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# Agriculture in the 21st Century with Implications for Colleges of Agriculture

By

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Professor of agricultural economics, Remarks presented at an organized Symposium, "The Contemporary Agricultural Economy and its Impact on the Lives of Rural People" at the 2002 meeting of the Southern Agricultural Economics Association, February, 2002. Views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the view of the University of Kentucky, the Agricultural Experiment Station or the Cooperative Extension Service.

# Agriculture in the 21st Century with Implications for Colleges of Agriculture

David L. Debertin*

It's time to take a close look at recent trends agriculture and in rural areas and speculate where these trends might lead. What are the important forces that will shape the future agriculture and rural areas in the 21st century? What are the implications of these forces on the programs that will need to be offered in research, teaching and extension? Here are some of the important emerging trends.

1. ***Declining commercial farm numbers and increasing reliance on off-farm income to support standards of living comparable to non-farmers living in rural areas.*** Fewer and fewer farmers nationwide will continue to rely on the sale of crops and livestock as the dominant income source, and for those that do, they will decreasingly rely on colleges of agriculture for much of the technical production information. Recent USDA data has revealed that farmers earning the majority of their income from sources other than crop and livestock in most cases have family income levels little different from larger, commercial farms where crop and livestock sales represent the major source of family income (Gardner). This counters the myth that college of agriculture employees should necessarily feel "sorry" for most small farmers and work to try to make them more heavily reliant on income from agricultural enterprises as a means of raising their incomes.

Even as commercial farm decline, (that is, those who earn most of the family income from crop and livestock sales) numbers of hobby and part-time farmers has not only stabilized, but perhaps is gradually increasing over time (U.S. Census Bureau) These farms put many colleges of agriculture in something of a dilemma–their mandate is to try to serve anyone, but many of these small-scale operators are not the kind of farmers agricultural college workers are used to serving. Should colleges embrace these new part-time and hobby farmers (many of which are comparatively well-to-do ex-urbanites who now are living on what the Census and NASS calls a farm) even as their traditional clientele (commercial farmers who rely mostly on crop and livestock sales for family income) continue to disappear? For starters, these newcomers, while interested in farming, are often less committed to the basic idea of trying to profit from it. This is particularly true if whatever is being proposed might in any way jeopardize a comparatively stable income from off-farm employment. Farming for these individuals is more nearly viewed as a supplemental source of income, not as the basis upon which the well being of the family depends.

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Colleges of agriculture through the agricultural extension service will play a decreasing role as a purveyor of technical production information to commercial farmers who rely heavily on crop and livestock sales for family income. Commercial as well as part-time farmers will increasingly use contracts with agricultural processors as a means of stabilizing prices and to minimize or eliminate risk. Over time, these contracts will include increasingly detailed information with respect to the production technologies to be employed in meeting the provisions for delivery of the contract.

For example, a corn processor might want to use corn that has particular genetic characteristics or is grown using a specific set of inputs as specified by the contract, in much the same way that a broiler processor might wish to specify in a contract the specific types and amounts of feed to be used. A traditional role for colleges of agriculture has been to provide specific information to farmers with respect to desirable production technologies to be employed, but this information will be increasingly supplied by the contractor, ultimately giving the farmer less and less leeway in the production technology employed.. Under this scenario, there is less and less need for a publicly-supported extension service to provide "helpful" technical production information. So even if a college of agriculture does not embrace ex-urbanite hobby and part-time farmers as a new group that needs to be served, changes will still need to be made.

We are only beginning to see the implications of this in grain production. In the immediate future, a grain producer can still choose to produce grain for sale on the open market, but this grain will undoubtedly sell for a significantly lower price than grain produced according to the specifications of a contractor, so fewer and fewer farmers will find it profitable to produce and sell grain for the open market. The grain producer becomes the "employee" of the processor as most of the important managerial decisions are passed from the farmer to the processor. Farmers will be willing to abandon managerial control because in return they minimize price uncertainty with the price specified by the contract, in addition to obtaining a higher price. This is no different then what happened in broiler production 25 years ago and more recently, to hogs.

2. ***Deteriorating world market prices of many agricultural commodities that have traditionally been important to incomes of farmers.*** Right now, the world is awash in many basic agricultural commodities as many developing counties that only recently were importers of US commodities become exporters. US farmers once had a significant edge in their technical ability to produce crops and livestock, along with access to capital markets that was the envy of the world. In recent years, these advantages have not proven to be as important. Production technologies employed in other countries continue to improve at a rapid pace. Certainly, in many of these countries, production is conducted using fewer capital-intensive technologies, and with more labor. Moreover, the US dollar remains a high relative to the value of currencies in many of the countries that are emerging as agricultural producers on world markets.

