PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION

Five Case Studies with Commentary and Discussion Questions

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The belief that citizens are capable of acting on matters of broad public concern that can be resolved through collective decisions and actions is the basis for this collection of case studies. The process of assisting policy makers and helping citizens empower themselves to act on public issues is public policy education. Learners who gain skills to work with other people and the ability to sort out facts, weigh values, examine alternatives, and make choices in concert with other people will be able to exercise their rightful position in the democratic process.

As the Cornell Cooperative Extension System is being reshaped, much attention has been given to focusing programs on significant issues. Issues are defined as matters of wide public concern arising out of complex human problems. Concerns ranging from child care to waste management to agricultural profitability can be addressed in part through educational programs that enable individuals to make responsible decisions in their own lives. But there is also a public policy dimension to each of these issues. Issue-oriented educational programs can also help citizens and policy makers decide what public, or community, actions need to be taken.

For example, the issue of child abuse is an important concern today. The public policy component of this issue involves decisions about the public responsibility for protecting children and preventing abuse. Deciding whether child abuse should be a matter of public responsibility and choosing appropriate and effective means to reduce the incidence of the problem are public policy decisions. If public responsibility is agreed upon, possible alternatives, such as more education or stronger punishment for abusive or neglectful parents, can be weighed and evaluated.

Although public policy education always involves important issues, some issue-oriented educational programs are implemented without a public policy component. After decisions are made about an issue, carrying them out may or may not be a topic to be addressed through public policy education. Informing the public and appropriate professionals about newly enacted child abuse regulations is part of the implementation stage of public policy, but teaching parents appropriate parenting skills is individual-skills education. Teaching parenting skills may have a significant impact on the issue, but by itself, simply helps individuals take responsibility for their own actions and is not public policy education. Such programs acquire a public policy dimension when people also have the opportunity to strengthen their capacity for effective participation in public decisions about their concerns.

Extension agents working in communities can provide education that helps citizens empower themselves and enables communities to address important public issues more effectively. Involvement in public policy education is open to paid and volunteer staff members as well as specialists or college faculty members. Linking research with teaching continues to be as important in public policy education programs as it is in efforts focused on individual well-being. Credible, factual education is of continuing importance in good extension programs.

With tools such as public policy-making models, leadership and policy process skills, and factual content, association staff members and citizen advisers can develop programs to enable the public and decision makers to interact and find solutions to community problems. Deliberate planning and design done at the beginning of the educational process result in stronger programs.

Unlike many programs that have evolved over the decades and require group process and control, working with a policy issue may not provide solutions or perfect answers. With public policy issues, collective decisions need to be worked out with other individuals and groups who have differing values and viewpoints.

Many extension agents expect to be able to provide the answers to whatever the situation might be. It is uncomfortable to present alternatives and possible consequences without recommending a final solution. Skill is needed to help people function in groups, resolve conflicts, and make collective decisions. Creative thinking is needed to build common ground and to satisfy the needs of different people.

In the public policy education process, paid and volunteer staff members support learners in identifying alternatives and obtaining a balanced perspective on options. This may be difficult if the educator has strong personal views on the subject or thinks that the organization should support certain clients or industries. Long-term organizational supporters may also view extension as being responsible for promoting particular views, such as being the champions for rural youth programs. An open discussion among the county staff and advisory groups may be necessary to clarify extension’s educational role.

The case studies included in this publication represent the diversity of the current system and include some of the key components of public policy education programs:

1. Audiences in a variety of roles, such as individuals, families, organizations, and decision makers in government and elsewhere.

2. Provision of both content (information about the issue) and process (skills needed for effective action).

3. Commitment to democratic decision making rather than advocacy for particular solutions.

4. Education in different stages of issue evolution (see page 4), including (a) early stages when concerns or issues are being clarified and people are beginning to become involved and (b) later stages when issues have been developed to the point of considering different alternatives and moving toward a decision.

The case studies are not intended to be examples of perfectly executed public policy education programs. Public policy education is in an infancy stage. No one knows exactly how to do it. We are still learning. These cases are presented as tools for identifying where we are and where we can go. By reflecting on experiences like these, relating them to the issue evolution model, and building our skills, we can develop future programs that will support the survival of our society and contribute to the betterment of the world.
THE ISSUE EVOLUTION MODEL FOR PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION

There is a certain amount of regularity in the way different issues are raised, debated, and resolved, which can be summarized as stages in the process of issue evolution. Proponents of the issue evolution model for public policy education argue that educational programs are more likely to be successful if they are designed with attention to the stage an issue is in and with the goal of helping the community move the issue to successive stages.

The stages of issue evolution are represented in the model's central circle. Policy-making processes begin in stage 1, when, for example, local elected officials, agency personnel, interest groups, or ordinary citizens identify a concern, problem, or vision of how things could be better.

In stage 2, additional participants become involved as those with the concern seek supporters and contact policy makers and as opposition begins to arise.

In stage 3, an issue emerges or gains clarity as participants translate their concerns into goals and become aware of points of disagreement with other participants.

In stage 4, participants seek and propose alternative solutions as they try to accomplish their goals, counteract previously suggested alternatives they don’t like, or search for workable compromises.

In stage 5, the proposed alternatives are discussed and evaluated in terms of anticipated consequences—what impact will they have, what will be gained or lost, who will benefit, and who will lose.

In stage 6, a policy decision is made, influenced by participants on different sides of the issue. Decisions are often compromises among the preferences of different participants.

In stage 7, the new policy is implemented.

Finally, in stage 8, results are evaluated, possibly by formal research, but more often through the experiences and reactions of the people affected by the new policy. If a new concern emerges, the process begins again.

Like all models, this one is oversimplified. The stages may not occur in such a regular order, and some may be hidden from public view. There is likely to be much movement back and forth among the stages. The process may stop with no further movement toward issue resolution. Most importantly, different participants may be in different stages at the same time, some ready to make a decision, for example, and others just becoming aware of a situation and developing a concern.

The outer ring of the model suggests appropriate educational responses for each stage of issue evolution. (Different responses may be needed for different audiences if people are in different stages.) The model is intended to be helpful in designing educational programs as well as in evaluating success in advancing the process from one stage to the next.
ISSUE EVOLUTION—EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION MODEL

1. Help audiences understand existing conditions. Show how different groups are affected. Help people look beyond symptoms. Help separate facts and myths and clarify values.

2. Identify the decision makers and the others affected by the situation. Stimulate involvement. Encourage communication among decision makers, supporters, and opponents.

3. Help clarify goals or interests. Help people understand the goals or interests of others and the points of disagreement. Help get the issue on the agenda.

4. Identify alternatives, reflecting all sides of the issue, including doing nothing. Help locate or invent additional alternatives.

5. Help predict and analyze the consequences, including the impacts on values as well as objective conditions. Show how consequences vary for different groups. Facilitate the comparison of alternatives.

6. Explain where and when decisions will be made and who will make them. Explain how decisions are made and influenced. Enable audiences to design realistic strategies.

