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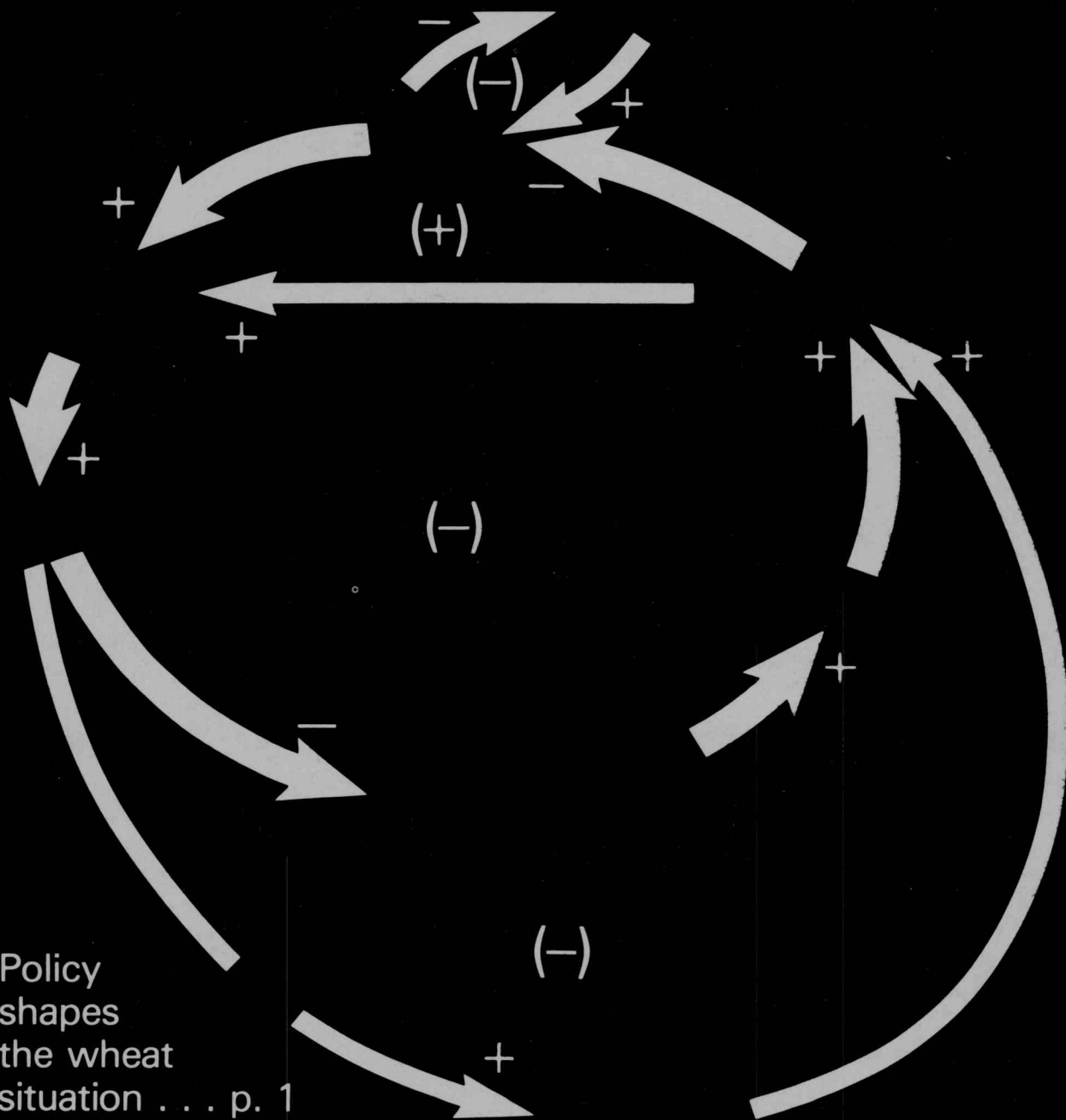
USDA/AE RESEARCH
V31 N2 APR 79

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS RESEARCH, 1979 APRIL; VOL.31, NO.2. Washington, DC: Economic
Research Service.