With comparatively high wage rates and a short labor supply, the US is not competitive in world markets in producing many labor-intensive crops. However, countering all of this is a new concern over terrorism involving the nation's food supply. It may be that US consumers will be willing to pay higher prices for domestically produced supplies of food if they believe that these

supplies are potential less prone to contamination–either intentional from a terrorist or from the misuse of pesticides which are subject to less stringent controls elsewhere than in the United States. If so, we could see more product labeling of US-grown food.

Recently, some foreign countries have begun to use the name of the country as part of their strategy for marketing to consumers. Instead of trying to hide the foreign location of the supply source, Kroger recently advertized red seedless grapes as the "First of the new crop from Chile" hinting that the product might be superior to those California-grown grapes consumers had been buying earlier. States (Georgia, Washington, and New York) have long been using geography to promote their particular type of sweet onion (Vidalia, Walla Walla, etc.). But now countries like Ecuador have started doing the same thing. All of this represents a shift in marketing strategy from commodity to product, that started with the Chiquita banana sticker.

3. ***The industrialization of agriculture***. The industrialization of agriculture has and will continue to profoundly reshape agricultural production throughout the US and world-wide and with it the roles of colleges of agriculture. To illustrate, hog contractors have important advantages over individual producers who sell to small packing houses in enabling them to supply a consistent product, in much the same way a few large-scale broiler contracting firms took over the poultry industry more than two decades ago. Most consumers appear to be valuing lean and uniform pork over the more variable quality ordinarily produced by hog farmers not under contract, even if it means paying a somewhat higher price for what they perceive more consistent product.

Think of McDonalds–people don't flock to their restaurants because they believe McDonalds' hamburgers are indeed the best. McDonalds' customer base is largely built on the notion that the burger will be consistent not only from day to day but also from one restaurant to another. This is the advantage the big contract pork and chicken producers are also exploiting.

At the same time the door remains open for small-scale producers to align with specialty processing and packing operations to produce specialty products with particular characteristics under a particular brand name. McDonalds transformed the restaurant industry, but it didn't wipe out the mom-and-pop cafés, either, and there is still a market for good food at a small restaurant or café running as a mom-and-pop operation.. Country ham sellers are a good example of this phenomenon, whereby each branded country ham is seen by consumers as having unique characteristics–characteristics that could potentially command a premium price. Think of this also as the hog-and-ham analog to the micro-breweries that manage compete in an industry totally dominated by just a handful of major beer makers. The wine industry is another excellent example of an industry in which the small-scale producers have found strategies for operating effectively within an industry dominated by large-scale producers.

As a particular segment of the food industry becomes increasingly dominated by a few major players who are all producing very similar products, this opens the door for producers who wish to seek out these niche-markets. The problem faced by colleges of agriculture is that historically they have had a commodity-based rather than product-based focus. Employees of colleges of

agriculture have often faced a steep learning curve in terms of acquiring the requisite skills needed to help niche entrepreneurs.

4. ***Emphasis on enterprises that mesh well with off-farm employment***. Historically, colleges of agriculture–including my own–have often favored full-time commercial farmers, those who rely primarily on the sales of crops and livestock as the major source of family income. As one of my extension colleagues (who will remain nameless) once noted, "I can't afford to spend a significant share of my time on small and part-time beef producers, because even if you added up all their output, it would not amount to anything significant in terms of beef production!"

I have often wondered about the extent to which that philosophy pervades entire colleges of agriculture. Perhaps we see as important citizens those farmers who are producing a significant amount of agricultural production, and those we feel could have an extraordinary influence in the state legislature with respect to funding for agricultural research and extension. We may not try to cater to small and part-time operators because we see the aggregate value of their output as comparatively trivial, perhaps these farmers are less "committed" to the goal of raising income from crop and livestock sales, and (gasp!) perhaps these small and part time farmers are not as politically connected and influential in agricultural circles and thus would not "fight" as hard on behalf of agricultural college and their programs, which often more heavily address the particular needs of the full-time commercial farmers. If this were indeed true, it's more than a bit scary.