7. Inform people about new policies and how they and others are affected. Explain how and why they were enacted. Help people understand how to ensure proper implementation.


1. CONCERN
2. INVOLVEMENT
3. ISSUE
4. ALTERNATIVES
5. CONSEQUENCES
6. CHOICE
7. IMPLEMENTATION
8. EVALUATION

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR USE WITH CASE STUDIES

You may find it helpful to keep in mind the following questions while reading or discussing the case studies:

1. What public policy issue is being addressed? Why is it a public issue rather than a private or personal issue?

2. What public policy decisions are expected as a result of the educational program?

3. How did extension get involved?

4. Is this an appropriate issue for extension?

5. What are the educational objectives, and how were they identified?

6. Who are the audiences to whom the program is addressed? How were they selected?

7. What educational delivery methods were developed and used?

8. In what stage(s) of issue evolution does the case study fall? (See pages 4 and 5.) Did the agents follow the model closely or use an intuitive process?

9. To what extent was the educational program directed at giving people the facts?

10. How much effort was directed to developing the learners' abilities to participate in policy discussions and decisions with other people?

11. What were the roles of the agents?

The case studies may be helpful to you as you plan programs in public policy education. We believe that by working through the above questions you can become better educators and design stronger programs in the future.
In the Northeast where water is generally plentiful, its availability has often been taken for granted. People obtain water from a private well without thinking about the source or the connection to a neighbor’s supply. Users on municipal supplies turn on the tap and water flows. Temporary droughts, overused aquifers, and visible pollution of surface waters have begun to alert citizens to the value of this natural resource and the potential dangers that threaten future supplies. Because supplies are interconnected and vulnerable in a variety of ways, protection of water is becoming an important topic on the public agenda.

SITUATION

Clean, picturesque Canandaigua Lake provides high-quality drinking water for five municipal systems serving nearly 50,000 people in Ontario, Wayne, and Yates counties. The lake serves as an economic and aesthetic base for the tourism industry in the Finger Lakes area of central New York. As a wildlife habitat and highly rated fishery, it attracts many visitors and users.

From 1980 to 1986, the city of Canandaigua on the north end of the lake was the fastest growing municipality in New York State. Heavy commercial and residential development created demands for more water, increased runoff into the lake, and congested the shoreline. Seasonal cottages around the lake were transformed into year-round homes with little regard for adequate sewage treatment. Although not visible to everyone, the life of the lake was in danger.

Growing recreational use of the lake caused more waste discharge. The visible effects were nuisance weeds growing thick in some areas and litter collecting along the shore. Sediment plumes were seen in the spring during heavy runoff from melting snow and rain. Inadequate septic systems, road runoff, agricultural practices, and construction operations were suspected contributors to lake water quality concerns.

Protection of the lake had been fragmented and sporadic. Neither Ontario County nor Yates County, which border the lake, had county health departments, and they relied on the regional office of the New York State Department of Health for protection. A joint watershed commission of the five municipal water users employed only one watershed inspector to work with town code enforcement officers on the proper design, installation, and function of septic systems. The rules and regulations for lake protection had not been reviewed or updated since the 1950s.

Canandaigua Lake Pure Waters (CLPW), a membership organization composed primarily of lakeshore owners and interested citizens, along with several other organizations, served as special-interest watchdogs for the
lake. They were involved in water quality monitoring and public awareness efforts, but credited primarily from their strong vested interest. They preferred to lobby for action rather than educate others about the need for protection.

Local concern about the future of the lake escalated after a series of newspaper articles portrayed the situation. In the spring of 1988, the city of Canandaigua proposed that representatives of municipal governments, lake associations, county and state agencies, and other groups join together to address concerns about the watershed area surrounding the lake. Municipal response varied from active participation in informal discussions to suspicion and indifference. By late summer, the participants agreed on the importance of enforcing existing rules and regulations and investigating the impact of recreation and development on the lake.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

After the city of Canandaigua and the local media called for new, coordinated initiatives regarding the protection of Canandaigua Lake, the extension agent consulted with the staff of the Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District and the New York State Water Resources Institute at Cornell about possible assistance.

In fall of 1988, the agent discussed the prospects with the agriculture program committee of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ontario County. The agent proposed that extension become involved as a nonpartisan facilitator and a representative of agriculture. He thought he could bring together the many stakeholders to discuss, focus, and plan appropriate responses to community concerns. Because of the public policy nature of the proposed project, the committee expressed uncertainty about the initiative. This was a significantly different way of doing business for extension. The agent pointed out that more than 35 percent of the land in the watershed was in agricultural use. He suggested that the agriculture community could be part of the solution or risk the consequences of not participating in the process.

The committee finally agreed that extension should become involved in facilitating a nonpolitical, community-based organization that would bring public concerns for protection of the lake together with the agendas of elected officials. Extension proposed to focus efforts on educational opportunities with a public policy process-oriented approach. The ultimate goal was to enact and enforce appropriate land use decisions that would control the negative impacts on the lake.

The extension agent, along with the conservation educator of the Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District and a volunteer, attended a Kellogg-funded Family Community Leadership training program. They became familiar with the issue evolution–public policy education model and decided that it was applicable to the watershed protection project. The model emphasizes the need for involvement of diverse interests to resolve community issues and provides a logical sequence of steps to follow. Throughout the project, the extension agent referred to the model while working with other agency colleagues, municipal officials, and volunteers.

The agent said it was like teaching farm safety—the program seldom drew a crowd, but it could be taught in small doses, as part of other meetings.

The agent persisted in warning citizens that elected officials wouldn’t consider proposing local ordinances until they were sure that their own constituency would support it. Education of the citizens about lake protection and the issues facing the lake and watershed was based on the notion that an educated population would lead to
informed decision making by elected officials. The belief in the ability of citizens to affect the public agenda was communicated and shared by others working on the watershed protection program.

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ontario County and the Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District, in cooperation with the Community College of the Finger Lakes, began designing the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Task Force project. The New York State Water Resources Institute at Cornell University provided technical and educational resources to the group.

Agreeing that local communities should participate in protecting Canandaigua Lake, the planning committee solicited commitments from the municipalities in the watershed and the municipalities using water from the lake. During the summer and early fall of 1989, the extension agent and a colleague from the Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District presented the proposed project to every town and village board. Eleven municipalities responded with financial resources (a total of $12,000) and a commitment of staff expertise.

Individuals were recruited from various community organizations and agencies to form a core group, which evolved into an executive committee and seven subcommittees. With leadership training provided by the extension agent, executive committee and subcommittee members gained skills to develop policy and prioritize the course of action. Executive committee members, with the agent as chairperson, were a clearinghouse for coordinated public information efforts.

In October 1989, the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Task Force was officially acknowledged at an organizational meeting supported by more than thirty agencies and organizations. Community leaders, local decision makers, community agency and organization staff members, and others attended. The following goals of the task force were identified:

1. To coordinate a comprehensive approach to enhancing the quality of life in the Canandaigua Lake watershed.

2. To protect and enhance the quality of Canandaigua Lake.

3. To encourage and improve management practices in the Canandaigua Lake watershed.

4. To strengthen technical capabilities at the local and county level to make better technical decisions and foster self-help.

