

1961

M. S. Shaw biography

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M. S. Shaw

Director, Agricultural Extension Service

Mississippi State University

M. S. Shaw, Director of the Agricultural Extension Service of Mississippi State University, has furnished major leadership in practically every important agricultural development in Mississippi for nearly four decades.

His service to agriculture began in 1923, when he graduated from Mississippi A. & M. College (now Mississippi State University) and entered the Extension Service as assistant county agent in charge of 4-H Club work and on-the-farm training students in Calhoun County. The following January he became county agent in Montgomery County, where he served until 1928 when he was transferred to a similar position in Alcorn County.

As a county agent, he pioneered in the cooperative marketing of livestock and poultry. He had the largest poultry marketing program in the state. He also helped to get Extension work started in Tippah, Prentiss and Tishomingo Counties.

He joined the state Extension staff at State College in 1931 as Extension economist, marketing division, and held that position until 1935 when he was named district agent for the Southeast District. In 1936 he received an M.S. degree in agricultural economics from Mississippi State University.

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A highlight of his accomplishments in the Southeast district from the late 1930's through the early 1940's was to lead all counties in organizing Farm Bureau as it has since functioned to serve agriculture. There were no county Farm Bureau organizations in the district when he became its supervisor. Near the end of the 1930's, of the 11,000 members state-wide in Farm Bureau, 7,500 were in the Southeast District. This continued to grow and strengthen.

Due to Mr. Shaw's leadership, the Southeast Extension district had more one variety cotton communities than any other part of the state. He was still district agent when farmers of the area began to become interested in other kinds of farming. To meet this change, he was among the first to stress grassland farming, livestock and timber management.

Mr. Shaw was named state agent and assistant director of Extension in 1946. He was promoted to associate director in 1951 and to director on February 1, 1961.

As a state-wide administrator of Extension, Mr. Shaw was largely responsible for spearheading several programs that have resulted in higher farm income and better family living. The outstanding success and general merit of these programs has on several occasions brought national recognition to Mississippi.

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County program planning, known more recently as program projection, is practiced in every county in Mississippi. Mr. Shaw headed the committee that set the pattern for this and began training Extension agents in it in 1947.

In this county-wide planning, all agricultural agencies and organizations, together with business and professional leaders interested in developing the total economy, met and carefully studied all farming enterprises, marketing, family living and related activities. With emphasis on contributions by farmers, homemakers and other lay leaders, they set county goals for progress. They then promoted action programs to meet these goals. They review their efforts annually or more often.

Such program planning has been largely responsible for increasing the annual farm incomes of many counties by millions of dollars. Many other less tangible benefits have resulted.

Farm and home development, known in Mississippi as Balanced Farm and Home Planning, has been an important factor in getting plans translated into action more quickly. It resulted in key demonstrations all over the state, which have been of tremendous educational value. Mr. Shaw led in establishing the first of these demonstrations in Mississippi in 1948, several years ahead of the beginning of such work in most states.

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Believing strongly in the importance of strengthening spiritual values, good family living and community fellowship, Mr. Shaw led in encouraging Extension agents to help organize rural community clubs. For a number of years about 500 clubs of this kind have been active in a large number of counties. Besides building human values, these clubs have greatly advanced the educational work of the Extension Service and have helped families to secure public services that they could not soon have had working individually.

Mr. Shaw has long stressed at every opportunity the importance of agriculture to the total economy, the harmonious relationship between agricultural and non-agricultural industry, and the improvement of rural-urban understanding. He accepted an active part in the early work of the Mississippi Economic Council. He is now leading an aggressive drive for better public relations for agriculture.

For several years, he was chairman of the State Farm Safety Committee. Then and since, he encouraged Extension agents and all agricultural leaders to teach safety practices the year around in connection with other kinds of practices.

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His present position puts him by virtue of his office on a number of important committees dealing with agriculture, rural living and total resource development. In this era of rapid change he stresses some of his favorite philosophy:

"We're losing farmers and are going to lose some more. Those who stay in agriculture are going to have to use technology and use it right. An Extension Service agent has to be better than good to service that kind of a farmer."

Besides the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation and other organizations already named, he is active in the First Methodist Church of Starkville, Masonic Lodge and the American Legion. His hobbies include hunting, fishing, and maintaining the beautifully landscaped yard of the home that he and his wife enjoy in Starkville.