(NAL Call No. S1Ec7Agr)

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS RESEARCH

APRIL 1979 VOL. 31 NO. 2



Policy
shapes
the wheat
situation . . . p. 1

Agricultural Economics Research

A Journal of the U.S. Department of Agriculture • Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service

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Economic modelers of different persuasions often find it difficult to communicate with one another. And modelers of any persuasion often find it difficult to communicate with policymakers. In a recent book, *Models in the Policy Process*, Greenberger, Crenson, and Crissey state that these communication gaps call for two kinds of bridges. One needs to be built between researchers of different persuasions; the other, between researchers and policymakers. The authors illustrate the conflict among researchers by recounting the differences of opinion between adherents of the Cowles Commission school of simultaneous equations and adherents of the Systems Dynamics school of feedback loops. Contributors to this *Journal* who model the economic structure of farm commodities tend to follow the Cowles approach. However, in this issue, Brzozowski applies the Systems Dynamics approach to the U.S. wheat economy. In doing so, he may help toward building the two kinds of bridges called for by Greenberger, Crenson, and Crissey.

* * *

Insofar as an economist thinks in generalities—for example, in claiming no more than that variable (Y) is some unknown function of variable (X)—economic theory can proceed with little quibbling about details. Once a specific form for that function is selected, be it linear, quadratic, exponential, translog, or some other form, the economist may find himself or herself on the defensive concerning unexamined assumptions introduced by the choice of form. Questions raised by choice of form have been addressed by authors of three recent articles in these pages: Lin and Chang (January 1978), Buccola and French (January 1978), and Lamm (January 1979). In this issue, Salathe looks at the properties of Engel curves implied by the choice of functional form. He finds empirical as well as theoretical support for using the double-logarithmic form for Engel curves.

* * *

Some economic attributes are hierarchical: if a given attribute is present, all lower-order attributes are also present. Scaling is a procedure developed by psychologists to determine whether human attributes, such as attitudes, can be ranked hierarchically. The procedure has been subsequently used to evaluate attributes in other fields, particularly sociology. The article by Stuby illustrates how scaling can be used to evaluate the degree of rurality of counties.

* * *

I am becoming conditioned to look up the word “tautology” in my dictionary under “M” because the phrase “mere tautology” is used so often that the two words are beginning to sound like one to me. I am sensitive to this because I find tautologies important in economic thought. When we classify a statement in economics as “meretautology,” we imply that it needlessly repeats an idea, usually one that is true by definition. Yet, certain observations which appear obvious, redundant, and true by definition have been turned by theorists into equations which serve as cornerstones of economic theory. Examples include the budget constraint in the theory of consumer demand, the profit equation in the theory of the firm, and the macroeconomic idea that aggregate demand equals spending by households, business, and government. Cantwell, in his article, uses a tautology concerning payments by patients and income to doctors. He points out, however, that the observation is only tautological in competitive equilibrium. It need not be valid in disequilibrium. Cantwell finds that regression coefficients for the equation which would be definitionally true in equilibrium show the extent to which divergence from equilibrium occurs in the rural-urban distribution of medical services.

CLARK EDWARDS

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**American
Journal of
Agricultural
Economics** *Edited by V. James Rhodes, University of Missouri-Columbia*
Published by the American Agricultural Economics Association

February 1979

Articles: George W. Ladd, "Artistic Tools for Scientific Minds"; Willis L. Peterson, "International Farm Prices and the Social Cost of Cheap Food Policies"; Philip C. Abbott, "Modeling International Grain Trade with Government-Controlled Markets"; C. Robert Taylor and Hovav Talpaz, "Approximately Optimal Levels for Wheat in the United States"; M. H. Doran, A. R. C. Low, and R. L. Kemp, "Cattle as a Store of Wealth in Swaziland: Implications for Livestock Development and Overgrazing in Eastern and Southern Africa"; Pranab K. Bardhan, "Agricultural Development and Land Tenancy in a Peasant Economy: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis." Proceedings of the AAEA Chicago meeting, three sessions: "International Commodity Markets and Trade," "Financial Markets for Agriculture," and "Competition and Regulation in the Food Industry." Plus Notes and Book Reviews.

Annual membership dues (including Journal) \$25; Annual subscription rate \$35; Individual copies \$10. Contact John C. Redman, Agricultural Economics, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Ky, 40506. Published in February, May, August, November, and December.

The Secretary of Agriculture has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of this Department. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Director, Office of Management and Budget, through February 28, 1980.

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office,
Washington, D.C. 20402. \$6.50 a year domestic; \$8.25, foreign.