Following the successful kickoff of the task force and the local commitment of resources, a state senator offered to help secure additional funding with an aid to locality grant in 1990. Funding was used primarily for educational and informational resources to heighten awareness of Canandaigua Lake and its need for protection as well as to generate concern and participation in the task force project.

A series of public forums were held in five communities throughout the watershed to build awareness and to give the residents and lake users an opportunity to express their concerns. More than 350 residents and interested citizens attended the forums and completed an attitude and opinion survey, indicating widespread public support for protecting the watershed. Participants in the public forums shared their suspicions about the causes of the lake's water quality problems. Respondents indicated that local communities should take the lead in working with county and state agencies to ensure the preservation and protection of the resource.

Based on the information gathered, educational activities were developed to increase understanding of the issues
and to encourage individuals to adopt sound practices to protect the lake. Specific audiences whose activities directly affected the lake were targeted.

Workshops and seminars for private homeowners included sessions on lawn care for homeowners, water resource management for private water system users, and septic system care and maintenance for homeowners. A seminar on watershed management issues was held for local decision makers.

Developers, builders, and farmers received information about the best management practices to prevent erosion and control sediment. Information for local highway superintendents focused on highway maintenance, and recreationists learned “lake etiquette.” Resources for the programs came from Cornell, other universities, and local agencies. Where appropriate, the Ontario County Planning Department, the Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the regional office of the New York State Department of Health were asked to share their expertise. The extension agent received training from professors at Cornell.

A variety of methods were used continually to increase community awareness. Excursions on the lake were offered to the general public, to youth, and to decision makers so they could see and hear the lake’s story. A narrated slide set was developed for community groups to view. A brochure describing a self-guided auto tour to review lake resources and problems was produced and distributed. Recreational and septic system surveys increased people’s awareness of sound water protection practices.

A home-siting handbook with information for prospective home buyers and builders about sound practices for water protection was developed by the Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District. This was distributed through lending institutions, code enforcement officers, real estate agents, and planning boards.

An educational coloring book for children was developed. The publication costs were covered by a lake association, and it was distributed through the local newspaper and school districts. In addition, an educational play was produced featuring “Drip and Drop,” who fell from the sky, landed in the watershed, and made their way through a variety of water uses. The play was presented to more than 3,500 elementary school-aged children in 1991. The fifth grade class of the Canandaigua School, in cooperation with the city’s Department of Public Works, labeled the storm drains in the city “Drains to Lake—Do Not Dump” to discourage dumping of contaminants.

RESULTS

The agriculture program committee of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ontario County recently acted to broaden their scope to include agriculture and natural resources. This was the same committee that, in 1988, hesitated to become involved. They are proud of the progress made toward protecting the lake.

When asked if the water is cleaner, the extension agent replied, “It may not be cleaner, but it certainly isn’t any dirtier.” What has been accomplished? “Many people from different perspectives are now communicating. Lots of folks, including state and local agencies, community organizations, and individuals, are participating, and there is a lot more awareness of the situation. Planning and strategy identification are under way, and implementation is certainly in the near future.”

Everyone is ready to act on lake protection practices, including the local chamber of commerce, which has
added protection of the lake as one of its goals. From the awareness and issue clarification stages, the project is ready to move to the alternatives stage. People are asking for a comprehensive, integrated management plan for protecting the lake and the watershed. Local decision makers and participants from a variety of groups have reached consensus that it is time to develop a consistent, implementable watershed management plan. Another series of community forums like those used to kick off the project is planned. The issue evolution model will be used to show what has been accomplished and how alternatives and choices must now be discussed.

To help in choosing the best alternatives, the task force will be using the new state guidance manual for water quality planning developed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee. Funding for this effort has been obtained through the state and the Non-Point Source Water Pollution Control Act. This provides the opportunity to strengthen technical decision making capabilities within the watershed. With data on water quality status and pollution sources and mathematical modeling, the group should be able to identify the best alternative management practices.

The task force is evolving into an organization with more lay leadership. Based in part on the task force’s success, personnel from various agencies are being asked to assist other community efforts in water resource management.

**Observations and Questions**

In resolving public issues, patience is very important. Public policy education requires time to overcome resistance and lack of knowledge. This project was initiated in 1988 and at this writing is three and one-half years in process. Individuals or groups initially involved in an issue sometimes lack the patience to help the community at large understand the issue. They find it difficult to hold back until the public catches up. In this case, members of several lake associations indicated a desire for immediate action rather than additional education. Slowing down to move deliberately through the stages of an issue is noteworthy. Such an approach shows consideration for all the learners involved.

Awareness of the link between land use and water resources is desperately needed. One town official was ready to ban lawn chemicals near the lake despite the lack of understanding by the public of the real impact of such chemicals on the lake’s water quality.

The issue evolution model shows educational intervention as a coaching process parallel to the evolution of an issue. In this case, the extension agent’s leadership as chair of the executive committee was a key role in moving the project ahead. The question one must ask is whether this is an appropriate role for an extension agent. Could other individuals have been trained to take on that role?

Does being in the leadership role jeopardize the ability of the agent to present both sides of an issue? Was the agent an advocate for the lake? Did he have a vested interest in the lake because the topic fit his professional specialty? Or was lake protection such a widely shared value that advocacy was not an important concern?

Was the issue of sufficient importance for extension to be working on it? What if someone had argued that other issues should have had higher priority? How should extension choose which issues to address through public policy education?
Dutchess County Farmland Preservation

Issues regarding land use appear more frequently on the public agenda as population densities increase and open spaces disappear. Private ownership and control of land is a strongly held value until one's neighbors begin to use the land in an offensive manner. Achieving the balance between individual freedom and public land use control has the added complication that often the fiscal support of local municipalities and schools is tied to the economic value of land.

SITUATION

Dutchess County, located in eastern New York 100 miles north of metropolitan New York City, encompasses residences, light industry, and diverse agricultural enterprises. As a part of the beautiful and agriculturally productive Hudson River Valley, one-fourth of the county's land (125,000 acres) is involved in agricultural production. An equal amount of land is open space or occupied by rural residences.

An influx of new residents contributed to a population growth rate of 10 percent per decade and a 25 percent increase in housing units from 1970 to 1980. Residential growth and a worsening farm economy resulted in the loss of 38,000 acres of farmland between 1969 and 1988.

Generally the county's economy was relatively strong during this time. The presence of national corporations such as IBM, other industries, and metropolitan commuters contributed to the county's median family income of $47,000 per year. The average home cost $145,000 to purchase.

Many residents felt an affinity for agriculture and the open space it provided, but few had direct knowledge or understanding of the challenges facing agriculture. Property tax rates for farmland and proposed limitations on farming practices were serious problems. Farmers believed that no one else cared and that cooperative community problem solving was impossible. They were suspicious of environmentalists and other groups promoting open space.

