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NEW LOOK FOR COLLEGES OF AGRICULTURE

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Some time during the past winter I watched and listened to an hour-long program on CBS-TV offered as part of their excellent The Great Challenge series. This particular program was a panel discussion by a group of eminent economists on the significance of certain economic trends to the present and future welfare of this country. I recall that agriculture's good friend, Mr. Galbraith, was one of the panel participants. It was a provocative discussion which, to the layman, raised more questions, understandably enough, than it answered. I enjoyed the interplay of capable minds and, yes, even the complete lack of agreement. It was a fascinating, inconclusive presentation.

Not long afterwards, I heard from the father of one of our students who had been dismissed from the University for inadequate academic performance. He, too, had seen this program and had drawn his own conclusions. Let me quote from his letter: "The law of supply and demand in our present economy is a fallacy. Banking practices vs. credit and business stimuli are not only confusing, they are just not understandable even to the teachers of economics. Economics is an inexact science dealing in fallacies and opinions. The CBS television program on March 23 is a horrible example of economic theories. This subject was proven to be not a science but a conglomeration of opinions so confusing as to confuse the experts. Economics is an area where any idea appears to be valid. This is the course my son failed."

My audience today is a group of New England economists. My subject involves a forward look at colleges of agriculture. Considering my audience and my situation you will understand, I am sure, if my talk, moving from one fallacy to another, develops into a conglomeration of opinions confusing both as to intent and content. Your planning committee is to be praised for its desire to be progressive in its programming but should not be blamed for any confusion I may contribute.

The land-grant college is a legislative creation designed to bring the alleged advantages of education to the masses. In the formative years, the enabling legislation represented National recognition of the contribution of the great private, liberal arts institutions of the East to the progress of our social system in general and to the personal, intellectual advantage of favored segments of our population in particular. Public support of education beyond the secondary school level represented a radical change in basic philosophy, but a change which, from a somewhat prejudiced viewpoint, has paid handsome dividends.

But this is the forward look - an analysis of the role and program of the land-grant institution for the future. Broadly and basically, the responsibilities of the College of Agriculture can be classified into four general areas today as they were yesterday and will be tomorrow, namely: (1) resident instruction, (2) Extension education, (3) research, and (4) service programs.

After nearly a century of existence the land-grant colleges have entered middle age and have taken on many of the characteristics of this age group - resistance to change, self satisfaction, and conservatism. All of us need constantly to remind ourselves that we have a constituency and a responsibility

to keep pace with the needs (both those known and those not even recognized) of the public to whom we are responsible. This means a constant reappraisal of our programs, not reevaluation ad nauseam, but an alertness to what goes on about us and how this relates to what we are doing. We are constantly being reminded of the changes through which agriculture is going and has gone. These must affect our programs whether we like it or not.

I want to consider each segment of our responsibility and what I envision for changes in program and organization as occasioned by the changing nature of agriculture and the needs of the times:

Resident Instruction - Degree programs in the agricultural sciences have as their primary objectives the training of the intellectual leadership for the food and fiber industries, both for this country and, necessarily, for large segments of the free world outside the boundaries of continental North America. Our traditional function of training men to be successful farmers is assuming different emphasis and a new importance. We will be called on to train fewer and fewer people for farming but those who do become farmers must be prepared to take on managerial responsibilities of production units capitalized (even here in the conservative Northeast) at \$75,000 to \$150,000 or more. Such men are inadequately trained if a major basis of their education are such courses as livestock judging, potato production, dairy marketing, and similar courses which have been common in the past.

Basically, no large proportion of our graduates will be returning to farms. The majority will be accepting employment with governmental agencies, with agricultural industries and in agricultural services of one kind or another. Essentially, we will be less able to forecast with surety where our graduates will be employed and hence we will be less concerned with education towards employment goals and more concerned with education per se - to develop the awareness of the individual to a point where he demands the opportunity to secure an education to the maximum of his ability. Basically, there needs to be recognition of and some agreement on the essentials. We here at Maine think we know, but we may change our thinking without notice. It is easy for me to say without any appreciable disagreement that the physical sciences, the biological sciences, mathematics, English, speech, economics and business are all essentials of a core training in the agricultural sciences and will receive greater emphasis in the immediate future.

Other areas of equal importance on which there is no agreement should be considered if we are to accomplish what we must without frittering away the time of students, the time of faculty, and our limited financial and physical resources.

Proliferation of courses and duplication of effort are problems of prime importance in all of our institutions. They are difficult to correct, too. Let me illustrate my point by speaking of a situation here at Maine. This is not unique to this institution either. Take the field of nutrition - undoubtedly of extreme importance as part of the training of many of our men and women. In three or four departments we offer the following courses in one phase or another of animal nutrition: livestock feeding, feeds and feeding, animal nutrition, poultry feeding, human nutrition, dietetics, nutrition of the infant and young child, and nutrition in abnormal conditions. I'm not saying that one course in nutrition can meet all of our needs. I do believe, however, that there is much needless duplication - animals are animals and I believe in this case they are overfed.

Don't think of nutrition as an isolated case. Others are easily found, too. Take the case of marketing - a vital field if ever there was one. Yet I question the necessity or desirability of agricultural marketing, marketing potatoes, marketing fruit, marketing dairy products, marketing poultry and eggs, advanced agricultural marketing, and marketing (Arts College). Here is a total of 21 credit hours of marketing courses offered at the University of Maine. Desirable as it may be to satisfy all of our constituency from a public relations viewpoint, this situation and others like it do not represent either a reasonable use of resources or wise pedagogy.

