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Agricultural Economics Research: Some Notes on the New Journal

By O. V. Wells

SOME OF US have felt for a long time that the Bureau of Agricultural Economics needed some medium for the publication of technical articles. Surely such a journal should prove as useful to agricultural economists and statisticians as similar journals have proved in other fields, such as commerce, labor, or for general agriculture, the *Journal of Agricultural Research*.

We intend that this be such a journal.

Editorial policy has not as yet necessarily crystallized. However, some tentative rules were suggested in a memorandum circulated to the field employees of the BAE under date of November 8. This memorandum indicated that we expect the journal to carry signed articles of 5,000 words or less falling within any of three general fields.

First, and most important from the viewpoint of space, we will publish articles that report on the results or findings of research carried forward within the Bureau. These articles may be in the nature of interim reports on work in progress or, on occasion, statements that actually terminate the project. Partly because of limited printing funds and partly because of the time consumed in preparation, the bulletins through which we publish many of our research findings are delayed. This new journal should be of service in speeding up the dissemination of our technical findings. Almost every leading line of work within the Bureau should turn up some new or significant result which would warrant consideration of an article from time to time.

Second, we will publish articles on new research methods or techniques that are being developed, as well as critical discussions of old techniques that are in regular use. As the reading audience will be primarily professional, we shall occasionally publish articles on methods or techniques which are designed to elicit or encourage discussion at the technical level.

Third, we will publish articles on new or expanding areas of research or statistical fact-gathering. Over and above any discussions of techniques that these articles may include, they should cover the probable usefulness of such new developments as well as the place of such new areas of work in the agricultural field.

Although all Bureau representatives are invited to submit articles in any of these three fields, we believe that State statisticians and members of their staffs should be an especially fruitful source for items falling within the second general field. We are continuously engaged in studying ways and means of improving the usefulness and reliability of the data collected through Agricultural Estimates. A considerable number of our inquiries and their results in this field often remain relatively unknown, especially to individuals outside the Service. Since the information collected and published as a result of our statistical work is so widely used, it is desirable to acquaint agricultural economists and statisticians generally with any improvements. Each issue of this journal should carry a couple of articles of this kind.

As we are anxious to carry discussions relating to all the work for which we are responsible, we shall consider articles from workers who are cooperating, or working under contract, with the Bureau. Such articles can be written jointly by a member of the Bureau and the cooperating or contracting individuals in the other organizations or over the signature of some single individual, who may be an employee either of the Bureau or the other agency—e g., a State Agricultural College.

A few book reviews will be carried, with especial attention to books which deal with research or statistical methods or to books falling within the more general social science fields where the conclusions or recommendations are chiefly based upon agricultural economics research. In addition, the editors will include in each issue a selected list of the more recent research and statistical releases of the Bureau which seem most significant, together with a series of short notes indicating the nature or content of each item.

Some of the questions that may be raised with respect to this new publication need to be considered.

Questions may be raised with respect to coverage. We have already indicated the type of articles believed to be appropriate, but it is perhaps worth saying that this journal is not designed to compete either with the *Journal of Agricultural Research*, which offers workers in the natural sciences a medium for articles, or the field covered by professional journals such as the *Journal of Farm Economics*. Articles dealing directly with agricultural policy will not be included. Articles in this field originating within the Bureau are expressions of personal opinion rather than official statements and are usually so designated. Such articles as a rule should be offered to some outside professional journal.

Some question may be raised with respect to cost. As best we can estimate, the annual cost of the journal will be about equivalent to the cost of publishing one fair-sized technical bulletin. But

the journal should offer a medium of publication for several workers in each issue whereas the technical bulletin as a rule serves as a means of publishing the results of one project. *Agricultural Economics Research* can be so used as to economize printing funds as well as to allow the more prompt publication of technical material.

A question may be raised with respect to the definition of the term, agricultural economics research. The term is here used in its widest sense to cover all work ordinarily carried forward by the Bureau, including work done in cooperation with other agencies such as State Agricultural Colleges and State Departments of Agriculture. That is, we consider agricultural economics to cover specifically the entire field of agricultural estimates or statistics, of rural social studies, and of research on such subjects as prices, marketing, land economics, farm finance, and farm management.

Finally, there is a fourth question that is almost inevitable—the question as to where and how workers in the Bureau will find time to write articles. However, in many instances there is need for at least a progress report well before a study is wholly completed. We believe that there is good reason why a considerable amount of such work should be published in a permanent journal rather than in mimeographed form, especially as mimeographed releases are always difficult to find once immediate interest in the subject has subsided. As a matter of fact, there are several excellent reasons why researchers and statisticians within the Bureau generally should give more rather than less time to bringing their material into some organized written form. After all, *agricultural economics work is carried on in the public interest and every researcher or statistician, regardless of his field, does have a responsibility for seeing that his material is prepared in such a way as to be readily accessible to his fellow workers and to the public*. We hope that this new journal will assist us to this end.