Concern was expressed about the loss of open space as bulldozers began work in areas adjacent to established neighborhoods. There also was a lack of understanding of tradeoffs and complications in changing this trend. New housing that contributed to economic growth took away open space. Agriculture that provided open space was taxed at a level that threatened its economic viability. Many counterproductive forces appeared to be at work.

By the spring of 1988, the extension agents for community issues and agriculture in Dutchess County had received enough calls regarding land use preservation and reviewed enough negative farm financial situations that they thought action was needed. With their combined expertise they began to support people in identifying and addressing the issue of land use.
IMPLEMENTATION

The extension staff recognized the need to raise awareness of the issue of land use and the possibilities for solutions. A tour was organized to neighboring Connecticut and Massachusetts to see how other communities approached similar issues. Although the tour looked at alternatives, the primary purpose was to help the participants overcome feeling powerless to make changes.

Forty local officials, farmers, and others interested in the future of Dutchess County invested $150 and two days of their time to participate in the tour. The group visited farmland that had been preserved through the purchase of development rights. The land kept in agriculture had a lower resale value because the right to sell it in the future for development had been purchased by the community. They also visited several cluster developments and affordable housing projects that were located near farms but designed with natural berms and buffer zones, making them compatible with agriculture. The tour did not promote the options viewed as solutions in Dutchess County, but as the basis for a dialogue on what the county could do.

The tour brought leaders together to consider what could be done. It was a gamble because the extension staff did not know if there was enough interest in the issues to motivate people to act. After the tour, three-fourths of the participants participated in a follow-up committee to determine what should be done next.

The follow-up committee, along with the original advisory coalition, agreed that agriculture should be the focus of educational efforts. Other interests that were part of the larger land use issue were being addressed through established groups and government authorities. To deal effectively with the agriculture issues, the committee decided they needed to become a larger group of diverse interests and should meet regularly. Sixty people were identified and recruited by committee members to become part of a coalition to identify issues and brainstorm solutions. They included elected officials or their representatives from local, county, and state governments; members of the county planning staff, town planning boards, and zoning boards of appeal; representatives of environmental, farm, and economic development groups; and farmers and interested citizens.

The new coalition called itself I.D.E.A.—Information and Dialogue Exchange on Agriculture. The members chose to be an informal group facilitated by Cornell Cooperative Extension. They wanted to be what their name implied: a brainstorming and educational discussion group rather than an advocacy group.

With connections to a variety of other organizations, the group members had avenues for taking action once they understood what could be done and agreed on what should be done. The coalition gave participants the opportunity to vent their frustrations and channel them into positive efforts. The organized dialogue among diverse participants became an avenue for building trust and understanding. The extension staff used facilitation skills to keep the group focused on what they agreed upon rather than their differences.

The group identified many factors involved in preserving open space by maintaining a strong agriculture industry. Lacking the time to deal with everything, they chose to form three committees to focus on public policy issues: taxation, education, and farmer-neighbor relations. A committee formed later on marketing was a move away from public policy education to specific education for farmers about promoting their interests.

All agreed that citizens and local officials needed to understand local agriculture and its diversity, benefits,
and concerns. The overall goal that evolved was to preserve agriculture. The following specific objectives guided the educational efforts:

1. To increase public awareness of the importance of agriculture both economically and aesthetically.

2. To educate local officials and community leaders about the issues and the options for solving the issues.

3. To bring together farm and nonfarm groups and individuals to address common concerns.

In addition to I.D.E.A., there were several other outgrowths of the first tour. One was a seminar for farmers to consider what they could do to protect their personal farm equity and farmland in general. The farmers saw the need to educate nonfarmers. The result was a conference cosponsored by the Farm Bureau, the Dutchess County Planning Federation, and Cornell Cooperative Extension, which attracted more than 100 people, including many planners, to hear about options being used in other states to preserve agricultural land. A slide presentation showed the county legislature the need to preserve agriculture and the options seen on the tour.

With the help of I.D.E.A., the agents identified four activities to build awareness of the land use problem and help separate facts from myths. The activities were designed to reach a variety of audiences, from youth and the general public to farmers and decision makers. They included a video about agriculture, a map of agriculture producers, a study of taxing practices, and a tour to nearby states to view alternatives for making agriculture and development compatible. A group went to Vermont to view two different projects that combined operational farms with limited development and affordable housing.

Taxing practices could not be challenged without documentation. To gather data on town and school property tax distribution, a study of the cost of community services was initiated with financial support from the American Farmland Trust. The Trust had done similar studies in Connecticut and Virginia and wanted to have comparable data on New York because the state's taxing structure was different from the other two states. The study of two different towns in the county compared the cost of furnishing municipal services for residential, agricultural, and commercial-industrial segments of the communities with the revenues produced by each. The findings did not surprise the agriculturalists. For every dollar paid by farmers in taxes, only 21 to 48 cents was used to provide services to agriculture. I.D.E.A. now had facts to use in examining the property tax burden on agricultural land.

The video along with a farm map were time consuming to complete. Their purpose was to educate the public and document the importance of agriculture as an economic and tourism resource. Dutchess County Agriculture: Ensuring Future Harvests was completed in the winter of 1990. The video was shown to community groups, and distribution to schools and libraries was planned. The video showed the diversity of agriculture in Dutchess County, from dairy and orchards to vineyards and Christmas trees. The production was funded by donations from farmers, farm organizations, businesses, community groups, and individuals.

The first annual farm map showing farms that offered public visits was completed in the spring of 1991 by a college intern from Vassar. The general public could see firsthand the source of their food and other agricultural
products. The sixty-two farms that were included on the map funded the project along with small border ads.

The agents working on this program fulfilled a variety of roles. The agriculture agents brought expertise in agriculture, providing facts and economic data used to educate the community and decision makers. They maintained relationships with farmers. The community issues agent was a facilitator for I.D.E.A., served as an educator for nonfarmers, and developed the tools used to educate the public.

RESULTS

I.D.E.A. built bridges to other organizations and precipitated action. One member ran for the assembly. The same person led with others the adoption of several resolutions regarding farmland preservation at the Farm Bureau's state convention—a task that Farm Bureau leaders said could not be done. Group representatives successfully went to Greenway, a group advocating the preservation of open space, and asked that agriculture be included on their agenda. Agriculture is now a subcommittee of this group and on the agendas of other organizations.

Because I.D.E.A. included several state senators, state legislation was initiated. Taxation and assessment amendments passed, while family farm preservation proposals did not. Legislation to purchase development rights was an option for discussion. Farmers initially did not support this legislation but are more open to the option now. They were concerned that purchasing development rights alone would not be enough to preserve agriculture.

I.D.E.A., extension, and the county Environmental Management Council, along with the county planning department and other groups, joined together to develop a proposal on a land stewardship fund. The purpose of the fund was to give tax abatements to agriculture and to help nonprofit organizations purchase land and limit the future development of current open space. The proposal was given to a legislative study group for consideration.

The farmer-neighbor committee of I.D.E.A. developed a right-to-farm ordinance that informs new residents that they are moving into a farming area. Therefore, they cannot necessarily change the practices of the farms that already exist around them. Two towns have adopted the ordinance and others are considering it.

