Coexistence: Role of the University

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NABC 27 June 2, 2015
Coexistence

- **Coexistence**
  - to exist together or at the same time
  - to live in peace with each other
    - (Merriam-Webster Definition)

- **Coexistence** is the ability of farmers to make a choice between conventional, organic, and GE production while still being in compliance with legal obligations and purity standards i.e. meet market demands.
Land Grant University Mission

• Land grant universities were founded on serving citizens through research, education, and extension (outreach).

• Part of the mission is to provide unbiased information on which decisions can be based.

• Is this possible for an issue such as coexistence?
University Role

• Does the university have a role to play?

• If so, what is it?
  • Participate in a way that reflects the mission of the university.
  • Does not become advocates for one side versus another.

• Reality is that faculty are passionate about their research areas which makes it difficult.
Research Related to Coexistence

- Research
  - Biology / Ecology – applied and basic
  - Economics
  - Social science
  - Political science
  - Mathematics
  - Others
Teaching Related to Coexistence

• Formal classroom education

  • Many different perspectives within a university.

  • Faculty lack the background to crossover between political, social sciences and agricultural sciences to provide informed views.

  • Therefore, students graduate without exposure to the issue with understanding of all perspectives.

  • Even a greater problem at nonland grant universities where there may be no agricultural perspective.
Extension Efforts Related to Coexistence

• Outreach – general public
  • Outreach to the general public on this issue makes many educators uncomfortable because it is contentious and audiences can be disrespectful and disruptive.
  • Also, makes the administration uncomfortable.
Extension Efforts Related to Coexistence

• Extension – agricultural clientele
  • Often extension faculty, especially at the local/county level, are aligned with a particular agricultural segment.
    • For example – conventional or organic

• May feel the need to defend one position.
Coexistence: Recommendations

• Research:
  
  • Change the structure under which most research occurs.
  
  • Continue to provide science based information to inform the decisions but:
    • Include many disciplines not just biological sciences.
    • Form teams with diverse skills and opinions.
  
  • Lot of the lip service for this concept but in reality not common.
Coexistence: Recommendations

• Teaching
  • Require all students to take genetics.
    • Many of the misconceptions are based on ignorance of basic genetics and biotechnology.
  • Develop courses that include faculty trained in different disciplines.
    • Allows students to challenge different perspectives but also have faculty present to correct misconceptions or misleading opinions.
  • Expose students to those impacted by the issue – growers, purchasers, etc.
Coexistence: Recommendations

• Outreach – general public
  • Develop a faculty speaker bureau from diverse disciplines but who can agree to the messages that are presented with respect for different opinions.
  • Train faculty for the situations that occur when facing a crowd that may disagree with the material presented.

• Extension – agricultural clientele
  • Develop materials that explain why coexistence is required.
  • Develop materials that will inform growers on the best management practices for coexistence.
  • These materials need to be very crop and location specific.
Coexistence: University Role

- Participating in coexistence research, education and the debate surrounding it is not for the faint of heart.
- The issues are contentious with many hidden agendas.
- It can be a mine field with negative consequences for a faculty member, so many choose not to be involved.