At the risk of upsetting my colleagues in dairy science, I would like to use dairy as an illustration of an agricultural enterprise that does not mesh well with off-farm employment. As an introduction I would like to draw upon personal experience in an anecdotal way. I grew up on a small diversified farm in western North Dakota. Our farm had a little bit of everything--a diverse array of enterprises, small grains, beef, sheep, and, about 10 dairy cows-and I used to show 4H Holstein calves. I enjoyed working with the dairy animals very much. The problem the dairy enterprise created is that it was a lot of work for the money we made on it–the cows needed to be milked every day no matter what. (I grew up having never been on an overnight vacation.) But, say, compared with dryland wheat production the income from the dairy heard was quite steady. I still recall my father's words "There are a lot easier ways of making a living than milking dairy cows."

When the time came for my father to think about cutting back on work, the first thing to go was the dairy herd. (The sheep went next, but I will leave that story for another day.) We knew that the time had passed for the small-scale dairy operation that did not have the capital investment required to keep up. Interestingly, the beef animals stayed around much longer. They required less labor and attention.

Few rural residents have any desire to work full-time off-farm, and then face a dairy herd that needs to be milked twice a day. Both the labor and the managerial requirements are high, so hiring labor is often not an option. Further, the average age farmers is increasing. So farmers who once were enthusiastic about dairying are winding down.

# Where Do We Go from Here?

Where is US agriculture likely to head over the next ten years and what are the implications for college of agriculture employees? Many of the recent structural changes in terms of farm numbers and enterprise shifts have been dramatic, and these trends will likely continue. While agricultural college administrators (and faculty) often promote the idea of encouraging part-time farm operators to expand their operations, by encouraging them to expand, these agricultural college professionals they may actually be encouraging these operators to do something that is not in their best self-interest. Income from crop and livestock enterprises tends to be volatile from year to year.

Barring layoffs or an entire plant closure, the paycheck from off-farm employment generally is quite steady from one year to the next. Why do we somehow believe that it is in the individual's best interest to earn income from the sales of crops and livestock instead of relying on a steady paycheck? In our zeal to promote crop and livestock production, we frequently lose sight of the bigger issue, that is, what is in the best interests of the individual.

Data from North Carolina suggest that if the primary goal of a college of agriculture is to increase farm-generated cash receipts, then it is not particularly difficult to accomplish this by simply inviting a number of large-scale hog farrowing and finishing operations to locate within the state. This is particularly true if one is unconcerned about such basic ideas as the distribution of incomes arising from the receipts from the breeding and feeding operations and environmental concerns, but suddenly the issue becomes not that of increasing cash receipts, but rather one of how the gains from such increases are distributed among residents and whether or not production is conducted in an environmentally-sound manner.

Focusing on changes in cash receipts as a measuring stick for gauging the success or failure of a college of agriculture bypasses most of the concerns that are of critical interest to the rural citizenry. These include concerns such as the distribution of incomes, the availability of off-farm employment opportunities (good jobs at decent wages), environmental consequences and a host of other issues that are important not only to rural people but to all residents whether they are rural or urban dwellers.

Further, there is no assurance that the quality of life for the average rural resident will be improved if cash receipts from the sale of crops and livestock increase. A thesis in agricultural economics revealed that the distribution of incomes in North Carolina counties producing large numbers of hogs is very uneven, not to mention how these facilities have reshaped day-to-day life for local residents (Diallo). Are rural residents willing to exchange their current way of life in a quest for higher cash receipts from crops and livestock?

# Agriculture as an "Engine" for Non-farm Rural Development

Agriculturally-based rural economic development goes under various pseudonyms. In recent years, a popular buzzword has been "increase value added." The whole idea here, of course, is that if low-value agricultural commodities can be further processed in-state rather than being immediately exported out-of-state in raw form, then local residents who are employed by these processing firms will benefit, even as the entire local (and ultimately, state) economy benefits as wages obtained from agricultural production and processing are spent and re-spent by residents.

The conceptual basis for agriculture as the engine for non-farm rural development hinges on the idea that rural communities are dependent on agriculture as the income base, and could benefit as a result of processing locally-produced agricultural commodities. One problem with this assumption is that most rural communities in the South and in most of the rest of the US are not primarily agriculturally-dependent. Rural communities in the upper Midwest and in particular on the Northern Plains tend to be more heavily dependent on agriculture than in the South, the West, and the Northeast. Rural communities generally have much more diverse economies, often relying on income from businesses and industries that are largely if not totally unrelated to agriculture.