Community attitudes have changed as a result of the many educational activities and the dialogue among community leaders. A comparison of newspaper stories before and after clearly shows the difference. Early stories focused only on the problems of agriculture, while later articles were about the positive benefits of agriculture. Agricultural land preservation is on the agenda of many organizations, which was not true in 1988.

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS

The process of reducing conflict and building understanding of different perspectives is an important part of this case study. Conflict is often identified only if it is open and publicly displayed. Yet in this case there was a perceived conflict between agriculture and environmental groups.

The dialogue among I.D.E.A. participants was an important key to future policy building. Because the extension agents were successful at facilitating communication among diverse interests, the groups found that they could help each other. The farmers alone were not a
strong lobby for their interests, and the open space proponents did not have the money to purchase land. The trust that developed was necessary for finding common goals for the future preservation of land. What special efforts were needed to enable successful dialogue among different groups?

The staff expected that appropriate mechanisms would be put in place to protect agriculture and that developing leaders would take action on future issues. Frustration with maintaining the coalition and not having quick answers for the future has challenged the agents. It is important to ask whether staff members have been providing process assistance to the coalition, enabling it to promote alternatives it has decided upon, or have they been promoting their own favored alternatives?

What critical decisions did the staff make regarding their roles? What other roles might they have assumed, and how could those roles have affected the outcome of the work with I.D.E.A.? Special assistance to agriculture could be defended as empowerment—assistance to interests that are affected by policy making but not adequately represented. But such assistance puts extension in a delicate situation (given extension’s close historical association with agriculture), which has to be carefully justified. Was this group involved in advocacy rather than public policy education, and if so, when?

When asked if they used the issue evolution model to design the program, the staff said they did not directly follow the model but felt intuitively that they were incorporating public policy principles into their plan. How might the staff have incorporated the model into their work with I.D.E.A.? What other options might have been considered that would lead the group to further study of decision processes?
WASTEWISE, A CITIZEN EDUCATION PROJECT ON SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL

Urbanized societies expect governments to collect and dispose of solid waste. This responsibility is a problem not easily solved by many communities. None of the solutions are overwhelmingly better than others. Each is costly and has environmental drawbacks. One solution, preventing the problem by generating less garbage, is at odds with ingrained American values to produce and consume.

SITUATION

Broome County, located on the New York–Pennsylvania border, has an urban core of 180,000 people located in the triple cities of Binghamton, Johnson City, and Endicott in the valleys of the Susquehanna and Chenango rivers. Another 30,000 people live in the rural areas east and north of the triple cities. Historically, the area was organized into towns, villages, and a city, with a county government that had limited responsibility. In the 1960s and 1970s, the county government expanded to include services such as waste management that were traditionally provided by the smaller municipalities.

In 1968 the county launched a county landfill to replace the numerous substandard town dumps and landfills that were scattered around the county. The new landfill was not without problems. In 1972 a resident near the landfill successfully sued the county for polluting a creek with leachate from the landfill. Area citizens expressed concerns about potential groundwater pollution and noisy garbage trucks leaving a trail of garbage during trips to the facility. The rate of waste generation grew, limiting the expected life of the landfill. It was increasingly expensive to operate due to stringent state regulations designed to protect the environment.

Community leaders in Broome County acknowledged that solid waste management was a problem and agreed that solutions were needed. The landfill used for the disposal of garbage was filling up faster than initially expected and was increasingly more expensive to operate.

By 1985, half a million dollars had been spent to explore alternative methods of dealing with the county’s garbage problem. Contracted engineering consultants focused on burning garbage with a new technology aimed at energy recovery. Reports generated public controversy. Citizen opposition groups were formed. Additional controversy centered on technologies—trash baling, recycling, and composting—not mentioned in the consultants’ reports.

County-sponsored informational meetings were little more than shouting matches. The narrow focus of the consultants’ reports and recommendations gave the appearance of vested interests (some consulting firms designed the resource recovery facilities they recom-
mended). Also, the consulting firms were not located in the county, resulting in ineffective information transfer to the public.

The county Environmental Management Council requested that Cornell Cooperative Extension conduct a public education program on waste disposal. Extension's community issues program already had a reputation for providing reliable, balanced information to the community.

IMPLEMENTATION

Working together, the extension staff and a community advisory committee agreed that an educational program should focus on giving government officials, community leaders, and citizens a broader understanding of alternative waste disposal technologies. Everyone recognized that traditional public meetings would not be effective. They decided that trained volunteer leaders would be a practical way to deliver information to established citizen groups.

An educational program that became known as "Wastewise" was developed and presented to a local foundation for funding. The objectives of the program were

1. To evaluate the knowledge and attitudes of twenty citizens about waste disposal prior to program implementation so that misconceptions could be clearly addressed.

2. To recruit and train forty selected community leaders, including legislators, local government officials, teachers, and citizens, to be volunteer community educators. Training would include a firsthand tour of disposal alternatives and the development of public presentation skills.

3. To develop resources—a slide-tape show and fact sheets—that would reach at least 1,200 citizens.

With $7,000 of foundation funding, the next steps were to gather information about the current levels of knowledge about waste disposal, plan the initial training tour, and begin to recruit volunteers. Advisory committee members surveyed their friends and acquaintances and found confusion about costs and severity of environmental impacts. This background helped shape the training and resource materials.

Thirty-three people with extensive experience in solid waste or other public issues went on the two-day fall bus tour to see innovative waste management facilities in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York. Staff from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Broome County Waste Division joined the tour and shared background information with the group between stops. At each stop, facilities were in operation, and managers were eager to share their experiences. At the Scranton composting facility in Pennsylvania, new compost piles were being built, and finished compost was stored for use. Volunteers and paid staff members were sorting glass and disassembling white goods at the Montclair, New Jersey, recycling center. A continual line of garbage trucks kept crane operators and plant engineers busy at the Peekskill, New York, resource recovery plant.

After the on-site visits, participants met with officials from different counties to discuss how they were handling their waste problems. Each official discussed solutions and approaches. No one had the same answers for the problem.

The bus tour changed the opinions of participants about some alternatives and reinforced them in others.
Composting and recycling operations were much simpler than participants had expected. The resource recovery operation was considered much cleaner than previously thought. Discussions with officials from other counties increased the participants’ concerns about the siting of solid waste disposal facilities and the costs of resource recovery systems.

With photos and facts gathered from the tour, the next step of the volunteers was to develop a slide show to take to community groups. This was easier said than done. The volunteers had different opinions on the “facts,” on how much information to present, and on the best way to present data. After four group meetings and many individual consultations, two slide shows were produced rather than the one originally planned.

Development of the slide sets was as much a part of the training experience as the tour. Differences of opinion had to be negotiated and resolved. The original plan to train volunteers in public presentation skills, listening techniques, and conflict management skills was not formalized. By the time the group agreed on the content of the slide shows, they were not willing to participate in more training.

The first slide-tape program focused on definitions of solid waste, steps in disposal, and composting, recycling, landfilling, and resource recovery alternatives. The second show focused on Broome County solid waste issues, such as the environmental problems at the landfill and siting the proposed resource recovery plant. This slide set has been updated twice since the original version was produced. Both presentations were accompanied by discussion guides to stimulate audience participation.

