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Advisory Services—Dundee Area

G. A. CATTO

Regional Director, Edinburgh and East of Scotland College of Agriculture

No one can deny that the scope and speed of the change in most branches of agriculture since the outbreak of war in 1939, have led to a welcome vigour in the industry; at the same time there has been an understandable bewilderment in some people's minds as to how to keep pace with the rapidly changing regime. Farmers and horticulturists have had to alter their methods—and their minds—to suit an era in world affairs in which the grim necessity to produce more food was, and still is, a national duty and therefore the task of everyone connected with the land.

Even the most casual observer can see how well the farming community has adjusted itself to the rapid onset of modern science and practice in agriculture. But he may not be aware of just how keen farmers are to absorb the mysteries of agricultural science, and to keep pace with modern practice. More and more farmers are now looking to the College Advisory Services to help them to keep abreast of scientific knowledge, and I am glad to say, in many cases to advise them in modern practice. After all, science and practice, or practice and science—have it either way—go hand in hand, and if an advisory officer is attached to a College and has had "College learnin'" it does not necessarily follow that his feet are never on the ground!

Before the war, the three Scottish Colleges at Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh were responsible for providing advice to farmers, and they did so by means of what was known as the County Extension Services. County Organisers, Dairy and Poultry Instructresses, Horticultural and Bee-keeping Instructors, were familiar figures in all farming districts in the country, and writing as one who was not then connected with the service

I can say that the pre-war College staffs did a magnificent job in laying a broad and firm foundation on which the present-day extended advisory services have been built.

The war years claimed most of the staff for executive and other urgent work, with the result that the identity of the advisory services became obscured in the need for getting more land ploughed and more food produced. Not that the current of advice ceased to flow altogether—far from it—but it was not until 1947 that the Advisory Service as such came into its own again. And just as farming methods had changed, so had the advisory services to be adjusted to meet the needs of the times.

The direction of the work is still in the hands of the three Scottish Colleges, but its intensification in the counties has led to a number of internal changes in direction and operation. An account of this is irrelevant here, except in so far as each College has divided its area into Regions, and that what is known as the North Region of the Edinburgh and East of Scotland College of Agriculture covers more or less this year's Royal Highland Show area. My remit is to say something about the work of the Advisory Service in this Region, which covers the Counties of Angus, Fife, East Perth and Kinross. The reader will find elsewhere in this issue articles on many aspects of farming in the area. The work of the Advisory Service differs from that in other Regions in Scotland only in its emphasis on certain branches of the industry which are predominant. Raspberry, sugar beet and seed potato growing are examples of specialised activities carried on on a big scale and which give rise to special problems and special work on the part of the members of the advisory staff.

THE ADVISORY STAFF

The Regional Headquarters are in Perth, and at the time of writing there are sub-offices in Arbroath and Cupar. Broadly speaking, the staff can be divided into the following categories:—Agriculture, Horticulture, Dairying and Poultry Keeping, Farm Machinery and Beekeeping. An Experimental Officer is responsible for the laying down and interpretation of results of experiments in the area. Behind this staff are the Specialist Advisors, based on the College in Edinburgh: the Soil Chemist, the Plant Pathologist, the Bacteriologist, the Economist, the Veterinary Investigation Officer—one and all are available to the farmer by way of the Regional Advisory Staff. This indeed is one aspect of the College Advisory Service which cannot be too strongly emphasised. The man or the woman working in the Region is in daily contact with farmers, and many and varied are the questions asked and the problems presented. The man who "knows it all" is not yet born, and it is therefore essential that the Advisory Officers working as "General Practitioners" in the Region should have access to the specialist in his laboratory and, through him, to the latest research work in the many fields of investigation.

So much for the general "set up" in the Region. But what really concerns the farmer, the market gardener, the dairyman, the beekeeper is—"What is the Advisory Service doing now and what will it do in the future?"

THE SERVICE DISCUSSED

Since 1947 the work has increased in all branches. The greater part of the year 1947-48 was a transitional period. The service was re-established, the necessary staff was appointed, contacts were made with those who could benefit from the Service and it was generally made known that once again advice was available for the asking. Now the ground is fairly adequately covered, and it may be of interest to readers to discuss briefly

some aspects of the work carried on in each section.

The agricultural staff have been concerned largely with cropping problems, but recent events in the livestock and feedingstuffs trade have led to an increasing number of requests for advice on the stocking of farms and the growing of home-grown foods—protein foods in particular. One of the main activities on the cropping side has been the taking of soil samples and advising manurial treatments on the results of soil analyses. This work is increasing in volume. For example, in the month of March 1949, 548 samples were taken and reported on in the Region, while the number taken from October, 1948, to March, 1949, was about 500 greater than the previous highest total for a complete year.

That farmers in the Region are "grass-minded" is borne out by the fact that questions on all aspects of grassland management have led to a steadily increasing amount of work in this sphere. Seeds mixtures, manuring, management, maintenance of swards, and the host of problems affecting grassland, are continually addressed to us. But perhaps the most persistent seasonal demand for advice is on the making of grass silage in pits. Farmers have taken up vigorously this method of preserving summer wealth for winter use, and it would appear that this admirable practice has become established for good. The recent rise in feedingstuffs prices, is, at the time of writing, increasing the number of requests for advice.

