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# *Ecology and the USDA Program*

*Presented by* DR. DIXON D. HUBBARD

Discusses the USDA "Environmental Thrust" plan and two specific projects in food marketing

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Environmental degradation has become a matter of great concern to our society. The reason for this concern is apparent in what we see around us: pollution of air, water, and soil; massive problems of waste; loss of open space; lack of natural beauty; the impact of poorly planned and disorderly development, etc.

These problems which confront us daily have very evasive solutions and frequently seem beyond the realm of our ability to resolve. Thus, relative to what can be done about today's environmental problems, the average citizen often feels at the mercy of economic and social forces beyond his grasp. This, in turn, frequently produces an attitude of futility. However, this need not be the situation. USDA has a plan for doing something about environmental problems. We call this plan the "Environmental Thrust".

We believe that any significant improvement in the environment must start with people and that the people of America can alter their thinking and actions to solve the problems of the environment. The purpose of Environmental Thrust is to show people how they can voluntarily do something positive about improving environmental conditions.

Twenty-two project outlines, now ready for use, can be obtained from local, State, and Federal Rural Development Committees. These committees are made up of representatives from the Soil Conservation Service, Farmers Home Administration, Forest Service, Rural Electrification Administration, Economic Research Service, and Extension Service. These agencies are easy to reach;

along with county extension agents and farm advisers, they are listed in local telephone directories.

There are also many other USDA agencies which have offices throughout the U.S. and any of these offices in your State and locality can help you obtain project outlines and guidance. The outlines and general information are also available from: Environmental Thrust, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

On September 13, 1971, Secretary of Agriculture Clifford M. Hardin made a policy statement relative to environmental improvement. Quoting from this statement Secretary Hardin says, "... it shall be the policy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to lend all possible support to individuals, civic and service clubs, development committees, and local, county, and State governments in pursuing activities, projects, and programs whose goals are to reverse the trend of greater and greater degradation of our environment."

The regular on-going activities of the USDA are concerned with every aspect of our environment. It is the business of agriculture to provide a safe, wholesome, and abundant supply of farm and forest products; to conserve and renew soil and water resources; to protect and improve wildlife habitats; to produce ornamental plants and trees; and to create outdoor recreation areas. Thus, agriculture's concern with the environment is as broad as the definition will allow—the total of our surroundings, conditions, and influences. This means that there is a wealth of knowledge and experience available through the USDA to help any community deal with a particular environmental problem. Environmental Thrust commits this knowledge and experience of USDA employees to assist citizens and their organizations in all ways possible in the battle against environmental deterioration.

On September 23, Senator Packwood of Oregon stated in the Congressional Record that "Environmental Thrust is not some new highly-funded Federal boondoggle. Rather it is the simple extension of a helping hand, a hand that extends into nearly every corner of our country. It is making available personnel, services, and programs that already exist, that are already funded, and which are operating."

Throughout the United States, the Department of Agriculture has hundreds of local, State, and Federal offices staffed with people whose daily duties relate to the environment.

The Environmental Thrust campaign aims to muster all available resources of the agricultural community so as to reach every rural county and town to help build and protect the quality of life. We want every source of pollution, ugliness, or blight to be challenged.

Alert citizens everywhere see pressing environmental problems on all sides. We hope to help these concerned citizens also see environmental *opportunities*—opportunities for voluntarily working together to solve problems.

Environmental Thrust seeks to get things started. It is designed to provide citizens with help in first initiating, and then carrying out, community-wide activities in environmental quality—concentrated efforts that can attain tangible, measurable goals.

Each community is urged to look around and decide where to develop its own environmental thrusts. The initial 22 Environmental Thrust project outlines is not an exclusive listing. Some communities may already have environmental projects underway; others may develop programs tailored to their unique needs. The outlines are merely guides. They suggest projects, work plans, and ways of measuring project effectiveness. *Most important they list the help available from various USDA agencies whose work relates to that particular environmental concern.*

The role of USDA personnel in the Environmental Thrust will be to support these citizen efforts on behalf of the environment in every possible way. However, the environmental projects will essentially be citizen efforts—determined, administered, and carried out by the community.

If you are concerned about the environment, regardless of where you live or work, you are urged to join the USDA in this environmental improvement effort. Working together, millions of individuals and their organizations can put quality into our environment.