Most groups who viewed the slide shows asked questions and participated in rational discussions. Few people could remember specific facts, such as the parts per billion of specific components in emissions, but they did go away appreciating that no one solution was perfect. Several groups felt that the show was biased toward recycling, while two other groups felt it was biased toward resource recovery.

RESULTS

The original slide programs were shown to more than 2,000 people. Volunteers did most of the presentations, some doing none and others doing five or six. When the volunteers agreed to go on the tour and to do community presentations, they paid a $25 fee, which was refunded when they completed their community presentations. Seven people forfeited their fees for a variety of reasons. Some were busy, while others lacked the confidence to give presentations to groups. In several cases, the extension staff assisted the volunteers in the presentations.

Generally, the staff and volunteers felt the educational process was effective. They reported results such as “greater awareness,” “reasonable weighing of the alternatives,” and “asking good questions.”

The public policy changes that took place as a result of the program were not necessarily what the staff involved in the project expected. In hindsight, they thought that education would bring the debate to a final decision on whether to proceed with building a resource recovery plant. Changes in county leadership delayed a decision on the issue, and the battle continued. The state Department of Environmental Conservation became involved in reviewing plans, and the landfill continued to fill up. With more informed county residents, discussions included more information regarding the options.

An important consensus that evolved out of the educational experience of the volunteers had a significant
initial impact. Persons learned that when the cost of disposing of garbage was separated from the property tax, citizens became aware of the cost of disposing of garbage. A separate tax, a tipping fee, was implemented within six months of the beginning of the Wastewise project. The other major change that took place was that, while no one expected it to be the sole answer to the garbage problem, a comprehensive recycling program was implemented for the county. Before Wastewise, proponents of recycling and waste reduction had had little impact on decision makers.

The initial Wastewise project, which was aimed at decision makers and interested citizens, expanded to other audiences, with more emphasis on individual action rather than policy choices. The extension staff and the advisory committee saw the need to educate children and young adults if there were going to be long-term changes in the amount of waste generated and the methods of disposal. The remainder of the original grant was used to produce a program for grades two through six, using Woodsy Owl to deliver a message on waste reduction and recycling.

In 1989 the county funded a full-time staff position to continue recycling and waste reduction education. The staff updated the Wastewise program and trained another group of volunteers to work with community groups and keep them informed about the county disposal procedures and choices for the future. Participants were recruited from active citizens’ groups and told that they would be asked to volunteer for additional work after a Saturday tour of county waste facilities. Enough funds were available from the county grant for two busloads of people to participate. Less time was spent on the slide set, and volunteers who agreed to do community presentations were trained to teach adults and guide debates that would not become unproductive conflicts.

More curriculum and teaching materials were developed for classroom use. Composting was promoted through a demonstration site and incorporated in gardening classes. A 4-H club put together an exhibit showing a seven-foot cross section of the landfill liner, which was used at the county and state fairs and other environmental sites.

**Observations and Questions**

The key to involving volunteers in such a project is that they have an initial interest and see the importance of the issue. The fee that was assessed in the original Wastewise project was not implemented the second time, and a sufficient number of volunteers agreed to do community presentations.

Over the five-year life of the waste education program, four different agents were involved in the project with the extension association director as the only constant. The agents acted primarily as program developers and information providers. The ability to train volunteers in facilitation skills varied with the experience of the staff. Changes in the staff meant taking time to orient new staff members to the job and the county, but probably helped neutralize extension’s role because no one person became an ultimate authority.

The initial project was a challenge because few Cornell resources or researchers were addressing the problem. There was little university assistance to fall back on for help. University administrators felt strongly at the time that waste disposal was an issue that the university could not address. On the other side, county staff members were very careful to document the sources of information that was shared and to make sure that fact sheets were balanced and represented the wide range of information.
available. Within two years of the start of the project, the Cornell Waste Management Institute was in place at the university to pull together research and provide educational resources for the county staff.

Considerable risk is involved when staff members confront a controversial issue and a minimum of resources. How did the staff in Broome County handle this challenge? What other alternatives were feasible?

What stage was the waste management issue in when Wastewise began? What stages were different audiences in? How did Wastewise meet the needs of audiences at different stages of the issue evolution model? How often did learners possess different levels of knowledge? How can those with higher levels of knowledge be persuaded to slow down and permit others to be helped to catch up?

How did extension get involved? How can extension associations position themselves to be invited to be public policy educators?
Generally, everyone agrees that it is appropriate to provide decent, affordable housing for senior citizens. Providing housing for seniors has multiple benefits: with their families nearby, seniors are able to live independently for a longer time; large, older homes are released for purchase by young families; and, in the long run, the costs for medical and nursing home care decrease.

Many worry, however, about the financial burden that housing for senior citizens may create for tax-paying households. In addition, zoning laws designed to protect the investment of homeowners can block less expensive housing alternatives. The issues that need to be addressed are how communities can provide such housing economically and what public policies need to be changed to implement new and different approaches to the problem.

**SITUATION**

The growth in Dutchess County, referred to in the case study on land use and preservation of agriculture, affected housing costs also. While median household income grew by 50 percent between 1980 and 1986, housing costs increased by 110 percent, appreciating beyond what many groups, including the elderly, could afford. A 1986 rental housing survey conducted by the Dutchess County Department of Planning found that the average annual increase in rents for the same period was 9 percent. The cost of a one-bedroom unit increased 61.1 percent; the cost of a two-bedroom unit increased 70.2 percent during that same period.

Residents over 60 years of age numbered 37,316, or 15.2 percent of the population. Census projections indicated that the number of elderly persons would continue to grow. Many of the elderly lived in single-person households; 8.6 percent had incomes below the poverty level. Many of the elderly single-person households were located in rural towns and villages away from existing options such as nursing homes and congregate housing.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

Extension volunteers, the news media, and the county executive had already recognized the growing need for affordable housing when an extension agent began work on her master's degree at Cornell University. She chose to work with the faculty in the Departments of Human Service Studies and Consumer Economics and Housing. She became involved in assisting with the development of the program Housing Options for Seniors Today (HOST) because it combined her interest in public policy with family economics. When she returned to the country in 1987, she had information on alternative housing options and a program plan for addressing the problem of affordable housing for the elderly.
She initiated work on the issue by meeting with elderly persons and their families in five different geographic locations in the county. These overview meetings helped her assess the interest in and concern for new and different housing options for the elderly. It was clear that the lack of options in area communities was a major concern. Two series of in-depth workshops on alternative housing options were held for this audience. The options included:

1. Match-up housing: A homeowner shares his or her house with an unrelated home seeker.

2. Shared-living residence: A group of unrelated people live together in a single household in a family-type arrangement.

3. Accessory apartments: A separate and independent living unit complete with a kitchen exists within a single-family home.

4. ECHO (elder cottage housing opportunities) units: Small modular or mobile homes are installed on the same property as a pre-existing single-family home. They can be permanently or temporarily installed.

