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CALIFORNIA'S AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

*Rich Russell
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I am a farmer from the central part of California. My family has been involved in the cattle business for a number of years, although recently we have gotten out of the cattle business somewhat and into farming. We are in production agriculture and that's my main interest.

I was in the fourth class of the California Agricultural Leadership Program. They are now in the process of selecting class eight. At least ten and perhaps more classes are planned.

California's Leadership Program is unique. It is strictly limited to agriculture. Eighty per cent of the 30 individuals in each class are from production agriculture and about twenty per cent from agri-business. This is consistent with the desires of the Board of Directors of the Agricultural Education Foundation and the supporters of the program.

The program consists of a two-year course of study taking place on the campuses of the University of California at Davis, Cal Poly at San Luis Obispo, Pomona State College, and Fresno State University. Two and three-day seminars are held every month, November through June. The first year's study includes a national travel event, generally ending up on the East Coast with a week's stay in Washington, D.C. There is some travel either north or south of Washington. This past year the group went to Texas and Louisiana. The second year, seminars are again conducted on the campuses, with three weeks of international travel.

The Agricultural Leadership Program is an extremely time-consuming project. It has been, without question, one of the most rewarding experiences in my life. The cost is not cheap, but agriculture is, of course, the number one business in California.

Some of the benefits that have evolved from this program are becoming apparent now. One is the Agricultural Leadership Associates, an alumni group that is formed from the graduating classes to continue some of the same types of things that were done in the formal program. We are also attempting to open better lines of communication between state government leaders, the legislature, and the governor. We are attempting and succeeding in getting

people involved in local politics, local anything, from the school board on up. We have people that are in state government in appointed positions such as the Department of Agriculture. We have recently had the opportunity for the Board of Directors of our Leadership Associates to meet with our governor and tell him of our problems. Such occasions are some of the benefits derived from the leadership program.