



**AgEcon** SEARCH  
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

*The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library*

**This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.**

**Help ensure our sustainability.**

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

[aesearch@umn.edu](mailto:aesearch@umn.edu)

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

*No endorsement of AgEcon Search or its fundraising activities by the author(s) of the following work or their employer(s) is intended or implied.*

# PROCEEDINGS 1945

PAPERS AND PROCEEDINGS

*of the*

EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

*of the*

WESTERN FARM ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION

*Held at Fort Collins, Colorado, June 27-29, 1945*

*and of the*

SUB-REGIONAL MEETING

*Held at Berkeley, California, July 16-17, 1945*

*Edited by the Vice-President of the Association*

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF AN "ALMOST VETERAN"  
EXTENSION WORKER RELATING TO NEEDS  
FOR RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL  
MARKETING

By PAUL CARPENTER, *Oregon State College*

*Foreword*

This paper will appear to some possibly as juvenile, to some perhaps as offensive. Certainly it lacks any character of profundity. It is intended to advocate no "great cause," yet possibly in a way it does exactly that. Between the lines it reflects a feeling that the scientific training of our young people definitely is lacking, that education is not the exclusive province of the so-called "educators," but rather that all of any sector of society effected, by a research enterprise, must participate if the results are to be of the greatest value. The gulf between academic people and business forces must be bridged in some manner. Need I cite the last ten years?

Too much has been expected of the economists. The strength of this country stems from the good sense and industry of its people. In America neither the Economists, nor any other professional group, can be a class apart. We serve best by being a part of, and working with. In the planning; in the deliberating; in the effort to help; let there be provided seating space for those of the industries who render the services an industrious people appear to require.

---

It may be only appearance:—But it seems that there are more fallacies to the square inch, more cock-sure ideas of exactly what should be done and how, in the field of distributing plant and animal products, than in any other field of human endeavor, unless it be the raising of other peoples' children.

Nor is this but a trite remark. Distribution has become so fearfully involved, goods take so many forms even though stemming back to the same raw materials, travel so far, are en route so long, call for such a variety of services by so many people and organizations, that even trained and virile minds are subjected to strain in the attempt to encompass and to understand.

Again, while it may be appearance only, it does seem that with reference to our real knowledge of marketing farm production, we vary in our ignorance only by kind and degree. The reason, of course, is this complexity of distribution in the modern world.

Agricultural economists, in fact farmers themselves, are rather skillful, and on occasion persistent, in self criticism. As a matter of fact, when compared with others, Agricultural service industries have not done such a bad job when consideration is given the accrued costs of marketing services the consumer is called upon to meet (and perhaps to share with the producer). With the retail margin alone on such a popular and standardized article as

an automobile at 22 to 24 percent, and on electrical appliances not far from 40 percent, our agricultural trades people have rather a creditable record. Stability of price is not considered at this point.

Despite this rather favorable comparison, there is a deep-seated conviction with a great many people, on and off the farm, that the marketing of agricultural commodities generally is inefficient, that we need drastic improvement, or perhaps an entirely new system.

It is given to the most of us to have the firmest and most unchangeable convictions about those things of which we know the least; hence there is a general agreement among those not directly engaged in marketing commercially, that the need and opportunities for improvement are scarcely less than vast. It is not the purpose of this paper to defend the existing order. The major purpose is to present a plea for determining WHAT IS the order. Certainly it will may cause research people to pause, as it causes extension people to age before their time, to note that THERE ARE NO AUTHORITIES IN AGRICULTURAL MARKETING.

What person can appear before you gentlemen and explain in any detail whatever what becomes of *each* of the more than 200 distinct agricultural commodities produced in the one state of California? Or the 100-odd in Oregon and Washington. Certainly no one from the states mentioned. Even as to individual commodities it is extremely difficult for extension workers to get from our hard-working and skillful research friends a complete picture of the physical marketing processes alone.

A case in point: Some years ago in meeting with a group of Hood River apple growers, in the presence of the manager and six ex-managers of the cooperative association there, as well as of other receivers and packers, the entire group handling over 90 percent of the tonnage, no one had nerve enough to try to explain a typical trip of two-bit's worth of Yellow Newtowns from Hood River to a consumer's table. There was *no less than a century* of marketing experience in that group.

Another: A committee of five named by the then Governor Chas. H. Martin of Oregon to study and recommend needful changes in dried fruit marketing, had virtually power of subpoena, examined 51 authoritative witnesses, worked over a period of seven months. Yet this intelligent group, well serviced, could not and did not satisfy itself as to JUST EXACTLY HOW dried prunes are handled from western packing house to eastern tables!

You men are mostly from the West, and each has much more than a vague idea of the great vital industry characterized by the annual harvest of native cover by beef animals. As you listen to this paper, who is prepared to follow a western steer "in the flesh" from mountain meadow, to fall ranch grazing, through hay fattening, to and through Denver, to Chicago to feedlot, back to Chicago for slaughter, on to a New York wholesale distributor, then where? Don't worry about the economics of the movement, JUST TELL US ABOUT THE TRIP from the high meadow until a fine

roast from said steer is carved by Father with Mother looking on apprehensively. (Note to the reader: If you get a rise on this one, AND HE REALLY IS GOOD; book him for some lectures on the campus, meetings with stockmen, and with members of the meat trade.)