At the same time, it became clear that it was not sufficient to educate only individuals and families. Agencies, groups, and community leaders needed to be involved if public policy changes allowing use of the options were to take place.

The agent consulted with the extension home economics program committee and representatives of interested agencies. The extension committee questioned whether the housing issue was considered education or service and whether extension had resources that were appropriate and not available in agencies that focused on the elderly. The Dutchess County Office for the Aging reported that they did not have staff members that were knowledgeable about housing issues. All agreed that Cornell Cooperative Extension should proceed with a public policy education program and also serve as facilitator and coalition builder.

An advisory coalition, the Dutchess County Committee on Housing for Older Americans, was formed with representatives from the Dutchess County Department of Social Services, the Dutchess County Planning Office, the Office for the Aging, two not-for-profit housing agencies, and the Community Action Agency, plus a rural minister and two public officials. This group reviewed the alternatives offered in the HOST program and recommended educating public officials about the options and the need to adapt zoning regulations to allow nontraditional solutions.

They set the following objectives:

1. To provide older people and their families with the information necessary to make intelligent, informed housing decisions.

2. To work together to provide information and increase understanding about newly developed options.

3. To strengthen the capacity of local municipal governments to respond to the housing needs of their older residents with programs that use existing community-based resources.

An overview session was planned and held for county decision makers, including municipal officials and not-for-profit housing leaders. The purpose of the meeting was to increase the participants’ sensitivity to the needs of the elderly and to have them check their own ordinances for roadblocks to facilitating solutions.

The evening program included introductory remarks by the county executive and a video presentation of the
housing options that had been presented to the county’s elderly individuals and their families. That was followed by a discussion with a professor from the University of Oregon on the adaptive zoning used in Oregon to allow for elderly housing. A local planning board member related how zoning in Dutchess County towns limited new approaches to providing elderly housing. Participants had been asked to bring a copy of their local municipal zoning code or ordinance with them so they could evaluate it as part of the discussion.

Participants were very pleased with the information they received. Three representatives of the rural town of North East asked that the program be repeated there.

The presentation in North East focused on the ECHO option. A Cornell professor discussed the needs of the elderly, and the manager of a Pennsylvania construction company showed slides of the units that they were manufacturing. A Canadian official from the Ministry of Housing shared how Canada had piloted an ECHO housing program. A representative of the Office for the Aging introduced funding opportunities for communities and not-for-profit agencies to initiate ECHO housing.

Town officials were convinced that this type of housing would help meet the needs of their residents who wanted to remain in the community and not move to Florida. The housing was consistent with the rural character of the community. It allowed the elderly residents to continue to maintain their independence, which was a priority.

The extension staff gave the town housing coordinator a sample zoning ordinance, which she rewrote several times for the town board. The agent advised the coordinator and met with the town board to discuss the needs of the elderly and how the ordinance worked in other communities. While the board worked on the ordinance, a model ECHO unit was placed on town property so the public could tour it and get more information.

Interest in the town’s activities led the extension agent to organize another countywide meeting to explain the ECHO concept. Again the builder-developer came and explained design features and construction and siting requirements. A national leader of housing for the elderly discussed how zoning could be designed to encourage community and family acceptance of the units. A panel made up of a local planner, a real estate agent, and a care provider addressed the local issues.

Parallel to the ECHO efforts, the extension agent continued to build awareness of the needs of the elderly and housing options to meet those needs. She participated in one fifteen-minute and three one-hour radio talk shows and recorded ten one-minute radio spots, which were aired throughout the county. Information about housing options and Cornell Cooperative Extension resources were distributed to and through local agencies. Individual citizens began to contact the extension office for information about housing options for themselves and family members.

RESULTS

In mid-1989 North East adopted the first zoning ordinance in Dutchess County and New York State that allowed the placement of ECHO housing. Their ordinance allowed both private and public ownership. A second town, Rhinebeck, adopted an ordinance that allowed only public ownership of an ECHO unit. Three more towns followed suit the same year.

Two different not-for-profit organizations began developing programs for placing the units. In North East, the project was headed by the Rural Preservation Com-
pany, while in Rhinebeck the Northern Dutchess Hospital took leadership.

Public acceptance was slow. Coalition members who had contact with potential users discussed the ECHO option at every opportunity. Finally, in the fall of 1990 the first unit, which was privately owned and maintained, was placed for use in the town of North East.

In the fall of 1991 the first publicly owned unit was placed in the town of Pine Plains, which was the third town to adopt an ordinance. This unit was purchased by the town with a county community development grant and turned over to the Rural Preservation Company for placement and management. The town made a critical policy decision to not assess an additional tax on the property on which the unit was placed.

The tenant, a retired school bus driver, paid rent equal to a third of her monthly pension to the not-for-profit Rural Preservation Company. These funds were used for maintenance and escrowed for future removal or replacement of the unit. The resident was excised to be near her grandchildren and stated that this was the “first new house” she had ever had.

Another town passed an accessory apartment ordinance, which resulted in the construction of five to six attached apartments. This provided housing, but was less flexible for future property owners.

The extension agent points out that it is important to stop and evaluate programs and their impact. At the time of the writing of this case study, the agent felt the need to do just that. Her preliminary conclusions were that there was a need to do more follow-up with the general public, so that more people would choose to use the options that had been developed.

Like many of her counterparts, the agent recognized the need for patience. It takes time to change public policies and procedures. It takes time for the public to accept new options for dealing with old problems. But the charges in public policy that are now under way will allow many more such units in the future.

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS

The partnership with Cornell was very important to the county effort. The expertise and connections to other resources would not have been available without the backup of specialists.

Educational programs are most successful when the problem has been identified and there is public concern for the problem. In Dutchess County, the media’s attention to the problem made it visible to community leaders and easier to get them to attend meetings to deal with the alternative solutions.

This program, which was started in 1987, did not result in a new housing unit until 1990–91. Was that a reasonable time frame? When should a project be evaluated to assess progress?

Was the effort an educational program or a community service? What is the boundary between education and service? How could a stronger educational approach have been developed?

This educational effort had many different audiences, including elderly persons and their families, local government officials, and not-for-profit housing leaders. Could there have been more opportunities for these groups to communicate directly with one another and learn from one another (as well as from the extension agent and various experts)?

Finally, were all options promoted equally or was one option promoted more than others? Why did this happen? What were the consequences? What was gained, and what was lost?
Quality child care is an issue of widespread public concern, primarily because there is no consensus as to who should be responsible for the provision of care or how care should be provided. As more women enter the work force and the need for child care increases, public officials and business leaders are frequently confronted with the expectation that community support is needed to sustain quality child care. Intermingled with the debates about who should pay for care are arguments about which types of care are the best for children and the most economical to provide.

SITUATION

Seneca and Cayuga counties are separated by one of the Finger Lakes in central New York and connected by one highway at their northern ends. In 1988 they shared a common need for affordable quality day care for children of working parents. The number of families with young children and both parents working was growing, following the national trend. Both counties had an additional challenge: many workers were commuting outside the county to work and they needed more day care hours than parents working nearby. Steps were taken in each county to address the issue of providing sufficient quality child care.