The following project outlines are ready for use:

Safe Drinking Water . . . Sanitary Landfills . . .  
Trash and Junk Removal . . . Safeguarding Food  
Quality . . . Reducing Environmental Degradation  
By The Marketing System . . . Sewage Disposal for  
Farm Home and Rural Community . . . Animal  
Waste Disposal . . . Pesticide Safety . . . Disposal  
of Pesticide Wastes and Containers.  
Controlling Ticks in Recreational Areas . . . Controlling  
Yellow Jackets in the Western United States . . .  
Controlling Ragweed . . . Controlling Poison Ivy,  
Poison Oak, and Poison Sumac . . . Controlling Poi-  
sonous Plants . . . Controlling Aquatic Weeds . . .  
Brush Control.  
Improving Recreational Resources . . . Improving  
Rural Housing . . . Land Use Planning . . . Noise  
Reduction . . . Protecting the Landscape . . . Land-  
scape Improvement.

The projects on Safeguarding Food Quality and Reducing Environmental Degradation By The Marketing System should be of special interest to this group. Thus, I have included copies of these two projects in my presentation and will give you a few excerpts from them.

## I Safeguarding Food Quality

### Situation and problem

Producers, processors, manufacturers, and distributors of agricultural products spend many millions of dollars each year to provide nutritious and healthful foods for American consumers. USDA studies and the experience of Extension personnel indicate that a great amount of the quality of food products is lost through improper and

careless handling in retail food stores, restaurants, and other eating establishments as well as in the home.

“Both the appearance and nutritive value of these carefully produced and processed food products are affected. In addition, careless handling of food often results in the development of organisms harmful to health.

### Objectives

1. To improve the handling and protection of perishable food products and so-called non-perishable food products that are subject to quality deterioration by developing an understanding of proper food care in the home as well as in stores, restaurants, and other food service establishments.
2. Reduce the spoilage of perishables in transit, in wholesale, in retail, and in the home.

### Plan of work

“The action divides itself into promotion, training, and recognition.

1. Promotion: A joint promotional effort by industry and government groups emphasizing the handling and protection of perishable food products, other food products, and animal feeds, including pet foods that are subject to quality deterioration. This campaign will be separated into two distinct approaches—one with homemakers and the general public; and the other with retail food stores, restaurants, food service establishments, and others involved in food handling in the marketing process.
2. Training: Local and State groups would sponsor educational programs utilizing home study, meetings, seminars, and self-analysis type assistance for stores and eating establishments. The national leadership will sponsor similar programs with establishments such as national and regional food stores, restaurants, food service groups and organizations.
3. Recognition: Individual homeowners who complete study courses, as well as food stores, restaurants, and food service operations, would be suitably recognized.

### Criteria for evaluating effectiveness

“Evaluation of this program’s effectiveness would be through measuring the success of the awards program and by spot checking retail stores, restaurants, and other food service establishments.

### Available resources

“The Agricultural Research Service’s competence and research in perishable food products can be drawn on to develop promotional and training materials on assembling, transporting, warehousing, retailing, and distributing food.

“ARS could develop popular publications and posters on proper care of perishables for distribution to housewives, wholesalers, retailers, restaurateurs, and other handlers. Pocket-size cards on how to store (and ripen) fresh produce could be prepared for distribution at produce counters.

“The Extension Service can lead in setting up demonstrations on safety practices in food handling. It could cooperate with ARS and C&MS in developing educational materials on the handling, storage, and protection of foods.

“In its consumer information work, the Rural Electrification Administration will increase emphasis on safe-

guarding food quality in household storage, cooking, and cleaning up, as well as in farm production applications or processes. Some REA borrowers work not only with consumers and schools, but with other institutional and commercial consumers.

"Consumer and Marketing Service's fruit and vegetable division could assist in promotion, education and training.

"Personnel of C&MS could teach the basic elements of handling perishable food.

"In the information activities of the Livestock Division of C&MS, references to meat handling and storage could be emphasized.

"Expertise in sanitary practices in the Dairy Division could be integrated into a national effort with such entities as the National Association of Food Chains and individual food chains. Field operations could carry it all the way to the processing and distributing level.

"The Food and Nutrition Service will intensify its participation in and contribution to safeguarding food quality through its direct information channel to some 80,000 food service establishments.

★ FNS specialists encourage industry to modify or create food service equipment to comply with the spirit of environmental thrusts.

★ Over 20 foods in family-size containers are now available for distribution through State and local agencies to some 3.9 million people. Nutritional information is already carried on the labels of these containers. This will be alternated with environmental messages.

"Here is a partial list of other resources readily available: Home economics clubs, 4-H clubs, FFA, youth groups, schools, utility companies, refrigeration equipment and maintenance companies, retail food associations, and restaurant associations.

"Some of the national associations that will be of help are the National Association of Retail Grocers, National Association of Food Chains, Cooperative Food Distributors of America, National Association of Convenience Stores, National Association of Food and Dairy Equipment Manufacturers, Product Packaging Association, and the Food Packaging Council.

