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# Agricultural Economics Research

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# Agricultural Economics Research

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Change and continuity mark this issue of *Agricultural Economics Research*. After 7 successful years as economics editor of the journal, Clark Edwards requested an assignment that would substitute doing research for reviewing research. While the community engaged in agricultural economics research will respect his desire, it will regret the corollary that he now has less time to help others. Fortunately, he has agreed to remain a member of the editorial board, so his accumulated experience will still help guide the journal.

My own goal, as the new editor, will be to maintain the quality of the journal and to enlarge the community of contributors and reviewers. I encourage more of those researchers in the Economic Research Service (ERS) and Statistical Reporting Service who have not submitted articles in recent years to do so. While these two groups have traditionally submitted most of the articles to the journal and they also contain a large proportion of potential authors, we continue to welcome articles from any authors reporting U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) supported research in agricultural economics and related disciplines.

Through this change of editorship, as in the past with all preceding changes, our purpose continues to be that stated in Volume 1, Number 1 (January 1949), by O. V. Wells. The journal publishes articles (1) reporting results of economic research supported by USDA, (2) describing new methods or critically evaluating old methods still in use, and (3) describing new or expanding areas of research or statistics. Book reviews are included now as then. In 1976, following a complete review of the purpose and performance of the journal, the same purpose was restated by J. B. Penn (January 1976). Only one addition to the types of articles has appeared. Following the 1975/76 review, the journal introduced research reviews—shorter, sometimes less rigorous pieces with the same subject areas as the major articles.

In 1983, 34 years after its first statement, the original purpose is still the proper one. The content

of agricultural economics research has changed, of course, but the need remains to report it, to constantly expand and scrutinize its methods, and to identify new and expanding directions.

The use of new methods, which have become highly technical, does not mean discarding the older methods, which can include logical writing. The journal welcomes submissions using the full range of methods employed in agricultural economics, associated areas of statistics, and related areas of social science, as it has for 34 years.

The first two articles in this issue relate to the first and most important purpose of the journal, reporting research results. These articles report research conducted jointly by investigators in ERS and the land-grant universities.

Collins and Taylor develop a model of crop production and sales designed to reflect the effects of change, particularly technical change. The model user changes yields, for example, to trace the effects of a new pesticide. The design of the model makes possible the easy use of expert opinion. Its design is such that a user can employ it to ask "what if?" questions easily. To evaluate and use the results appropriately, however, the user needs to understand the model's construction. The model differs from others in two ways: (1) demand for inputs is estimated directly from relative returns (the "duality" approach) rather than from a mathematical representation of the production process, and (2) benefits or costs resulting from a change are calculated separately for consumers and producers.

Taylor and his associates employ the model developed by Collins and Taylor to evaluate alternative approaches to boll weevil control and eradication. Because the model is designed to incorporate judgment, the evaluation could use expert opinion to develop estimates of yield changes. The authors estimate effects of different pest control methods using Delphi, a process which polls an expert panel, gives each member a description of the range of

group responses, and then polls again. The combination of expert opinion and a comprehensive model illustrates the value of both. Although the reader's immediate response to boll weevil eradication might be that it would help cotton farmers as a group, the result indicates that the consequent higher yields would reduce incomes for cotton farmers as a group, while raising incomes of farmers in heavily infested areas.

In the third article, Willard Cochrane returns to the pages of this journal in a rare kind of article, one of organizational reflection and purpose. In the history of the journal, a handful of such articles have appeared, including Professor Cochrane's article announcing the formation of ERS in 1961 and the two

articles already mentioned examining the purpose and performance of the journal. In this issue, he identifies the proper role of ERS as that of a staff agency to the Nation, which means timely and appropriate responses to the Secretary of Agriculture, the Congress, and the interested public—including farmers, farm groups, agribusiness, trade associations, food and nutrition organizations, and religious and educational institutions. He concludes that ERS has done well, but could do better, and that its future depends on commitment by its leadership and professional staff to do good staff work for the Agency's clientele.

**Lorna Aldrich**

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