
As state budgets for education become constrained, agricultural extension services must re-evaluate the delivery of services to clientele. The authors have compiled an extensive list of case studies involving agricultural information transfer by public, private, and governmental sectors. The book is divided into specific types of contractual agreements; including environmental services, input services, delivery services, precision agriculture services, commercial advisory services and more. The case studies analyze contractual agreements in 18 different countries on 5 continents.

Contracting for extension services has resulted in positive developments and provides a strategy for advancing knowledge. The common thread throughout the text is that contracting is becoming widely acceptable, involves the public and private sectors, and provides a variety of solutions for information transfer. The author sets up each case study in similar fashion. The technical considerations of the contract and situation are addressed: selection and monitoring of consultants, funding issues, content, receipt of services, and institutional roles. This is followed by the environmental and social consequences, including stakeholder participation, equity issues, security or food systems, and natural resource management. Finally, the impacts and outcomes of contracting are addressed for each case.

The 18 case studies are divided into six sections of the book: “Off-Loading Public Sector Extension Delivery Services, Contracting to Promote Environmental Services, Contracting for Input Services, Contracting for Specialized Services, Farmers Contracting for Commercial Advisory Services, and Other Contractual Arrangements for Extension Services.”

The first section, “Off-Loading Public Sector Extension Delivery Services,” contains four case studies: Chile, Estonia, Germany, and the Netherlands. In each of these cases the delivery of extension messages and advisory services has shifted to private or privatized suppliers. This shift has given farmers greater control over the information they receive, although in some instances it has alienated small producers when the cost for extension services was placed on the farmer. These systems have also seen a pro-active response by private sectors and advisers to provide local training for farmers.

The second section entitled “Contracting to Promote Environmental Services” highlights two innovative programs in Australia and Madagascar. Each of these programs uses group responsibility to involve the local community in natural resource management. In both cases, funds were distributed to community groups as part of a contract agreement. In Australia the community group cost-shared expenses with landholders to reduce water recharge. The result was improved water quality for landowners downstream and increased yields for the participating landowners because of liming and gypsum of the soils. In the Madagascar case, the return of responsibilities related to forest management yielded economic benefits in addition to declines in forest fires and illegal deforestation.

Bangladesh, Mali, and the USA-Illinois cases comprise the third section, “Contracting for Input Services.” Each of these cases involves a specific extension or production service being privatized to assist farmers in the efficient use of certain inputs. The Bangladesh case emphasizes the role of private industry, in contracts with regional farmers, enlisting educational projects and institutes to provide extension services. These services would provide farmers with the skills and information needed to be successful.
In Mali a private veterinary network has been contracted through extension to provide consultations with village producers. This partnership has been successful in developing demand-based training sessions; thus empowering producers and allowing for competition between training providers. Finally, the USA-Illinois case demonstrates the ability to package information services through public and private entities. The packaging of services allowed producers to make choices based on financial circumstances and comfort level related to the technologies involved in the practice.

In section four, “Contracting for Specialized Services,” cases from Colombia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vietnam demonstrate the ability of private or semi-private organizations to provide services that an extension department is not prepared to perform. These services included technical assistance in the delivery of services, development of a mass-media campaign, and training in participatory planning processes.

Two cases are examined in section five, “Farmers’ Contracting for Commercial Advisory Services.” Similar to the previous US example, these cases examine the benefits and impact of private consultants working with farmers to address specific producer issues. In Portugal, producers were eligible to receive subsidies upon entering into a technical service contract to attend trainings and employ Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies to acreage devoted to grape production. The US example focuses on private crop consulting services for the cotton industry in Louisiana.

“Other Contractual Arrangements for Extension Services” is a compilation of four cases from China, Finland, Mozambique, and Uganda. China’s example illustrates the governmentally-dominated extension service; it provides the benefit of stronger coordination of service while stifling farmers and technicians participation. Finland describes its contract with independent Rural Advisory Centers to deliver state extension services. Mozambique’s unique system of public funding for private and public delivery of services is designed, but not implemented. Uganda explores contracting for implementation of specific rural programs.

Each case presented in this text unveils new benefits and pitfalls from contracting extension services. However, each provides a means of exploration for future dissemination of extension information and services. In some cases, financial constraints have been the driving force for change, while other cases have searched for client accountability and responsibility, as well as producer autonomy in the decision-making process.

The first and last chapters of the book provide an excellent overview and review of the development of contracting in the agricultural extension sector. The international perspective of the book broadens the reader’s view on challenges faced and solutions developed. It encourages readers to think beyond the traditional constraints of institutions, governments, and budgets.

This book is an important contribution to the literature of extension. Extension practitioners and researchers can both benefit from the examples and evaluation it provides. As administrators and funding agencies look to the future, contracting extension services through private and public outlets can be substantial contributors to the exchange of information and implementation of new practices.