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CHALLENGES IN THE YEARS AHEAD

W. D. BUDDEMEIER*

THE problems confronting India present a tremendous challenge. Two critical ones rest on the door-step of the agricultural economists and their professional counterparts in other sciences: (1) food production, and (2) the marketing of farm products, which includes processing and other services required for getting food from producer to consumer. In most countries agriculture is a highly competitive business. Efficient agricultural production is essential for raising the standard of living. But there are also other areas to which agricultural economists must contribute, such as credit and finance, rural sociology, land tenure and reform, agricultural and national policy, and others.

This brief background leads us to the consideration of some of the responsibilities and challenges of a professional society in a developing country. Your Society has a constitution and by-laws that set forth its purposes and its method of operation. There is no point in reviewing them here. It is more appropriate, I think, to raise some questions and offer some suggestions about how your Society can contribute most effectively to India's development in the years ahead.

PRACTICAL ORIENTATION ESSENTIAL

The American Farm Economics Association is the oldest professional agricultural economics society in the world. It is significant that the word "farm" has remained as part of the name, while in many similar younger professional societies this word has been replaced by the word "agricultural." Farm management was added to the programme of our agricultural colleges in the early years of this century. By that time American agriculture had developed commercially

*The author is indebted to Professor H. C. M. Case, Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics Emeritus, and to Professor H. G. Halcrow, Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Illinois, for their suggestions in preparing this paper.

to the stage where economic problems were assuming major importance. But the economic problems that were being emphasized centred on production at the individual farm level. Many of the early workers were in farm management, which is considered part of production economics in present-day terminology. It was therefore logical to use the term "farm" in the name of the American Farm Economics Association which was organized about 1920 by combining agricultural economics and farm management groups that had been organized separately at earlier dates.

By explanation I do not mean to imply that the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics should change its name; rather, I emphasize the fact that farm management was the major base from which agricultural economics developed. A critical problem for India today and in the years ahead is food production. The solution to this problem lies in the individual cultivator—that is, in the area of farm management. The Indian Society of Agricultural Economics must not overlook the basic importance of improving production at the farm level in solving India's food problem. In addition, market facilities and marketing and service industries must be developed to give the individual cultivator the tools and supplies he needs to produce and market his products at low cost.

Although the heart of the production problem is on India's farms, dynamic growth in the national economy will require the development of an efficient marketing system. For effective marketing, transportation, storage, processing, and wholesale and retail facilities must be developed. The challenge to agricultural economists is to get an overall picture of national economic development, including the production, processing, and marketing of food. If India is to achieve the level of living that modern agriculture makes possible, it will be necessary to develop the total economy. Until agricultural workers produce substantially above the amounts required for themselves and their families, the nation cannot achieve self-sufficiency in food production. The long-run goal for agriculture should be a substantial increase in output with a smaller labour force.

Economists in agriculture need practical knowledge and experience. Pure theory alone is not going to solve the production problems of India. One of the major drawbacks to progress in food production in India today is the gap between theory and practice. Such a gap probably exists to some degree in all countries. But it may widen when developing countries send men to be trained in countries in which the agricultural technology and economy are so advanced that they cannot be applied in the home country. Many Indian economists are extremely capable and are highly trained from the standpoint of theory. But the terms "farm management" and "production economics" imply skill in practice as well as theory. India will be able to meet her food needs only when there is a true balance between theory and practice in the operation of the millions of small farms as well as in marketing, credit, and various other problem areas.

In recent years, agricultural economists in the United States have been placing increasing emphasis on extension (cultivator education) activities, especially farm management. In fact, special extension sessions have become a part of the meeting of the American Farm Economics Association. Such emphasis is even more urgent for India.

In India, farm planning, a farm management technique, has been emphasized and publicized to a considerable extent in recent years. But farm planning is meaningless unless there is a proper blending of theory and practice. Men must be trained in this area. They can influence cultivators and others only when they are able to understand, practice, and demonstrate effective agricultural production based on sound economic theory.

CO-OPERATIVE EFFORT IMPORTANT

Co-operation among economists and production specialists is an effective means of bridging the gap between theory and practice. Since the economist may sometimes lack adequate knowledge of the practical aspects of production, he needs to co-operate with his colleagues in the production area. This activity is a two-way proposition. The economist also has something to offer to production specialists. In other words, a truly co-operative effort should cause the economist to become more production-minded and better informed about practical problems in applying theory. Similarly, the production specialist should become more aware of and knowledgeable about the field of economics.

Many of the greatest achievements in United States agriculture have come as a result of co-operative effort. Soil scientists, crop production specialists, and agricultural economists working together at the University of Illinois have achieved results that would never have been possible by working individually. Agricultural engineers and agricultural economists also work closely together. Farmers who make large investments in power and equipment need to have reliable assistance from various sources. Joint effort brings greater results than would be possible from individual effort. However, such co-operation does not lessen the need for an individual to have training and experience in both economics and farm management, or in both theory and practice. Equally important is the need to keep up to date in both areas.

Co-operative effort seldom comes easily. Co-operation is as much a state of mind as an activity. Professional jealousy needs to give way to larger vision. Efforts can be effective only when people are open-minded and seek goals that extend beyond their own professional interests. They must recognize the contributions of their colleagues in other fields. Too frequently people forget that the reputation of an educational institution, or any other organization, is determined by the degree to which all of its members work together for the good of the institution.

Co-operation offers a tremendous potential for achievement; yet too often it is beset by problems and difficulties originating in the minds and attitudes of people.

TRAINING AND GUIDANCE

What balance in the training of Indian agricultural economists is most appropriate today? First, how many people are needed with training at the various levels—B.Sc., M. Sc., and Ph. D.? Second, what kind of training is most desirable at these various levels? Should it be broad and general, or should it be highly

technical and specialized? Obviously men with training of various types and levels are needed, but what sort of balance is most significant? A professional leader must have a broad basic training in order to understand and visualize the entire field of agricultural economics, although specialization in some part of the field is also important.

