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## Book Reviews

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*Interregional Competition in Agriculture.* By RONALD L. MIGHELL and JOHN D. BLACK. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 320 pages. 1951.

AS THOSE who have followed the interregional competition project in BAE will recognize, the empirical investigations summarized and interpreted here represent some 15 years of cumulative research results beginning in the middle of the 1930's. An influential reason for the choice of dairying in New England and the Lake States as the subject for intensive study was the practical problem of the long-run competitive position of dairying in these two regions. The results of the several supply-response studies developed in that project are presented both for their substantive content and for their bearing on the general problem of research methodology applicable to empirical studies of interregional competition.

In the development of supply schedules for dairy products, principal reliance is placed on the budget technique as applied to individual farms. Budgets are developed on the basis of alternative assumptions as to the relation of dairy prices to prices of other farm products. Price and production developments in the 10 years following 1936 provided an opportunity to test the analytical devices against the record; and the authors conclude that the results are reasonably good when allowance is made for the special circumstances of World War II. The demand schedules used in the study are developed mainly from the work of other research workers in the field of dairy marketing.

The authors recognize that the analysis developed during the 1930's is not applicable directly to the problem of the present competitive position of the two dairy areas. It does provide a test of the feasibility of estimating production responses to different assumed situations as to price. To the extent that the authors attempt a long-run evaluation of the competitive positions of the two areas, it depends heavily on the relative strength of influences that are difficult to fit neatly into individual farm budgets, such as technological changes, population growth, and governmental programs. But the earlier type of analysis developed in the basic studies provides a starting point from which

an appraisal of the probable influence of these "unknowns" can be made.

Although there is an attempt to appeal to a broad group of readers by including additional materials, it seems likely that those interested in research methodology will benefit most from this study. It should be especially valuable to those engaged in research based on the economics of the firm. The probable supply response of the individual farm firm is basic in the analysis. The authors recognize that in retrospect a better job of sampling could have been done. A further difficulty in the use of the method is the need for background research in basic relationships as a prerequisite for the exercise of judgment in developing farm budgets. It is a little difficult, therefore, to reconcile the authors' enthusiasm for this research technique with their somewhat disparaging remarks on research on basic relationships. The budget technique is no substitute for analysis of basic economic relationships. One of its main advantages is that it forces the researcher to be explicit on relationships that might be overlooked.

The reviewer has considerable sympathy with the emphasis placed in the final chapter on using a rifle rather than a shotgun in the collection of basic economic statistics for use in research of the kind outlined in that chapter. But the cost of separate collection of partially duplicating statistics for a large number of purposes in addition to the study of interregional competition cannot be ignored. The ingenuity of research workers in the use of general-purpose data may have to continue to substitute in part for specialized data tailored to particular research programs.

This book is not easy reading, but this is not necessarily an adverse criticism. Distilling a little truth out of imperfect data is a laborious process, and the reader cannot be spared a share in this process. The authors have chosen wisely in not attempting to make the study easy to read at the expense of leaving out pertinent details.

*Donald C. Horton*