In recent years, a lot of attention has been devoted to the role of tobacco as an income generator in states like Kentucky, North Carolina and Virginia. Since tobacco is grown by a large number of producers on small plots of land, unlike income from large-scale hog production, income from the sale of tobacco is broadly dispersed. In Kentucky, there are only 11 counties that have been identified as tobacco-dependent, based on the comparative importance of tobacco relative to the total production of all kinds of goods and services.

The fate of most rural communities in th South is not as closely tied to farming as is true for rural communities where commercial agriculture (full-time farmers) is more important, and in regions of the US where there are fewer off-farm employment opportunities in a diverse array of businesses and industries. This reduced reliance on agriculture as a source of income can be viewed as a strength not a weakness of economies in the South as it makes rural areas less subject to the factors affecting worldwide demand for crops and livestock, and less subject to difficulties in the face of a natural disaster such as a major drought.

Most advocates for agriculture prefer high economic base multipliers for crops and livestock production, and larger numbers are preferred to smaller numbers. A number of the agricultural economists in the South who generate such numbers have developed an informal exchange group, in part as an effort to develop methods for assuring that economic impact multipliers are not misused or overstated by advocates for agriculture, (including college of agriculture employees such as Deans and other administrators). Compared with many other sectors of the economy, the economic base multipliers in agriculture for employment and income are quite low..

# Ultimately, it's the Lives of Rural People that are Important

I have sometimes used the phrase "Its people, not pigs, that should be the primary focus of colleges of agriculture, including my own." In other words, the primary goal of colleges of agriculture should be to help improve the lives of rural people, and as a faculty we should be willing to go wherever that goal takes us, without hesitation. Another way of saying this is that the college of agriculture is at its best when it is working toward the broad goal of improving the well-being of people, not when it is narrowly focused on increasing the technical productivity of crop and livestock enterprises.

Faculty within the college of agriculture sometimes seem to me to be less than clear with respect to the point I have just made. Much of the work conducted within colleges of agriculture follows a research paradigm which I will call "reductionist science." Reductionist science is basically grounded in the idea of breaking problems into the smallest possible component parts and studying each component part in great deal of detail. Scientific "truths" are obtained from this careful analysis of each component part. If enough of these tiny pieces are understood, then they can be assembled into a picture of what is going on in the aggregate, or so this philosophy of science goes. Agricultural scientists often assume that if, through reductionist science, a method can be found to increase the productivity of a specific enterprise-that is, milk production per cow, gain per pound of feed, or yield per acre, and an educational system is in place that acquaints and convinces farmers to implement the new productivity-enhancing approach, then somehow the lives of all farmers who adopt these new methods will be enhanced.

Often, this is not the case, at least not in the aggregate. If this were true, because of productivity gains, cash receipts from the sales of crops and livestock would have soared as a result of the accumulating impact of the productivity gains developed through research and adopted by farmers with extension's able assistance. This is clearly not the case! Adjusted for inflation, total cash receipts in the US are little different now than they were in 1949. Productivity-enhancing gains have been just offset by reductions in market prices when the additional output reaches the market. Cash receipts have increased a bit on a per-farm basis over the same time period, but only because farm numbers have been declining at an even more rapid pace (Debertin).

In part because of relative numbers of faculty, the political culture of most colleges of agriculture (including ours) is largely dominated by production scientists who are consumed with the goal if increasing the productivity of the agricultural commodity that they deal with. They make the (in my view, often erroneous) assumption that the inability to achieve productivity gains is the primary problem facing farmers, and they seek to develop technologies that permit these gains to be achieved. The assumption is further made that any increases in the technical ability to produce crops and livestock will result in higher incomes to farmers, and, as farmers spend and re-spend this additional income, the non-farm rural economy will prosper as well. This distorted logic is the underlying conceptual basis for the idea that agriculture can be the basis for rural economic development.

A better approach might be to abandon the reductionist paradigm, and start thinking holistically. Ask some very basic questions, and use the answers to these questions as the basis for designing a college of agriculture for the 21st century. Here is my list of questions. These questions can be specifically directed toward the needs of rural people, but they also address issues affecting the public at large.

1. *Exactly what do (rural) people seek in an effort to improve the quality of their lives on a day-to-day basis? In short, what do people want out of life? What are their goals and aspirations?*

2. *What specific characteristics make a (rural) community a desirable place in which to live and work?* (Conversely, what factors make a (rural) community undesirable?)

