

AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT: A CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY FOR THE LAND-GRANT COLLEGE SYSTEM

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A basic American tradition is that the individual citizen shall by his native ability and acquired competence not only conduct his private affairs successfully, but that he shall use his knowledge and understanding to conduct public affairs as well. The American people realize that an enlightened electorate is essential to the success of a democracy which thrives or languishes by the ability of its people to choose wisely.

We have long believed in the absolute necessity of some education for all the people. We designed a nation-wide public school system that produced a degree of literacy no other nation has been able to match. Our land-grant colleges were created to provide higher educational opportunities for the masses. These institutions have done a remarkable job, and their impact has been felt not only in the United States but throughout the entire world.

The advance of our people in well being, in comfortable living, in culture and refinement, in productive capacity, in usefulness as citizens, must for the most part be attributed to education. Virtually all of the important differences between man 10,000 years ago and today are due to education.

Education furnished one of the great drives behind our economic growth. However, as significant as the contributions of the past may be, they are no cause for complacency. Although the past record of education in this country is impressive, we must admit that it has failed to solve the economic, social, and political problems of the individual, the community, the state, the nation, and the world.

In a democracy where public opinion shapes the fundamental direction of government policy, effective leadership rests on an informed public. To keep the public informed and to implement continued progress at a rapid rate, our educational programs must keep pace with technological and scientific developments, the resulting economic and social disturbances, and the demands of a changing society. In a dynamic world we cannot afford to wait for wisdom in the next generation. We need to develop well-informed citizens who can make intelligent decisions on prob-

lems confronting them today. If education is to continue to serve as a vital force for progress, it must adjust to the world it serves.

U. S. agriculture, like the rest of the U. S. economy, is undergoing rapid and accelerating change due to technological and scientific developments and improved methods of organization and management. These changes have resulted in steadily rising per capita incomes during the past two decades for the population as a whole. However, the U. S. farming industry has been in a persistently unfavorable position—from the standpoint of incomes, employment opportunities, and in other respects.

The disparity of income between farm and nonfarm sectors of our economy stems from chronic overproduction in agriculture. This problem cannot be solved by the independent action of an individual farmer or even by the agricultural industry. Many of the required adjustments are controlled by society as a whole rather than by the farm sector alone. The broad public—farm and nonfarm—needs to understand the problems and issues before society as a whole can take constructive steps in the common national interest. Thus, it becomes essential that all of the people have a better understanding of agriculture as an industry and its relationship to the rest of the economy. They need to have the facts and know how to interpret them.

To interest all of society in the broad national problems relating to agriculture is a tremendous educational task. This is the audience, however, with the ultimate power to make policy decisions. Only by reaching society as a whole can we arrive at a national consensus for the formulation of sound agricultural policies which will bring about adjustments in agriculture that will benefit both agriculture and society in general.

The educational task is made even more difficult by the widespread misunderstanding that has arisen over the years from imperfect measurement and interpretation of economic trends, a conflicting and misunderstood value system, and misconceptions about the sources of agricultural problems. This increases the importance of accepting the educational challenge of helping agriculture regain full partnership in future national growth and prosperity.

If society is to be helpful in developing a constructive and sound agricultural policy, it must have a better understanding of the nature of modern agriculture and the role modern agriculture plays in national economic growth. As a result of the recent ad-

justments in agriculture, a new concept of agriculture is emerging. In this new concept, agriculture is defined to include three important segments of our economy.

The first segment includes the farmers themselves who are engaged in the production of crops and livestock. Approximately seven million people are employed on farms in the United States.

The second segment includes those industries which furnish supplies and services to farmers. This group of industries employs over six million people and is vital to the emerging concept of "agribusiness."

The third segment includes those industries and commercial enterprises that process, store, handle, and merchandise the products of our farms. This is the largest of the three segments in terms of the number of people employed. Currently, this group of industries employs more than 10 million people and it will grow larger in proportion to farming.

Together these three groups employ approximately 37 percent of the total number of persons employed in the United States. Taking this broad view, more than one out of every three employed persons work in agriculture. Any way you look at it, these three groups are important segments of the national economy.

