

Evolutionary or Revolutionary: Changing
the Social Contract on Agricultura Policy:
*Application of Public Policy Education/
Public Issue Education to Improve the National
Debate on Changing the Social Contract*

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Public Policy Education/Public Issue
Education

- Focuses as much on how we teach as what we teach.
 - Extension professionals who successfully work in public policy/issues education possess skills and abilities that enable them to deal with technical complexity, human diversity and political sensitivity in a dynamic environment.
 - These educators are effective communicators, networkers and bridge-builders.
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Core Values of the Public Issues Educator*

- ***Education***—objective, relevant
- ***Inclusion***—all stakeholders
- ***Civil Dialogue***—develop mutual trust
- ***Innovative Solutions***—willingness to negotiate, share power, explore collaborative action
- ***Improving Communication/Decision-making Skills***—getting better at skills you do well & strengthening/compensating for weaknesses

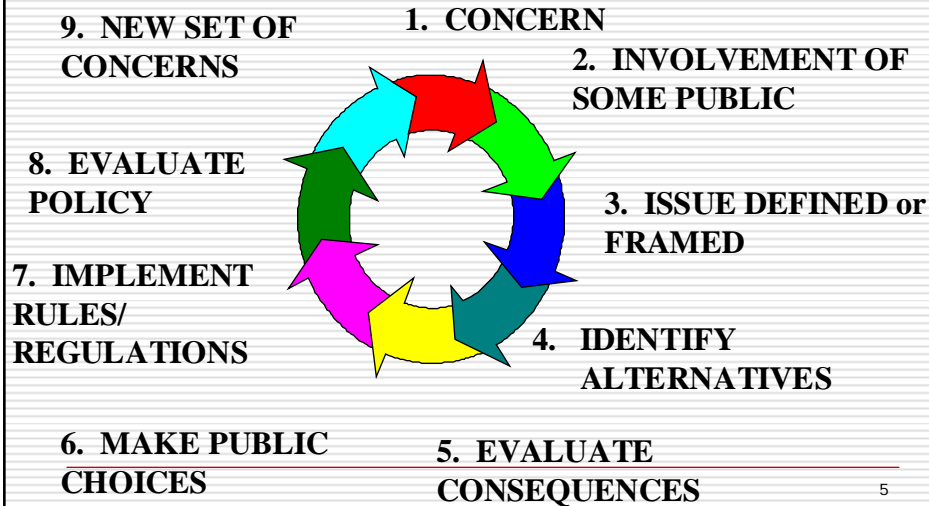
*NOTE: Courtesy of "Public Issues Education: Increasing Competence, Enabling Communities", working draft July 2002, developed by Public³ Issues Competencies Task Force

Key concepts

- Land-grant university faculty are **objective, non-advocates** who use sound, scientific research to educate students & various publics
- **Framing issues** is critical to the success of public policy education programs
- Awareness of the **issue evolution process** suggests the role of the public policy educator
- Adopting a method of objectively evaluating relevant **alternatives** (including status quo) and educating various publics about the resulting likely **consequences** without advocating for specific alternative provides credibility and relevance for educator
- **De-mythification** is a key role of the public policy educator

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ISSUE EVOLUTION



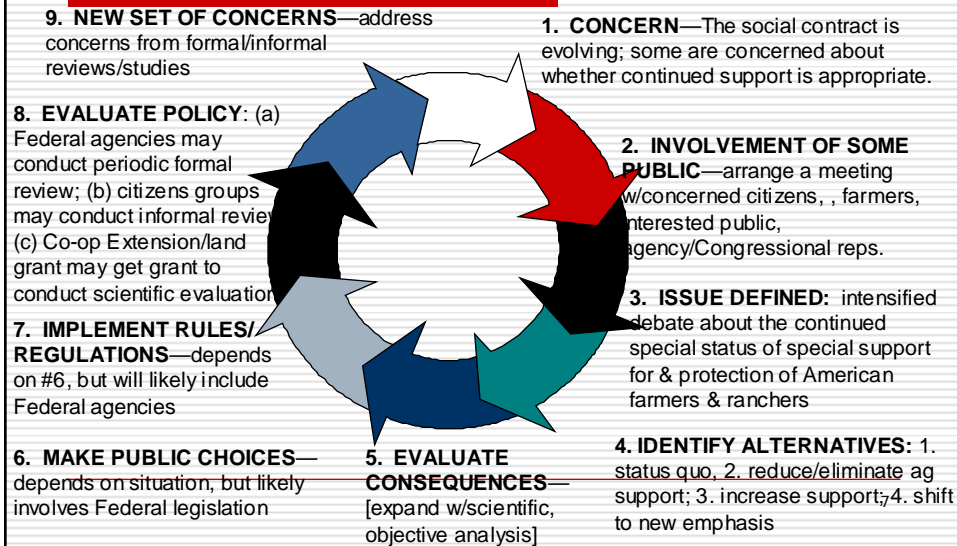
The issue of US agricultural policy—an example of framing

