic to fledgling agricultural universities and colleges, especially those in countries whose national economies are in stress. It envisions the formation of autonomous foundations through which local currency generated by the PL-480 program could be used to endow developing country institutions, thereby making them "food grant colleges." The interest from the endowment would be used to enhance their operating budgets. This would be similar to the creation of the U.S. land-grant colleges, which emanated from the proceeds from the sale of public lands and have served as perpetual endowments.

### The Problem

Agricultural colleges and universities in many developing countries are suffering from moderate to severe funding problems, affecting the long-term sustainability of these institutions. As a result, development assistance projects by A.I.D. and other donors sometimes falter or institutions retrogress when project activity ceases. Institutional sustainability then becomes a crucial question, sometimes negating the years of hard work and scarce funds put into these projects. In his paper on science-building in Africa, Eicher comments, "...[F]inancial sustainability ... is a serious problem that is not being addressed by ... administrators ..., donors, or social science researchers." (2, p.16)

Support funds for these institutions most often are the first to be impacted in times of financial stress, severely limiting their capacity to fund anything besides staff salaries and direct instructional costs. This has been the case during the stressful economic times of the 1980s. As a consequence, libraries have become outdated, research projects have gone unfunded and faculty travel has been precluded. Deferred maintenance has resulted in deteriorating equipment and facilities, including laboratories and farms, thus limiting students' practical learning experiences. In many instances low faculty salaries have exacerbated the problem, resulting in the loss of key personnel to other jobs, most often to positions outside of the country. Eicher comments that "... unless the incentive structure is dramatically improved for national scientists and teachers, the agricultural brain drain will continue." (2, p.15)

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A recent study of the impact of agricultural university development projects in ten countries by the Center for Development Information and Evaluation in the Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination of the Agency for International Development highlighted this situation. The study concluded that, despite past successful projects in a number of countries, current underfunding in many countries is weakening research and educational programs. In addition to the aforementioned problems, an even more serious result is increasing provincialism among these institutions, because of a lack of contact with the larger scientific community. Given the fast changing nature of science worldwide, institutional competence inevitably degrades under such conditions, suffering from the lack of intellectual stimulation that comes from discussions with scientists who work on similar problems under different conditions. (1, p. 6)

### The Model

The food grant college is conceived as a unique institution. Local funds generated from the P.L. 480 program are endowed to it through a foundation for the support of programs whose central concern is for sustainable food and agriculture systems in the ecology in which it exists. The food grant college is concerned also with the maintenance and enhancement of the natural resource base.

Both farmers and consumers are in its purview. With farmers, the principal focus is on enabling them to achieve increased production and profitability under sustainable conditions, while at the same time being concerned with food security, not only for themselves, but for the nation in which they live. With consumers, it is on making available adequate diets at economical prices through an efficient marketing system. A special emphasis is placed on the poor, be they farmers or consumers.

As an institution, the food grant college is problem-oriented, emphasizing strongly the application of theory to the practical problems of development. The food grant college concept is designed to promote the generation, storage and dissemination of knowledge, making it available not only to the students in residence at an institution, but also to the people in the country which it serves. It has a special concern for the in-service education of the professional and semi-professional agricultural, food, and natural resource cadres of the country.

From the standpoint of generating knowledge, a food grant college first has an instructional program based on sustainable systems in that environment. In that sense, it either adapts technology from other technology-generating institutions or develops its own. Second, it links into the national agricultural research system in an effective way; otherwise, it will become

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irrelevant over time. Third, it links effectively into the international technology system, not only to transfer and adapt technology for its own use, but also to maintain its own vitality as an institution.

The storage of knowledge is a vital function of an institution of higher learning. The development of up-to-date and functioning repositories of knowledge is an even more critical activity in developing country situations. Most often, it is the principal knowledge resource not only for its faculty and students, but also for the larger populace. The traditional library is included, as well as the use of the computer as a far-reaching information storage and retrieval mechanism.

The general function of technology transfer and dissemination is a crucial one, although it often is lacking in agricultural universities around the world. Related to the functions of generator and repositior is the general responsibility to get knowledge understood and used. A special responsibility exists for the continued growth of the agricultural, food, and natural resource professionals and subprofessionals who staff government departments and parastatal organizations, teach in the schools, and work in private enterprise. There is a special responsibility to link effectively into the national extension framework, not only to contribute to staff development, but also to be more conscious of farmers and their problems.

The food grant college is conceived as a people-oriented institution. It is concerned with its students, first and foremost. It teaches them to be development-oriented professionals who know how to solve problems. The instructional process offers students multiple opportunities to apply knowledge to real situations and to deal with people from all walks of life. There is a special emphasis on women -- usually serviced by male-dominated and male-oriented bureaucracies and organizations -- since they do most of the producing and marketing of food.

### Organization and Administration

There are two critical aspects to the organization and administration of a food grant college. First, it must have an adequate financial base in order to achieve its purposes. In order to achieve an adequate financial base, it also must have a measure of financial independence in such matters as the use of endowed funds, retention and use of self-generated funds, and the ability to attract grants from donors. These foundations could receive funds from other internal and external donors, as well as P.L. 480-generated local funds.

To implement these ideas, the development of an autonomous foundation is an absolute necessity. It must have legal status as a self-perpetuating group composed of people from the government, private sector, relevant interest

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groups and donors. It must have a set of bylaws, objectives, and appropriate policies and procedures. Authority is required to raise funds, invest them, and allocate investment and other income.

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### References

1. Center for Development Information and Evaluation, Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination, The Impact of Investments in Agricultural Higher Education. A.I.D. Highlights No. 5. Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development, August, 1989.
2. Eicher, Carl K., "Building African Scientific Capacity for Agricultural Development," a paper presented to the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development, Washington, D. C., September 28, 1989.