3. *What do (rural) people want out of their jobs or self-employment? What is most important alone or in combination? Decent wages or a high income? Good working conditions?*

4. *What factors outside of work are critical to the well-being of (rural) people?*

And then the 5th, and most important question

5. *How can colleges of agriculture design research and educational activities that support the objectives of questions 1-4 and conduct its programs in such a way such that the public reaches these goals?*

Note that none of these questions suggest anything about improving the technical ability of farmers to produce crops and livestock, beyond the idea that this could be a mechanism that in part could help to achieve some of the goals embodied in the questions outlined above. Further, none of these questions suggest that the college of agriculture in its quest should focus on or necessarily be biased in favor of agriculturally-related employment opportunities.

# The Future. . . .

Colleges of agriculture in most states have traditionally viewed research and educational activities directed toward narrowly focused efforts aimed at increasing the productivity (increasing output or reducing production costs) for major agricultural commodities as the "bread and butter" of what they do. Activities outside this realm are sometimes attempted, but the central focus in most colleges of agriculture has remained on identifying specific opportunities for increasing the productivity of agricultural enterprises, and the lion's share of public monies for agricultural research have been directed toward these efforts.

This is not the strategy that will work effectively for the 21st century. Here is a summary of the reasons I believe that this narrow focus will no longer work.

1. ***The linkage between gains in technical productivity of production agriculture and the well being of commercial farmers is no longer as clear as it once was.*** A strong case can be made that, in the aggregate, consumers not farmers are the primary beneficiaries of the benefits of productivity-enhancing research. They benefit because of lower prices at the grocery store.

2. ***Much of the productivity-enhancing research requires large up-front capital investments in order to achieve the cost-saving benefits.*** This means that farmers who cannot make these large capital investments will increasingly be put at a competitive disadvantage. This issue is particularly important in a state like Kentucky where the average farm is small in scale and farmers have only limited access to the capital markets.

3. ***Colleges of agriculture are of decreasing importance as sources of information on new technologies and the specific decisions to be made.*** This will become more and more apparent as contracting and producing crops and livestock according to a contractor's specification becomes commonplace. Why would a farmer ask for extension's advice on a production technology if the specific technology to be employed is already specified by the contract? Farmers producing under contract have far fewer managerial decisions to make: colleges of agriculture have traditionally focused their educational efforts toward farmers who make a large number of critical management decisions.

4. ***College of agriculture in most states have not yet devoted significant efforts aimed at helping farmers produce products for the market rather than commodities.*** In this context, an agricultural product is something that has one or more unique characteristic that can be marketed at a premium price to buyers who desire these characteristics. The characteristics are often real but, in the case of many branded products, they may be merely imaginary "assurances of quality" associated with a brand name. Colleges of agriculture are still largely geared toward helping farmers produce and market generic (unbranded) commodities (like #2 corn). In a branded product world, the competitive conditions quickly become very different from what we have been used to, as firms compete for sales primarily on the basis of particular product characteristics, real or imagined. Having access to information your competitors do not have becomes all important. Colleges of agriculture have been reluctant to provide assistance to farmers producing branded products, because of their mandate to make information freely available to all. If they assist producer *A*, they are under some considerable obligation to provide the same assistance to a competitive producer *B*. They cannot guarantee confidentiality so critical under competitive conditions.

5. ***Rural communities in most states are developing economies that are increasingly diversified, and less dependent on the technical productivity of the agriculture in the surrounding area.*** At one time those who lived in rural towns and were in non-farm employment saw their fates as directly linked to how well agriculture was doing in immediate area surrounding the town. That was because farmers were primary purchasers

of the goods and services that these non-farm businesses produced. But as economic development in sectors outside of agriculture took place, communities ultimately became less tied to how well agriculture was doing locally even as farmers made more and more purchases of inputs, goods and services from outside the local community. There are still a few places in the US, most notably on the Northern Plains, where the economic health within towns and villages is closely tied to the well-being of agriculture. There are probably a few counties in Kentucky where this is true as well. But even in the Northern Plains, communities are making efforts to build a more diversified economic base. The result: the citizens of most rural communities no longer see their well being as directly tied to the productivity of the surrounding agriculture and thus are less and less inclined to support the need to using tax dollars to conduct research and educational activities aimed at increasing the productivity of agriculture.