Basically, farmers want equality of opportunity with the rest of society. This includes not only income opportunities but social, educational, and other types of opportunities. Farm people are interested in continuing progress, stability, freedom, security, efficiency, conservation, and justice. These goals to a degree are conflicting. Some individuals would emphasize certain goals at the expense of other goals. Others would emphasize different goals, based upon their values.

These differences in values grow out of the different economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds of individuals. Because of this difference in the weight given to values, individuals with the same knowledge concerning a given situation may arrive at different conclusions regarding what policy or course of action should be followed at any given time. Goals may also vary between the agricultural and nonagricultural groups because of differences in their knowledge of the situation or their background. In addition, we must recognize that emphasis given certain goals may change nationally under different economic conditions. The conclusions drawn or the courses of action taken are prerogatives of individuals

or groups. The function of education is to see that the conclusions or decisions are based upon facts.

Dr. Mervin Smith has outlined the adjustments needed. Most of the information needed to deal effectively with these problems can be classified as economic and social. If the land-grant colleges are to prepare people to deal effectively with change and adjustment, they must change their perspective. They must add a new dimension to the current educational goals. Land-grant colleges were created when the problems of rural people were mainly technological. For this reason, most of the work in the agricultural institutions has been largely technically oriented. The future program must be broad enough to develop understanding of agriculture's role in society. It must provide understanding of the common goals and interests shared by all of society in economic growth and progress, and in the adjustments required if the full benefits of technological progress are to be realized by all.

RESIDENT TEACHING

In the years ahead agriculture will need broadly educated, adaptable, capable young people who can adjust to changing times. The educational program of our colleges must be broad enough and flexible enough to enable each individual to develop commensurate with his own abilities.

Historically, agricultural education was developed with the primary objective of producing better farmers. The training of farmers is still important, and we should continue to improve the training given to prospective farmers. As agriculture becomes more highly specialized and competitive, and as we seek better methods and greater efficiency, more advanced and broader knowledge will be required to be a good farmer.

However, agricultural education programs now need to be aimed at agriculture in its broadest sense. Producing efficient farmers is no longer enough. The supply industries as well as the processing and marketing industries must be efficient if we are to compete effectively with synthetic products and other regions of the world in the market place.

Agricultural education must also look beyond the bounds of agriculture. With technological progress decreasing the need for labor on farms, emphasis should be given to educational programs to assist rural youth in adjusting to urban vocational and social patterns.

Moreover, the farm family will be confronted with continually

increasing social problems. These extend beyond the farm borders and become interwoven into the entire rural community. Thus, agricultural education in the future must deal also with a wide variety of human and public problems.

Land-grant colleges need to develop educated individuals who are not only technically competent but also capable of assuming roles of leadership in an increasingly complex society. Haphazard curricula do not develop such individuals.

Social, economic, and political problems will become increasingly important as we attempt to adjust to economic growth and as we attempt to live peacefully with our neighbors of the world. Colleges and universities need to take a searching look at the role of resident teaching. No attempt will be made here to discuss this in detail. The deans of resident instruction held a workshop at Fort Collins this past summer to consider this question. At least two more workshops are planned in the years ahead on this subject. The specific educational adjustments that should be made in the curricula are difficult to determine, but adjustments obviously are required and are sure to be made.

RESEARCH

As the source of supply for new knowledge, research has played a key role in the economic progress of our nation. It has made possible revolutionary technological advances in agriculture, from which both the farm people and nation have benefited greatly. In fact, research has done its job so well that agriculture is burdened with overproduction and surpluses.

However, in a sense, research in agriculture has lagged behind the times. Although we cannot deny that agricultural research has done a magnificent job, we have perhaps been too slow to change the direction of our research.

To be sure, continued investment in research to improve technology is highly desirable to aid in continued economic progress; to maintain the nation's competitive position in the world economy and allow the nation to aid in the development of other countries; and to safeguard against unforeseen contingencies. However, research on technological improvement in agriculture increasingly must be accompanied by research which aids agriculture to adjust to the new conditions forced upon it by this progress. Emphasis in our research should be shifted from biological and physical techniques in agriculture to the interrelationships of agriculture with the rest of society and means of adjusting to economic growth.