In an area such as this sugar beet and seed potatoes inevitably call for special attention. The former crop is an important one, and close liaison is maintained with the staff attached to the Scottish Sugar Beet Factory at Cupar, Fife. This co-operation is proving to be of great value from all points of view. The advisory staff are kept constantly up to date with latest factory and field news of the crop. Demonstrations are arranged jointly with the factory staff. Experiments are conducted in con-

junction with the Sugar Beet Research Committee. Thus the advisory staff are in a position to advise growers on the latest developments. Special attention has been paid to the utilisation of the by-products of sugar beet as feedingstuffs.

The large acreage of seed potatoes grown in the region calls for a special effort in training rogues, in experimenting on the growing, manuring and cultivating of the crop and the proper storage and dressing of potatoes. A potato rogues' class is held annually—this year it will be held at Meigle just after the Royal Highland Show. The number of students applying for enrolment to this class is increasing.

Cereal crops demand their share of attention and many cropping queries come from farmers on marginal and hill farms.

The Horticultural Staff are engaged in a great variety of work, but problems in connection with soft fruit growing—raspberries in particular—occupy a considerable amount of their time. Maintenance of contact with the Scottish Raspberry Investigation Department in Dundee is most important in this work, and, as time goes on, it is becoming more obvious that the liaison now established is of mutual benefit. A demonstration plot at Cupar, Fife, provides facilities for demonstrating varieties of fruit and vegetables, while many experiments, some of them long range in scope, are being carried out in the counties.

The Dairy and Poultry Keeping Staff have to keep in touch with developments in milk production and poultry. They advise on the handling of dairy equipment, the principles of clean milk production, and—where the opportunity presents itself—on butter and cheese making. The Department of Agriculture for Scotland's Accreditation Scheme for Poultry has led to special work by the instructresses on blood testing and culling. This work is developing rapidly.

In common with other regions, rapid mechanisation in agriculture has led to a great demand for advice on the care and maintenance of farm

machinery. Two machinery instructors operate in the Region, and are available to all farmers for advice. Winter classes on farm machinery are very well attended, but farmers should not hesitate to ask for an instructor's services on their farms. It must be made clear that the instructor's job is not to trespass on the preserves of the many efficient servicing units provided by the machinery and implements trade, but to advise on the care, maintenance and handling of tractors and implements.

Finally there is the Beekeeping Staff. Anyone who keeps bees knows how fascinating the job is, and beekeepers in this Region are not one whit behind others in enthusiasm. Consequently work for the beekeeping instructors pours in; and throughout the Region beekeepers are making full use of the instructor's services.

VALUE OF CONTACTS

The Young Farmers' Club movement is an excellent medium for contact with young members of the farming community, and every member of the advisory staff is doing his bit to help it. Agricultural Discussion Societies are gaining in popularity in the Region, and here, too, the staff help in every possible way. These things are, of course, very important, and time spent on them is not wasted. But the fact that press publicity is given to these activities does not mean that they are more important than daily advisory work on individual farms.

Contact with the individual farmer on his farm is the less publicised part of the work, but it is the "core" just the same. A soil sampling visit, for example, is not just a case of taking away a few bags of soil. The farmer accompanies the Advisory Officer round the fields; he discusses anything and everything in connection with his farming problems and very often on such a visit the officer can and does give much useful advice.

The steady work of an experimental nature carried on on farms

in the Region is invaluable in providing information on many aspects of crop and animal husbandry and we are greatly indebted to a host of farming friends who, year after year, put their fields, their crops and their stock at our disposal.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

To date the farming community are making more and more use of the Service, and this is as it should be. But it must be our aim to go forward into the future with an Advisory Service flexible enough to cope with rapidly changing circumstances. With this in view it is proposed to acquire an area of land (not a large one), somewhere central in the Region, and there to establish a more comprehensive Regional Headquarters. At the moment, the Veterinary Investigation Officers, the Plant Pathologist, the Bacteriologist and others have to be called from Edinburgh. The new Regional Headquarters will provide laboratory accommodation for specialists of the type mentioned,

and this should result in a speedier service, dealing with diseases, etc., more or less on the spot. This development should provide a service now badly needed, while the area of land attached will provide facilities for small scale, accurate experimental work on problems special to the Region. Meantime, farmers and others in the Region who wish to avail themselves of the Service should make a note of the following addresses:—

Regional Headquarters — Old Academy Bldgs., Rose Terrace, Perth. (Tel. Perth 2362.)

Advisers for—

East Perth, Kinross — Old Academy Bldgs., Rose Terrace, Perth. (Tel. Perth 2362.)

Fife — Clydesdale Bank Bldgs., Cupar, Fife. (Tel. Cupar 2033.)

Angus—79 High Street, Arbroath, Angus. (Tel. Arbroath 2395.)

A final word, don't forget to visit the Scottish Advisory Service Educational Exhibit at the Royal Highland Show.