6. ***Achieving gains in technical productivity is only one of many problems farmers face, and, for many farmers it is no longer the most important one.*** In Kentucky, for example, the more important problem for many farmers may be in developing specific ways of meshing agricultural production with a full-time off-farm job. But the research resources in most colleges of agriculture, narrowly focused on reductionist science aimed at making technical productivity gains, is not well geared to answer questions of this sort for those who obtain only a small share of their incomes from the sales of crops and livestock. These individuals see the research program of the college as being focused on full-time commercial farmers, in Kentucky and in many other southern states, an endangered species according to the 1997 Census. If so, why should small farmers (who generally have little capital for putting the newest technologies in place) and part-time farmers support colleges of agriculture?

7. ***Strategies for rural development coming from colleges of agriculture often try to concentrate on development efforts related to agriculture to the exclusion of other options.*** A basic goal of rural development is to help communities make good employment opportunities available to local residents. A good employment opportunity is a decent, steady job that pays good wages and provides comfortable long-term working conditions. Farm and non-farm workers have no preference for employment somehow related to agriculture (perhaps in agricultural processing) over jobs that have no agricultural connection so long as these basic conditions are met. Unfortunately, many of the employment opportunities being discussed in livestock processing do not meet these basic conditions. The jobs tend to be on the low end of the wage scale. They tend to be boring and repetitive, and often require workers to face less than desirable working conditions. This results in a high employee turnover rate as employees find job opportunities that better meet the basic conditions outlined above. Then the community is stuck with the prospect of attracting non-residents–perhaps even foreigners–to fill the jobs vacated by local residents, and confront the task of supplying housing and basic public services to these in-migrants.

In many states, agricultural interest groups like to focus on employment opportunities in agriculturally-related non-farm jobs, to the exclusion of other possibilities that might provide opportunities that could better serve the needs and desires of local residents. Colleges of agriculture to a large degree have bought into this as a means of rationalizing a heavy emphasis on research and education in crop and livestock production. In other words, a state where a lot of hogs are processed clearly "needs" college of agriculture scientists who know something about hogs, whereas if the state is heavily involved instead, say, in high-wage employment making parts for automobiles, the need for hog scientists is much less clear.

Given this backdrop, its interesting to note in recent years where efforts by colleges of agriculture aimed at obtaining more research and educational activities have succeeded, as well as where they have failed. The public, in influencing the state legislature and the governor, sees a strong need for people-directed efforts at the local level aimed at working on problems that will improve the quality of life for rural residents.

In my discussions with county agents, I am continually reminded of the extent to which the focus of county-level programs has shifted from narrow efforts aimed at improving the technical productivity of a small band of large-scale farmers to broad-based programs directed toward solving problems that will improve the well-being of rural residents both farm and non-farm. Extension programs at the county level have had to face the kinds of adjustments I am talking about on a daily basis, and, as a result have had to focus on these problems to a much greater degree than the faculty have.

Many of faculty appear to still be living as if we were in a state dominated by full-time farmers and persist in doing commodity-oriented research that, even if successful, will benefit at most only a small number of producers. They see rural development as a means of rationalizing more of this focused research by attracting firms capable of processing crops and livestock, with little regard for what this might mean for the lives of the average rural resident.

State legislatures sending these messages loud and clear: There is political support for programs aimed at broadening the mission of the college of agriculture to focus on improving the lives of rural citizens. Conversely, the support for money that would be used to further enhance our ability to conduct narrowly-focused research aimed at enhancing the technical productivity of large-scale, full-time farmers is weak if there is any support at all. The numbers of legislators who are committed to this latter goal are rapidly declining!

Efforts by colleges of agriculture can be seen by the public not as a source for unbiased assistance on a wide variety of issues, but rather as a group rallying on behalf of farmers–particularly commercial farmers and their apparent short-run interests. We must not be seen as just another special interest group confronting the state legislature with the need for a handout in support of the state's agricultural interests. Rather, we must be seen as an organization that will pursue whatever needs to be done to improve the lives of rural residents wherever that may lead us. Our programs should not tend to favor farmers over non-farm residents, large-scale commercial farmers over small-scale operators, or full-time farmers over part-time farmers. Our activities

aimed at improving rural communities must focus on the broad range of opportunities and possibilities, and not limit ourselves to only those possibilities for improving the lives of rural citizens that are somehow linked to agriculture.

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