- There are increasing challenges to maintaining the social contract that has existed between the American public and agriculture for the past century. Some of these challenges have intensified the debate about the continued special status of public support for and protection of American farmers and ranchers.
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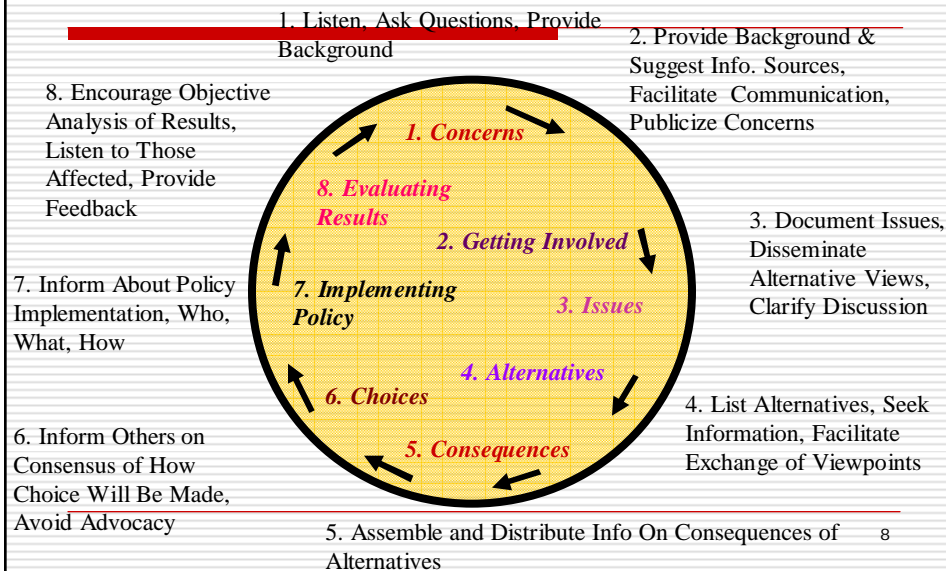
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ISSUES EVOLUTION Sample Case

The Social Contract between Public and US Agriculture



THE WHOLE PICTURE

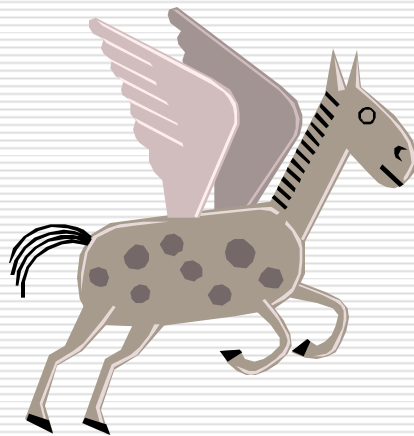


The Objective of Public Policy/Issue Education

- ❑ To increase awareness/understanding of the issue
- ❑ To facilitate rational discussion among interested individuals/groups, & assure all relevant parties have opportunity to participate
- ❑ To assist in application of scientific research to clarify issue & improve understanding of the issue by evaluation of relevant alternatives; then educate about consequences
- ❑ To maintain a position of objectivity and non-advocacy, & keep the process on track
- ❑ Keep the public informed

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"DE-MYTHIFICATION" IS KEY TO IMPROVING PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS



- Moving citizens from "cocksure ignorance" to thoughtful uncertainty" *
- Moving citizens from Myths (sense & nonsense) to Facts
- Moving citizens up the power pyramid
- Insuring Kingmakers understand the Facts

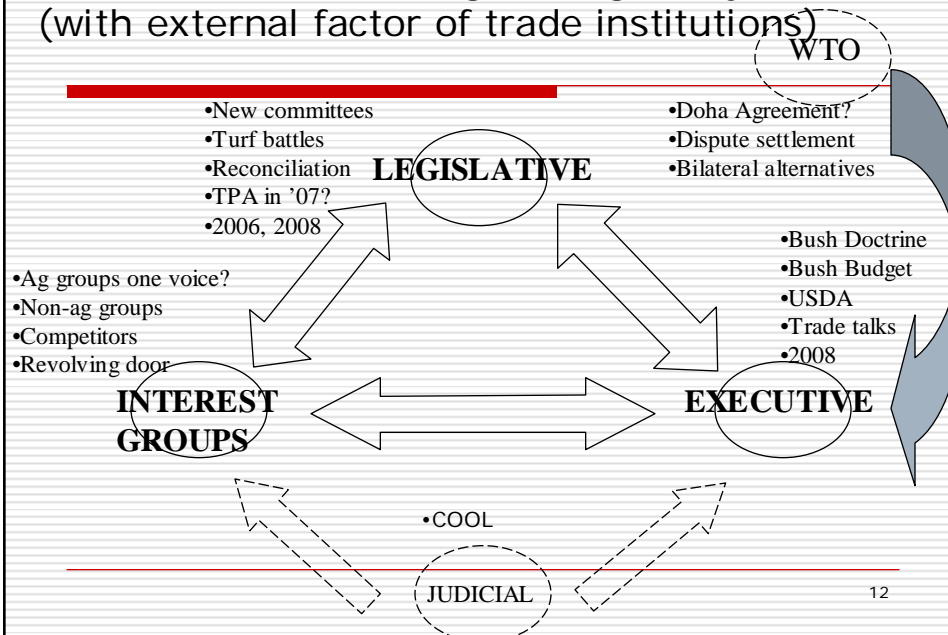
*R.J. Hildreth, 1987

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Concerns

- Power politics
 - Institutional resistance to change and current recipients of largesse create inertia to maintain the status quo (Demosclerosis*)
 - Evolution vs. Revolution of the social contract
 - "If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else."
 - Post-modernism
 - Growing desire to minimize/eliminate influence of science on political decisions

Politics: Political Triangle of Ag Policy (with external factor of trade institutions)



Factors affecting the debate

- Federal budget deficit
 - Trade & trade deficit
 - Trade agreements (WTO)
 - Changing demographics of American Public
 - Agriculture is less monolithic
 - Agribusiness larger & more influential
 - Natural resource use & environmental quality/protection
 - Sustainability
 - Agriculture & world around it has changed—how should institutional mechanisms of support evolve?
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Institutional resistance to change

- Will we in the land-grant system be part of the solution or part of the problem?
 - How we prove our relevance and value to society is to be engaged as objective non-advocates.
 - Thomas Jefferson: Democracy will only survive with a more fully informed citizenry
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