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PREFACE

Introduction to the Special Issue

Robert N. Shulstad and John C. Bergstrom

The papers appearing in this special issue were developed from presentations made to The National Symposium on the Future of American Agriculture hosted by The University of Georgia, August 25–27, 1999. All symposium presenters were invited to submit papers for single-blind review, and the resulting revised and accepted papers are published in this special issue.

The symposium brought together many of the nation's top agricultural experts from land grant universities and the private sector to discuss the challenges facing the agricultural industry in the 21st century. Academics, policy makers, national and state producer/commodity organizations, producers, environmental organizations, and consumers from 26 states and Canada participated. Symposium sponsors included The University of Georgia (UGA), The UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, The UGA Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development, the Farm Foundation, and the National Public Policy Education Committee.

The symposium addressed how American agriculture will be impacted by economic growth, trade, risk management/crop insurance reform, regulations, taxes, profitability/ownership, and environmental and food safety issues, and suggested potential legislative remedies. This convocation represented the first step in initiating a frank and open discussion of these important topics.

Proceedings of the symposium were reported directly to the U.S. Senate Agricultural Committee as testimony in a field hearing conducted by Senator Paul Coverdell in Athens, Georgia, on August 27, 1999. That testimony has become input to possible revisions of the FAIR Act. Opening remarks were provided by Roy Barnes, Governor of Georgia, Senator Paul Coverdell, Senator Max Cleland, Representative Saxby Chambliss, Gale Buchanan, Dean of The UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Thomas Irvin, Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture, and Wayne Dollar, President of the Georgia Farm Bureau.

The primary motivation behind the 1999 National Symposium on the Future of American Agriculture was the current financial problems facing U.S. agriculture related, by and large, to low commodity prices. The financial squeeze caused by low commodity prices, in turn, brings other financial factors influencing agricultural profitability to the forefront. These financial factors are the focus of this special issue.

In the papers published here, Abner Womack (University of Missouri) and Ed Smith (Texas A&M University) first set the stage by quantifying the current state of American agriculture and what we can expect over the next five years in the aggregate and at the farm level. Next, Bruce Gardner (University of Maryland) and Dan Sumner (University of California-Davis) examine the implications of the global economy and trade policy for U.S. producers and consumers. Michael Boehlje (Purdue University), Neil Harl (Iowa State University), and Mark Drabenstott (Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City) then consider the implications of increasing concentrations in input supply, production, processing, and marketing for farm policy, owners and producers, agribusinesses, and rural America. Barry Goodwin (North Carolina State University), Keith Coble (Mississippi State University), and Jeffrey Dorfman (University of Georgia) discuss the role of government in providing income support and risk management policies. In a final note, Michael Doyle of the University of Georgia addresses the increased liability and responsibility that will be placed on food producers to enhance the safety of foods of animal and plant origins.

Because of its emphasis on financial problems, this special issue does not encompass all topics that are likely to present important challenges to American agriculture in the 21st century. As the financial picture and profitability of agriculture improves in the future, the general public and policy makers may turn more attention to other broad policy concerns that would offer focal themes for future symposia and/or special issues of this journal. A set of concerns that are likely to emerge on the public policy forefront at some point in the future are the effects of agriculture on environmental quality, and the impacts of environmental regulations on agriculture. The 1999 National Symposium on the Future of American Agriculture included presentations not published in this special issue, related to agriculture and the environment, by Sandra Batie (Michigan State University) and John Antle (Montana State University). Texts of all presentations and papers delivered at the symposium are available online at: <http://www.agecon.uga.edu/~caed/agfuture.html>.