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Land Economics Research

Edited by Joseph Ackerman, Marion Clawson, and Marshall Harris. The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore. 270 pages. 1962. \$4.00.

WE OWE THE SYMPOSIUM to the Greeks. To them a symposium was literally a banquet at which there was brilliant and entertaining conversation, and free exchange of ideas.

This symposium on land economics comes closer than most contemporary ones to satisfying the ancient criteria as to brilliance, wit, and free discussion. The place was Lincoln, Nebraska; the time was June 1961; and the sponsors were the Farm Foundation and Resources for the Future, Inc. The participants were 16 economists representing a cross section of youth and age, enthusiasm and wisdom, experience and training in the field of land economics.

The high level of accomplishment was also due to the careful planning that resulted from a pre-symposium conference of the principal participants some months before the symposium proper.

The 15 chapters are arranged under four headings concerned with scope, theory, procedure, and programs in land economics research. Each chapter was developed by one of the participants and in two instances by two participants jointly.

The focus of the book is on research in land economics with an eye to the future. The evolution from rural to urban phases is traced by M. M. Kelso in his scholarly review of the content and orientation of research in land economics today.

Urban and regional planning and economic growth and development on the world scene are carefully delineated. A chapter by Roy E. Huffman on better utilization of research results considers the responsibility of the researcher for getting his results into use.

The four chapters on theory are among the most stimulating in the book. Walter G. Miller's production theory is well prepared. The sparkling discussion of welfare economics by M. Mason Gaffney may move on too high a plane of sesquipedalianism for many readers. Yet his presentation may help to jar many plodding researchers from their occupational lethargy.

Kenneth H. Parsons' short paper on institutional economics is a cogent statement. But Howard W. Ottoson's parallel columns of similarities and differences between institutional and neoclassical economics deserve the attention of every agricultural economist. He drives home and clinches the point made earlier by John F. Timmons, Kenneth H. Parsons, and others that the different approaches are complementary and not antagonistic.

The chapters on research procedure have merit in emphasizing the need for orderly procedure and methodology. But the close identification of the function of science with the solution of prob-

lems may easily fence research into confines that leave too little room for the exercise of free imagination.

It is interesting that it was left for the practical administrator, Harry A. Steele, to point out the inhibiting aspects of the detailed project system and the inflexibilities of research organization: "The attention to basic and pioneering research in recent years is an effort to free the research worker from any inhibiting administrative restraints."

Steele believes research results are most useful if they are available at the strategic time. He stresses the need for continuing support for research organizations that are attuned to long-range programs, yet flexible enough to deal with specific problems as they arise.

For researchers in land economics this book is the most important "landmark" in research appraisal since the 1948 publication of Leonard A. Salter's *A Critical Review of Research in Land Economics*. For agricultural economists in general it is an intellectual banquet of superior rating.

If one might sometimes wish for a larger measure of singular insight and a smaller portion of plural insights, this may be the price of brilliant conversation. In any symposium some loose ends should be left for future conversation pieces.

Ronald L. Mighel