Just what does this somewhat fatalistic narrative mean?

IT MAY MEAN that this observer has eyes but can not see, has ears but can not hear.

OR IT MAY MEAN that, despite the endless thousands of dollars spent by many hundreds of earnest research people, and with substantial returns, generally the results have been short of providing the data for an understanding of the marketing system now in effect, even with respect to any one commodity.

Gentlemen, how can we intelligently work over our present marketing system WHEN WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT IT IS?

True, there has been a great volume of most excellent research work done in agricultural marketing. It would be a delight to devote a paper to outstanding examples. My contention, however, is that most work has been of a "spot" character. Some facility, some function, some service, has been observed, analyzed, weighed, studied and reported upon. Every such study, well done, has been helpful to producers and others. But, at best, these are "link" studies, each covers but a part of a long chain. Moreover, even if we had each of the many links subjected to the white light of systematic research, we still would not have the basis for the understanding needed. The reasons in a moment.

The intent of this discussion is that means must be found for prosecuting early, vigorously, and continuously, these complete farm-to-table marketing studies, entirely through the industry, end to end if you please, or "hook to hook" to continue the chain analogy.

There are innumerable difficulties to be overcome in this type of research. The lack of free mobility of many able workers, the absolute necessity for getting trade cooperation, the early incidence of "teaming up" with others, and perhaps unlike, commodities with the attendant problems of joint costs. It is easy to get lost at the point where these other items enter the common current of trade. Economically, the problem of competition by other commodities is extremely difficult, vegetable oils with lard and butter; peaches with pears; bananas with apples; pork with beef; and what have you.

Yet all the clearly apparent difficulties do not minimize the NEED if we are to have a basis of understanding upon which to erect, with popular support, a better and more effective means of effecting distribution.

(Another note to the reader: To this point I feel the folks will go along, a little grudgingly maybe; but from here on out some may feel like taking the writer apart—in absentia.)

Who is going to do this kind of work? Reference is not to agency, state, federal or private. What kind of people? The implied specifications eliminate just about all of us. The work will be done, if it is done, with what we

have with which to do it. It is worth-while, however, to be conscious of our own short coming as individual workers and as agencies for the reason that alertness is developed with respect to strengthening services where they are less than strong.

Marketing is or involves BUSINESS. No one in agricultural marketing research can reach the level of production which the farmers of America are demanding unless HE HAS THE FEEL OF BUSINESS. It is an incontrovertible fact that BUSINESS IS A RACE WITH DESTITUTION, A CONTEST WITH FAILURE. It is so statistically. IT IS SO EMOTIONALLY.

For the distribution of agricultural commodities we are dependent upon men who lie awake nights wondering if there will be sufficient men to operate at all Monday morning, worrying over bank loans, corporate stockholder and cooperative member attitudes, competitive pressure, feeling that he is working for his labor or for his banker, all with a question as to whether he can make the grade, maintain his position, accumulate or preserve the savings for a decent old age. Most of the people who handle our stuff are not wealthy in the sense of having any "feeling of safety."

Yet, right here in the ambitions, and worries, and fears of men we have the tremendous driving force that, somehow, provides the time, form and place utilities necessary for getting food on the table. These men also are the source of the vital raw data, not only facts and figures, but views of what is and what might be, for the research worker. How are we to get the data, how are we to understand them, if we do not have the FEEL of the MEN WHO DO THE MARKETING.

I do not know how so to get, how to understand, without the feel.

A man is not going to deliver in the marketing research field if he cannot recognize a payroll if met face to face on the street at high noon Saturday, or if he is blind to the effects of temperament, of working conditions, of personal relationships within a crew of men or women.

No man is going to deliver if he doesn't know the problems involved in getting work done.

So the position is taken here that the most of the top level research work in marketing will be done, if it is done, by men of business experience; some kind of business; any kind of business that will develop in one an appreciation of what makes people tick. It is not sufficient to look upon men objectively, there must be a "FEELING WITH" if full meaning is to be given research results.

Here we have the reason why the total of the links does not equal the chain. There may be a whole series of individual studies, all good, yet there would not be a true industry study without someone in the picture with the experience and vision to see, to understand, and to feel the whole; that is the whole chain from the farm to the table.

Hazardous as it may be, I am willing to take the position, and to take it firmly, that marketing research of the type under discussion, must have the

cooperation of the trade, and that in the absence of genuine trade cooperation, scarcely can justify the expenditure of time, energy and funds. (We also spend other people's time in these studies.)

Such cooperation need not be the bugaboo regarded by some. If one is on a worthwhile study, clearly in the public interest, if he knows exactly what he is trying to do, and how, if he respects the time of and the pressures upon others, if he is trust-worthy himself, if he respects confidences,—if he keeps his mouth shut, if he has the necessary PATIENCE to identify, to get acquainted with and to study people and the conditions under which they live and operate, if these conditions obtain, there will be full trade cooperation and such full trade cooperation is the most priceless ingredient in any marketing study.

To summarize this discussion: I wish to make two points: First, that our studies extend all of the way from the producer to the consumer. Second, that we give careful attention to the financial and psychological difficulties which beset the men who are trying as best they know how to give "time, form and place utility" to our farm products.