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Book Reviews

Introduction to Agricultural Prices. By WARREN C. WAITE and HARRY C. TRELOGAN. Burgess Publishing Co., Minneapolis, 1948. 227 pages.

“THE essential feature of prices from the standpoint of entrepreneurial decisions lies in their variation.” Operating on this premise Doctors Waite and Trelogan have written a readable and well-organized text to (1) identify the problems arising from price variations and (2) explain how and why such variations occur. After the customary courtesy to the “equilibrium theorists” the authors proceed to do what they started out to do anyway—to examine rather intensively the “problems of particular interest to the entrepreneur.” The plan has enabled them to evolve an unusually good text in agricultural prices and a superior piece of reading material for students in elementary economics.

Essentially, the volume is one from which a student can obtain a clear picture of the scope and importance of agricultural prices in our economy. Likewise, he will find a rather well-knitted, logical explanation of the forces causing the price structure to be one thing instead of another. The authors have emphasized the importance of a full understanding of the interrelationship of economic phenomena on the part of anyone attempting to explain or analyze the price structure for any farm product. It appears, therefore, that the brief treatment of statistical procedures is justified on the basis that a “tool” is of little importance to one who does not know how to use it. Further weight is given this point of view by the following statement:

“In using statistical procedures in the analysis of prices the student must keep constantly in mind that the numerical or graphic results, no matter how good they may be, tell nothing about the reasons for the relationships. These reasons must be found in the general knowledge of the relationships and the general logic of the situation”

Organization of the subject-matter into chapters follows a rather conventional pattern. The illus-

trative material and the descriptive analysis reflect the broader background of the authors in economic theory and price-regulatory work. Such chapters as “Price Determination in the Individual Market,” “Organization of the Market and Price Formation,” and “Futures Trading and Prices” are very well done.

The authors chose to deal with the role of government in price-making in their chapters “An Experience with Price Control” and “Price Policy Applied to Agriculture.” This fact makes more serious the virtual omission of such subjects as governmental fiscal policies and food and fiber as bargaining tools in international policy. These two activities of government deserve more than a passing comment.

The authors detracted from their good work by using the Preface to bow modestly to the ghost that lurks in the subconscious mind of almost every economist. It appears to the reviewer that the following might well have been omitted:

“No assumption has been made that the business management of agricultural marketing enterprises accepts, or is even conscious of, the principles and generalizations herein presented when they conduct their day to day activities. Nor is it contended that agreement or familiarity with this subject matter will fit the student for a position of responsibility in an agricultural marketing enterprise”

Viewed as a whole, the work is superior in most every respect. It fills the need for an up-to-date, teachable text in this phase of economics, and it should help many an overworked and underpaid college teacher to put new life into the supply-demand part of his course in elementary theory. Teachers interested in training students for work with agricultural-marketing organizations or for marketing research will find this book a valuable teaching aid.

D. B. DeLoach