Technological progress has increased the efficiency of agriculture so that the resources now in agriculture are producing far more than necessary to meet the food needs of the nation. Today research need not give very high priority to finding new ways of increasing production, which will only add to the stores in our already bulging bins. Research should be aimed at increasing farm profits rather than merely increasing production. It should be more concerned with the pressing need for removing the excess resources out of agriculture, which seems to be the only way to eliminate overproduction and surpluses, and consequent low incomes.

The present research program includes too few studies that focus directly on the obstacles to adjustments in resource use. Information is needed on production responses to changes in technology, prices, costs, government programs, and other factors.

We know too little about the phenomena of economic development in order to predict where growth will or should take place and how to guide and implement the needed adjustments. Research is needed on labor mobility and improvement of services to facilitate migration. Attention should also be given to the problems stemming from migration, such as the effects on a community of losses in population, consumers, and taxpayers. Communities receiving migrants have different problems of concern, including housing, schools, and other facilities.

Research has the responsibility of becoming better acquainted with the changing characteristics of agriculture and the implications and providing information that will help guide our programs and policies toward attaining and maintaining a balanced, progressive, and prosperous agriculture.

EXTENSION

The Extension Service, in fifty years of development, together with the research and resident instruction resources of the land-grant institution has developed a unique system for service in over 3,000 counties aimed at better, wiser management of change in the individual farm or family unit. Throughout the years the Extension Service has developed a sensitivity to people and to problems and concerns at the local level. It enjoys today a high degree of acceptance and a reputation for objectivity and integrity. Living in America, and particularly rural living, has been vastly improved as a result of extension's efforts.

The increasing competitiveness of farming, the unremitting pressure for constant innovation, and the national interest in an efficient agriculture all demand continuing and improved education in management and technology for farm people. Today, in addition to helping to maintain these increasing rates of production, the Extension Service needs to devote more of its resources to the adjustment problems which arise as a result of economic changes associated with modern agriculture.

These adjustments center around bringing the aggregate level of resources devoted to farming into line with desired agricultural production levels, combining resources in proportions that are in line with modern technology, and finally, using these resources on more economic sized units.

Extension's concern should also extend to a whole series of social, economic, and institutional changes that are needed as a result of these primary adjustments and technical advances. These include the supply and marketing organizations which serve farming as well as all community services. They also include urban development, taxation, and water and land use. In addition, they include areas associated with human resources, such as vocational guidance and training of rural youth, adult education programs in agriculture, and problems of the aged.

Since all of these problems affect the broad public, farm and nonfarm, and require understanding and decisions by society as a whole, extension has a dual responsibility. It must bring to the farm public a better understanding of agriculture as an industry and its relationship to the rest of the economy. Farm people need to understand the limitations of what they as independent operators can do to improve their conditions, and the need for industry-wide approaches to the solution of many agricultural problems. Extension must also bring to the nonfarm public an understanding of the vital role of agriculture in the U. S. economy, of trends in agriculture which affect the welfare of the nation. The nonfarm public also needs to understand the reasons for public policies that deal realistically with the basic causes of the chronic farm problem.

The gap in understanding between farm and nonfarm groups must be bridged in order to produce a favorable climate for constructive public discussion and action on the problem of agricultural adjustment. Increased understanding between farm and nonfarm groups becomes even more important when we consider that the

political strength and social claims of agriculture are very apt to decline as the proportion of the nation's population on farms continues to decrease.

In trying to develop understanding of the agricultural adjustment problem created by economic progress, the educator's approach should be: (1) to analyze the problem, (2) to set forth the possible solutions, (3) to appraise the consequences of each of the solutions as objectively as possible, and (4) to allow each individual or group to choose which course of action best meets his values and over-all goals.

People traditionally desire freedom from governmental intervention but they realize that economic and social growth and progress create complex new public problems that may demand more government intervention, not less. Society can be only as good as the people composing it and operating it. Extension must accept this new challenge by providing all individuals with the basis for knowledge and judgment that is needed for great decisions. It needs to conduct a broad continuing education program designed to insure that the quality of the individuals, the productiveness of their efforts, and the value of their decisions are as high as can be achieved by institutional means.