Another question is where is the most appropriate place to get the necessary training and advanced degree—in India or abroad? India's economy has progressed substantially, but most of her agriculture is still primitive. Can such an agriculture be catapulted into modernity, or will it have to evolve gradually? Whether India remains a democracy committed to socialism or assumes some other form of government may be a determining factor.

The present status of Indian agriculture creates a dilemma for agricultural economists and many other scientists. Today new scientific information becomes quickly available throughout the world. Many professions have international societies that exchange ideas and knowledge. They include representatives of countries from the most advanced to the least advanced. This interchange is commendable, but it also presents problems. It creates international professional competition. It has the effect of encouraging scientists in the under-developed countries to place undue efforts on problems that are not the most significant ones for their countries. Much of the professional knowledge is more advanced than the developing countries need and can use. A common criticism of the developing countries is that they do not put enough emphasis on practical or applied problems. There may be two reasons in addition to the one given above. Many individuals do not thoroughly understand their local environment, their problems, and their needs, and some teachers lack the background and experience necessary to direct students in selecting and analyzing the most currently critical problems, especially in the applied phases of such sciences as agricultural economics.

The professional people from the developing countries are not entirely at fault. Their problem is to develop and maintain a professional status and prestige in the world as well as at home. Many of them logically seek training in the highly developed countries where the basic resources for both production and research differ radically from those in their own country.

The development and use of electronic computers is one example. There is a strong tendency for doctoral candidates as well as many master's candidates trained in the United States to use machines in their research. This situation poses some critical questions for Indians trained abroad: How many will have comparable facilities when they return to India? If they do not have them, can and will they adjust to what they do have? Are the available data adequate and reliable enough to justify the use of such machines and techniques? Does such training tend to remove agricultural economists further away from the practical problems and the critical need to solve them?

Electronic computers can solve few problems for the millions of cultivators involved in a primitive agriculture. If the technology already known in India could be effectively applied, food production could be substantially increased. There are undoubtedly some areas of research in which electronic computers would

be useful, but, in terms of the limited resources of the country, they would have to be considered a luxury. Adequate facilities, including housing for the equipment, men who understand the mathematical techniques that are involved, operating and maintenance personnel, the ability to get repair parts and, finally, reliable data are essential in order to justify the purchase and use of such costly equipment.

I do not mean to condemn the current research in agricultural economics or the desire of Indians to obtain the training needed for such research. I am simply raising a question about how urgently and critically such equipment and training are needed in solving India's immediate food problems. It is highly probable that most Indian students trained in agricultural economics in the United States will receive some such training. A common consequence is frustration and dissatisfaction with job offers and working conditions when these men return to India.

Is the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics in a position to give direction to study aimed toward more efficient management and organization of resources? The urgency of solving the food production problem points up the need for well-trained men. There is a vital need for additional training in agricultural economics with emphasis on the practical aspects. In a developing country that is primarily agricultural, the first step toward increasing food production is to gain the confidence and respect of the cultivators. A simple, direct approach will be most effective.

And now this final observation: Many United States technicians who have worked in India feel that the social, political, and related barriers are more serious obstacles than economic ones to the agricultural development of the country. If this observation is reasonably accurate, it would suggest that the members of your society should develop close working relationships with professionals in other fields such as sociology (including rural sociology), political science, psychology and others in an effort to remove some of these barriers to agricultural progress.

PROFESSIONAL PROGRESS AND EXPANSION

To justify its existence, a professional society must constantly grow, expand, and offer something constructive to its members and through them to the nation. Its members must be given the opportunity to participate and make contributions. The membership base must be broad enough to reach all agricultural economists who might have an interest and desire to join.

Communication and transportation are difficult in a country as large as India. Low salaries prevent many professional workers from attending a single national meeting. One way to make it possible for more people to benefit from a professional society is to organize state and regional branches. In North America there are the American Farm Economics Association, the Western Farm Economics Association, the Canadian Agricultural Economics Society and many state and regional professional societies. Professional people are encouraged to belong to several of these societies; many participate actively in more than one. Your profession will benefit from making possible greater participation of more agricultural economists in a recognized association as a means of professional advancement.

To what extent should the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics give direction to programme of training for agricultural economists in India? There are numerous colleges of agriculture in your country. They and some other institutions offer various levels of training. A number of new agricultural universities are being established. What kind of training will they give? Who will guide the development of such programmes?

A professional society has an obligation to be concerned about the standards of training available in its field. The society can exert a favourable influence through its members as well as through conferences, seminars, study committees, and committee or group recommendations.

CONCLUSION

One of India's major problems is economic development. Since a large part of her resources and national income are agricultural, agricultural economists have an obligation to accept the opportunities, the challenges, and the responsibilities that confront them in India's struggle to advance.

After 25 years of constructive effort, the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics is in an excellent position to forge ahead, to give direction to and improve work in agricultural economics. Many of the food problems of India are on the door-step of the agricultural economists. Achieving worthwhile results in solving these problems will require hard work on the part of many people.

In the United States the Morrill Act providing for the establishment of the land-grant institutions was passed in 1862, early in our agricultural development. A significant aspect of this Act was its concept of a high economic status for farmers. The objective of improving the farmer's position was a motivating force in the development of teaching, research and extension education in our colleges of agriculture. It centred on helping farmers solve their problems. The outstanding success of this effort has been due largely to (1) the dedication of professional people to achieving the objective, and (2) the unselfish co-operation and co-ordination of effort of all those concerned. With the same goals and dedicated effort, India too can achieve success.