Two educational bandwagons available for mind-weary professionals today are the rocket-powered "science bandwagon" and the more pedestrian but no less impressive "business" one. In our efforts to justify our existence, colleges of agriculture are re-labeling our old wares with catchy titles in tune with the times--no college worth of the name hasn't either created or toyed with the idea of an agribusiness curriculum and various equally fancy-named science programs. On close scrutiny most of these proposals turn out to be mere relabeling without change in content. Agribusiness is simply agricultural economics. A rose is a rose is a rose.

Efforts are also being made with perfectly reasonable explanations to rename colleges of agriculture to escape the curse of the word "agriculture," which in society's present frame of mind seems to represent a very low order of social and intellectual acceptability. These, then, are superficial aspects of the "new look" for colleges of agriculture.

Some of this is amusing, some irritating but none lethal - all of us will shift back and forth some with the changing pressures, but encouragingly, I suspect we move always to a more substantial academic position. Programs in colleges of agriculture will evolve primarily into university rather than strictly college programs. This will lead a better developed relationship between various segments of our universities and even more importantly to better educated young men and women. Specifically, I detect in the field of agricultural economics, for example, an increasing emphasis on college mathematics, business economics, and economic theory--a merging, if you will, of the resources of the agricultural and liberal arts colleges. Perhaps the day will even come when those directing liberal arts program may recognize that agricultural courses have certain overtones of academic respectability--this may well be the ultimate.

Extension Education - Extension programs have been more influential in changing agricultural patterns and practices than any other single effort either inside or outside of the land-grant system. Their role of providing agricultural leadership, and as a translator of research findings into absorbable terms, has been the vital program which has made progress possible.

The organization has been a successful educational force because it has kept pace with changing times. The next ten or more years will really put Extension's ability to be flexible on trial since a rapid change in economic patterns of agriculture should be recognized by equivalent organizational and program changes in Extension.

I suggest that the new look for Extension may include elements of the following:

1. Upgrading of the educational and experience requirements of Extension employees at both county and state levels, with commensurate salaries, titles and privileges making these staff members equivalent to those in other divisions of the University.
2. Reorganization of the field force to provide more specialized service to a more specialized agriculture. The days of the general farm as a vital force in our agricultural economy seem numbered. Highly specialized production units need highly specialized field educational services. The broiler producer with 100,000 birds has needs for extension education completely different from those of the poultryman of a decade ago. The same thing is true of dairymen, orchardmen, potato farmers and other commercial operators. Such producers must have more highly technical and specialized information than the generalist extension agent can be expected to have.
3. Broadening the talents available to Extension clientele by increasing the numbers of state specialists available; directly by an increase in force or indirectly by increasing the number of split (extension-research) appointments.
4. Bringing together administratively the total resources of the institution to develop a coordinated approach to areas of broad concern. To illustrate: editorial and publication efforts of the agricultural division might be made more effective by consolidation of our several units into a single one.
5. Non-agricultural educational demands at the off-campus level are numerous and need appraisal and official recognition - urban as well as rural youngsters profit from 4-H activities; demands from agricultural trade and industry must be recognized as a logical and legitimate part of our agricultural responsibility; urban women increasingly participate in home demonstration programs; suburban living creates demands for elementary agricultural education, particularly in the field of crop and fruit production, and landscaping.

Research Programs - The present trend for regionalization of research work is basically sound. It doesn't stand to reason that each of the several New England states should have duplicating research programs in all of the various fields. State funds for agricultural research will continue, during the next decade at least, to have a secondary priority to the demands for growth of undergraduate education. It would seem to follow that there needs to be a rather careful evaluation at the administrative level of the research areas which will be supported with such funds as are available. Attempting to meet all of the demands of our citizenry and the equally high requirements of the research staff would seem to lead to programs which, trying to be all things to all people, may result in not satisfying anyone. Incisive clarification of goals and limitations with an equivalent all-out effort in specific areas would seem to be a reasonable objective.

If and when this can be done, I suspect that one major area in which greater rather than less emphasis would have to be given is the field of economics of production and utilization. It is easy to say this before this group but it would be equally true and appropriate for an audience of dairymen, asparagus growers or food processors. The most significant fact of agriculture's

present position is the size of capitalization factor involved in commercial agriculture. A need exists for research information on such various business facets as management of credit, labor management, equipment utilization and replacement, accounting, contractual services, quality control and others. This need is so very real and significant that perhaps the very drastic, and dislocating approach of reassignment of available funds should be made. This will take more courage and stamina than many of you will admit or we will quickly assume.

Service Programs - No special comment is needed here than to say that our land-grant colleges will continue to offer at cost (self-supporting) certain essential technical services not available from private industry. To illustrate: private industry cannot carry a pullorum disease control service, or testing of fertilizers, or other essential public services. The land-grant institution may be expected to use its resources for these purposes.

The future cannot be blueprinted this easily and quickly. At best, what I have attempted to do is to lay before you my thinking on the new look. The new look phraseology sounds dishearteningly similar to the forward look of Chrysler Corporation fame--perhaps you, the public, will not like the "fins and chrome" I have added to our current model. That, certainly, is your privilege.