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A Journal
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Food Policy: Frameworks for
Analysis and Action

Agricultural Economics Research

A Journal of the U.S. Department of Agriculture • Economic Research Service

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In This Issue

This issue concludes my role as economics editor of *Agricultural Economics Research (AER)*. When I started my editorship 3 years ago, I felt awed by the company I was joining. This journal has had an impressive group of editors. Gene Wunderlich, the incoming economics editor, will fit into this group well. I am sure he will maintain the level of excellence of my predecessors. I except my term because such evaluations of a journal editor are much like those of a plant or animal breeding experiment in that they succeed only if they make what comes after better. The real test will be if the group of articles from Volume 36, No. 2 (Spring 1984) through Volume 39, No. 1 (Winter 1987), influences the future literature of economics and agricultural economics.

The articles in volumes 34 (1982) and 35 (1983), edited by Clark Edwards and Lorna Aldrich, set impressive standards. The Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) uses the "impact factor," which measures the speed with which an article published in a journal has an impact on the literature, as one of its comparative indexes for computing a journal's value. The 34 citable items published here in 1982 and 1983 were cited eight times in 1984 in the source journals covered by SSCI. This 8/34 ratio (the "impact factor") places *Agricultural Economics Research* above most other agricultural economics journals and compares favorably with many of the well-respected economics journals in terms of immediate impact on the literature.

Together with ideas articulated by O. V. Wells in the first issue that this journal would be a vehicle for communicating how analysts in the Economic Research Service (ERS) do their work, the SSCI's "impact factor" provides a common theme for the three articles in this issue. First, if one were to select articles that would enhance the "impact factor" of a journal, one would choose articles on topics as timely as these: exchange rates and agricultural trade, the impact of the Food Security Act of 1985 on livestock sectors, and biotechnological impacts. These topics are surely relevant to the current

policy agenda. Second, the three articles illustrate three separate approaches ERS takes in analyzing current policy. By their nature, current policy analyses have a time dimension that often precludes the formation of a separate research project to evaluate an issue. One must rely instead on the accumulated stock of past analyses.

These three articles illustrate three important approaches. First, ERS has devoted resources to developing a general economic model that can be used to analyze special situations. Second, when the real-world problem involves many economic actors and variables, the analyst may resort to algebraic analysis to ascertain underlying economic influences. Third, when confronting a new phenomenon for which prior experience is not available on which analysis can be based, the researcher must resort to descriptive analysis and informed speculation.

In the first article, Edwards uses a three-country trade model to explore the relevant issues in the current discussion about the importance of the recently strong dollar in explaining weak export demand for U.S. agricultural exports in the eighties.

In the second article, Westcott, Stillman, and Collins use the ERS quarterly commodity forecasting model to analyze the potential impact on livestock sectors of lower feed costs resulting from lower support prices in the Food Security Act of 1985.

In the third article, Offutt and Kuchler review and analyze issues in regulating biotechnology and analyzing the impact of potential innovations.

These articles allow me to conclude my tenure on a high point of relevance to current issues. I have appreciated the opportunity to edit this journal for the past 3 years. I thank the many authors, reviewers, and readers for their contributions and support.

Gerald Schluter

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