"The county office staffs of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service and the county ASC committees can assist in informing the general public. Precautions are being taken by ASCS in protecting stored grains.

## II Reducing Environmental Degradation

### By The Marketing System

#### *Situation and problem*

"Materials used each year for packaging food produced and consumed in the United States weighs approximately 60 billion pounds and costs about \$7 billion. The volume of packaging materials will rise from 51.7 million tons in 1966 to 73.5 million tons in 1976, and disposal costs for packaging materials will rise from \$419 million to \$595 million.

"The assembly point, shipping point, and terminal food markets in the United States are faced with serious problems in eliminating waste as most are now confronted with more restrictive regulations for waste and trash disposal.

"A recent survey of terminal markets indicated that for every ton of products received in the market there were 20 pounds of trash and garbage generated. In New York City alone, this amounted to nearly 1,200,000 tons of trash a year.

"President Nixon's message on the environment called for two approaches to the problem of packing waste: (1) making products more destructable, especially containers which are designed for disposal, and (2) reusing and recycling a far greater proportion of waste materials.

#### *Objectives*

"The purpose is to reduce environmental degradation by the marketing system through an information-education program designed—

1. To reduce the amount of non-edible products sent to urban markets, such as corn husks, outer lettuce leaves and celery stalks, broccoli leaves, bones, and inedible fat on pork, beef, lamb, and poultry.
2. To segregate packaging waste so items can be either recycled or compacted for landfill.
3. To reduce trash and garbage at city markets.
4. To reduce the spoilage of perishables in transit, in wholesale, in retail, and in the home.

#### *Plan of work*

"Here are several work plans that might be considered.

1. Promotions: National, State, and local promotions could be utilized to make the general public as well as the decision makers of various production and marketing units aware of the environmental problems in marketing. Popular publications and posters could be developed based on more technical bulletins and research data for distribution to housewives, retailers, and wholesalers.
2. Education: The local, State, and national groups could sponsor pilot projects, seminars, meetings to make available information for the adoption of new products and procedures.
3. Incentive: It is proposed that an incentive loan program be established for aiding individual firms and markets in developing new processes for disposing and recycling waste products and trash. Youth programs could also be developed and subsidized.
4. Recognition: A recognition or awards program should be established at both the State and national levels with awards going to communities and firms that make outstanding contributions.

#### *Criteria for evaluating effectiveness*

"Evaluation of this program will be based on the change in pounds of trash per ton of product shipped into terminal markets; the tonnage of trash recycled into usable products; and the volume of trash used in landfill or disposed of by some other means. Evaluation will also include interior improvements, functional, esthetic, and economic changes.

#### *Available resources*

"Appropriate personnel of the Agricultural Research Service and ARS research results are available to help with the promotion and education necessary to accomplish the objectives of this project.

"Production and marketing specialists of the Extension Service inform producers, processors, and marketers of the latest packaging and disposal practices. Home-economists teach consumers.

"The Rural Electrification Administration informs its borrowers' home service advisers on new products, procedures, and techniques.

"The Food and Nutrition Service will intensify its participation in and contribution to reducing environmental

degradation by the marketing system through its direct information channel to some 80,000 food service establishments.

★ In workshops and conferences with food service managers, FNS staffs discuss ecological problems of food operations.

★ Over 20 foods in family-size containers are now available for distribution through State and local agencies to some 3.9 million people. Nutritional information is already carried on the labels of these containers. This will be alternated with environmental messages.

"Environmental implications will be considered in specifications for packages, cans, bags, and other containers for distributed food. To the degree possible, container manufacturers will be encouraged along these lines.

"The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service under the Rural Environmental Assistance Program (REAP) provides cost sharing for pilot projects in a few States for establishing disposal pits for solid waste on farm.

"A partial list of other resources that are readily available to the community or county are the following: Cooperatives (production and marketing), youth groups, schools, civic groups, city and county governments, growers associations, market managers, food wholesalers and

retailers, restaurants and food service establishments, and home economics clubs.

"A partial list of the national associations that would be interested in this program would include fruit and vegetable, livestock, poultry production and processing associations, and various food processing, manufacturing, distribution, and market managers associations. National and regional firms that are members of the above associations would be in a position to provide assistance."

As I have said, the list of projects we have prepared is not exclusive and is already being expanded. You can help make sure that the opportunities you know about are included. Share your ideas and your commitment with your community.

Although the ultimate cause of some of our environmental problems lies beyond the control of a single community, nonetheless the solutions can begin in actions taken locally by interested and cooperative people—in every community in our land.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture wants very much to help establish and pursue those goals that will result in the kinds of environments Americans want and need.

We ask that you work with us and join in a citizen's program for a better America.