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## From agriculture to rural development: Critical choices for agriculture education

Charles J. Maguire  
Senior Institutional Development Specialist  
Rural Development Department, the World Bank

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Making the leap from a concentration on production agriculture to a focus on rural development presents traditional agricultural education systems with difficult choices. The paper suggests that the choice is not whether to adapt to change but what changes to make. Rural development is a complex process that demands sustainable production agriculture, natural resources management, institutions, infrastructure, health, education, markets, finance, policy, local government, and education in order to succeed. Agricultural education systems from universities to non-formal adult education have to decide how much change they need to make to meet the expectations of an expanded and diverse population of stakeholders and remain relevant. Various authors have, over the past fifteen to twenty years, stressed the importance of institutional reaction to the pressures of change but action has been limited. The paper suggests that increasing competition from other educational institutions and non-traditional sources makes a strong and urgent case for agricultural education systems to make changes in order to influence a wide range of stakeholders including those in academia, in farming and non-farming rural areas, policy makers, and the private sector. The alternative is to become less and less relevant. What is needed is the vision to sense the future needs of the multiple stakeholders in Rural Development and the leadership and determination to bring about change to enable the institution to educate, train, research and serve for the benefit of the rural community. The paper suggests that the time is right for change initiatives and identifies a number of international organizations and bodies that could be helpful to those contemplating systems change.

This paper is about change. Change we are told is the biological imperative and failure to heed the command can be fatal. Agricultural education is hearing the change imperative and needs to make some critical choices. We have seen our education establishments develop and disseminate a number of truly momentous scientific advances related to plant and animal breeding, soil and water management, and food preservation. Our education establishments pioneered the development of ingenious labor-saving machinery; and introduced a business management approach to farming. Our education establishments have led the way in providing leadership in agricultural and rural sector policy formulation and reform. The agricultural education system has been a major contributor to agricultural research, extension, production and institutional successes over the past hundred years. We have much to be proud of but, at the same time, we need to be vigilant for the arena in which our success was won has expanded and changed. Alert members of the agricultural education community have not been unaware of the creeping and sometimes rapid influence of change and have made institutional and organizational adjustments to accommodate and remain relevant. However, we have reached a point where our change response has to be faster and more decisive if we are to survive as an influential force in agriculture and in rural development. Darwin awakened the world to the phenomenon of the survival of the fittest and many agricultural education institutions now face such a challenge. This paper suggests that it is time to take a measured look at the nature of change that surrounds agricultural education and resolve to adapt in order to take back a leadership role in education and training for a much-expanded clientele.

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