In Cayuga County, a call for action was initiated by a church social concerns committee, which sponsored a community luncheon. A review of available day care services revealed only three licensed day care centers in the county. One caseworker in the county Department of Social Services was assigned to work on day care, and there were only twenty-three county-certified family day care homes and no state-licensed homes. The luncheon participants thought they should launch another day care center, but a social services administrator convinced the group to look further. She invited the Cornell Cooperative Extension agent for human development to help the group explore day care options.

In Seneca County, the human development agent had led occasional workshops for day care providers. She saw that the demand for services exceeded the availability. There were waiting lists at the three existing centers and very few openings for infant care. Not one family day care home in the county was licensed. The agent realized that the issue not only was a personal or family issue, but also affected the community’s work force and its economic well-being. She invited individuals, organizations, and agencies interested in child care to a meeting to discuss taking action.

IMPLEMENTATION

The initial groups in each county continued to meet and investigate how to increase the amount of quality child care. In the process, each learned how child care
Coordinating councils could recruit, train, and support child care providers and link them to parents in need. A representative of the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council explained that funding opportunities were better if the counties collaborated rather than built separate councils. Both county groups decided that was the best solution for their situation.

The two groups met and agreed to a merger, which would become the Child Care Coordinating Council of the Finger Lakes. A merger committee with equal representation from each county began work on details, including clarifying individual philosophies and a collective purpose. Each advisory council continued to deal with issues specific to its county.

As work progressed, the agents discussed the need for quality day care with their respective extension advisory committees. In each county extension association, young families were a priority audience and day care was an important support for those families. Each agent planned significant time to address the goal of increasing the amount of quality child care. In addition, the Cayuga County Cornell Cooperative Extension Association agreed to be the sponsoring agency until the proposed council was fully established.

To pursue more public support for child care successfully, each county group recognized that it needed to quantify the need for day care. They tabulated existing child care services and surveyed families and employers to assess their needs for child care.

Agents and volunteers searched for funding sources and lobbied state senators and assembly members. Work began in earnest to identify and take advantage of available resources. They learned that the designated economic development zone for the city of Auburn could provide financing and training of child care workers.

Chamber of Commerce members helped the groups establish contacts within the business community. A breakfast meeting was organized to describe the benefits of quality child care and the results of the needs assessment and to honor a state senator who supported the effort with a legislative initiative grant.

Educational and informational activities were used to keep the child care issue in the public eye. A “Day Care Education Day” was held for community leaders and parents. Cornell specialists helped define quality day care. The audience was asked to share their ideas on newsprint posted around the room. During the “Week of the Young Child,” day care providers worked together to educate the public about quality day care and to raise funds. Volunteers participated in community activities, selling balloons, tote bags, and food items to raise interest as well as money.

Fund raising was challenging. The early promise of a $15,000 legislative initiative grant from the area’s state senator gave the group courage to incorporate, solicit members, and write grant proposals to businesses, United Way, city and county governments, and the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council.

By the end of 1989, the new council had completed incorporation, a membership campaign, six educational programs, and numerous public awareness presentations. At the first annual meeting in October, the joint council was officially launched. Child care was provided so that the council’s actions modeled what they advocated.

The goals for the next year ranged from continuing to educate the public to hiring a director and obtaining funding and tax exempt status. The New York State Child Care Coordinating Council funded a family day care training project for the two counties. By midyear, the council had commitments for a grant of $96,000 for
family day care start-up, $9,000 from the City of Auburn, a $14,000 corporate contract, and a $25,000 loan program. A full-time director-trainer and a part-time secretary-bookkeeper were hired. The struggle to obtain 501(c)3 tax exempt status continued, and obtaining liability insurance coverage was added to the council's challenges. Promised funds were slow in arriving, but the council survived and became independent as it carried out its mission of providing and advocating for quality child care.

Then in the spring of 1992 tragedy struck in Seneca County. A child in an unlicensed day care home died when he strangled on a venetian blind cord. The regional licensing office of the New York State Department of Social Services immediately came into the county and closed three unlicensed homes, including one that was caring for eighteen children. The community was incensed. Some were upset that a child died, while others were irate that their child care was gone overnight.

The extension agent saw the incident as a teachable moment. As a result of her training in public policy education, she understood the benefits of helping citizens look at all sides of an issue. Here was an opportunity to deal with conflict and to help the community sort our responsibilities and options for child care. Her goal was not to advocate for a particular solution but to examine the alternatives.

She worked with the Child Care Coordinating Council of the Finger Lakes to organize a community meeting with a panel representing the various community viewpoints. Included on the panel were members of the licensing staff from the regional office of the New York State Department of Social Services, the director of the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council, a local representative of the Department of Social Services, and a parent who had lost his day care provider. Each shared his or her perspective on what was needed for the future.

The agent, who served as moderator, used all her conflict management skills to keep participants talking and listening to each other. Although no agreement was reached, the seventy-five attendees understood the child care licensing law, and those who supported the law and wanted further action, such as better enforcement of the law, were directed to the Child Care Coordinating Council of the Finger Lakes. Several unlicensed day care providers requested information about how they could become licensed.

RESULTS

The creation of the Child Care Coordinating Council of the Finger Lakes did not solve all of the child care problems in the participating counties, but it continues as an established organization to address the issue. The process of forming the council raised more awareness of child care needs than existed before the agents became involved.

Community feedback after the public meeting on child care options was extremely positive. Participants wrote notes and stopped in the office to tell the agent how much they appreciated the opportunity to hear all the sides and learn about the complexities of child care issues. The agent felt the forum was the most important public policy component of the project. She said it was a demanding and challenging experience, but one that she would definitely do again.
**Observations and Questions**

What might be arguments against extension working on child care? Would everyone agree that it is an issue of sufficient importance, in which extension should be involved?

How could the agents’ early work have been more oriented to public policy education? What were the opportunities for content and process education? What were people learning—or were they just cooperating to get a job done? How could the opportunities for learning about child care or about the public policy process have been increased? Could time have been taken periodically to assess, or reflect on, what was learned, or was the urge to get the job done too great?

What were the roles of the agents? When and how did those roles change? The Seneca County agent is quick to point out that the initial goal, which was to increase the number of licensed day care openings in the community, was not formulated from the approach of public policy education.

Looking back on the experience, the agent believes that, given the same opportunity in the future, she would carefully think about the role of the extension agent. She believes she would again become involved in writing grants and laying the groundwork for a new community resource, because there are few such resources in a rural county. But she also sees the possibility of doing more public policy education for identifying the problem and weighing the alternative solutions.

She believes that every agent should have the ability to examine issues, apply the issue evolution model, and provide public policy education as appropriate. No one agent should be the public policy education agent. Every agent should be prepared to deal with the public policy components of current issues.

On many issues, extension has fewer ties to particular audiences than other organizations do, and consequently less vested interest in the outcomes of policy discussions. How can this advantage be best used to help policy makers and the public?