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# Dr. Hal Harris

## Lifetime Achievement Award

Hal Harris grew up on a dairy farm in Montgomery County, Alabama. He received his B.S. from Auburn University in 1961. After a 2-year stint as an officer in the Seventh Cavalry, he returned to Auburn, completing an M.S. in Agricultural Economics in 1965. Hal served on the Auburn faculty for a year as Instructor, then attended graduate school at Purdue University where he was granted the Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics in 1971. His Ph.D. dissertation, "The Economic Outlook for the Independent Dairy Company," foretold 3 decades of structural upheaval in the milk processing industry.

Hal joined the Virginia Tech Agricultural Economics faculty in 1970. Five years later he moved to Clemson University as Associate Professor in the Agricultural and Applied Economics department. He was promoted to Professor in 1978. Dr. Harris' extension and research areas have covered a broad array of topics in the public policy and marketing fields of the profession, including commodity policy, market structure, dairy marketing and policy, producer marketing strategy, grain marketing, wetlands and endangered species issues, animal waste policy, agribusiness management, and international trade and trade policy. He has authored over 300 research and extension reports, bulletins, book chapters, proceedings papers, and journal articles.

In 1992–1993 Hal spent 14 months in Washington, DC on sabbatical leave as National Program Leader, Public Policy with the Extension Service (now CSREES)-U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). While in Washington, Hal strengthened USDA's communication links with public policy educators in the land grant university system. He played an important part in the creation of the Coun-



cil on Food, Agricultural, and Resource Economics (C-FARE). C-FARE now plays a pivotal role for the agricultural economics profession. Dr. Harris served on the C-FARE Board of Directors from 1993 through 1999 and as Vice-Chair for 1998 and 1999. He secured ES funding for the creation of the Agricultural and Food Marketing Consortium, now a section of the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA). With Kitty Smith, he sowed the seeds for the formal formation of the USDA Economists Group. He co-chaired a National Task Force that developed educational materials used widely in the debate over the 1996 Farm Bill and served on the steering committees for similar projects for the 1990 and 2002 Farm Bills.

Dr. Harris has been an active member in our professional organizations. Hal served two 3-year terms on the Extension Committee of the AAEA. He has also served on the Extension Awards Committee, the Nominations Committee, various ad hoc committees, and as a nominee for Director. For the past 3 years, he has served on the *Choices* editorial board. A member of the Southern Agricultural Economics Association (SAEA) since 1970, he has participated in scores of sessions at the Association's annual meetings. He served as SAEA Vice President in 1978–1979.

In 1999, Hal was elected President-Elect of the SAEA and served on the Board of Directors for 3 years as President-Elect, President, and Past-President. In his presidential address, he continued his career-long needling of the profession about the need for relevance in our research and in all our publications. During his term on the Board, he was instrumental in restructuring Board member duties under the new constitution and bylaws, and in developing a system of sound financial planning for the Association.

Hal has served as Chair of the National Public Policy Education Committee, two terms as Chair of the Southern Extension Public Affairs Committee, and as Chair of the Southern Extension Marketing Committee.

His honors include induction into a number of honorary societies, including Sigma Xi, Omicron Delta Epsilon, Phi Kappa Phi, Gamma Sigma Delta, Phi Tau Sigma, and Epsilon Sigma Phi. His awards include the 1983 Clemson University Cooperative Extension Superior Performance Award and the 1988 Southern Legislative Conference Leadership Award for Agriculture and Rural Development. In 1995 he was presented the Clemson University Alumni Association Distinguished Public Service Award, which is the most prestigious recognition awarded to an extension educator at Clemson each year. In 1999 he was named recipient of the R. J. Hildreth Award for national leadership in public policy education. In 2000, he was inducted into the South Carolina Dairy Hall of Fame, the only agricultural economist so honored over 50 years.

Hal has been named a recipient of the Clemson Board of Trustees Faculty Excellence Awards in 6 of the 7 years since its inception. In 2001, he retired from Extension, but continues his service to the university and our profession in the classroom and in University Public Service and Outreach. Last, but by no means least, he continues to stimulate the thoughts of fellow agricultural economists, students, agricultural businessmen, and policymakers by "telling it like it is."

## A Return to Our Roots: Some Observations

**Hal Harris**

I cannot imagine many pleasures greater than the honor of receiving our Association's Lifetime Achievement Award in my native state, and at the site of the SAEA's initial meeting here in Mobile—a return to our roots if you will. I am thrilled to have my name join a roster that includes a number of my dearest friends, my closest professional associates, and several of my mentors. At the risk of omitting some names, I want to recognize the following previous Lifetime Achievement Award winners for the comradery, support, and wisdom that they shared with me over the years: Gary Fairchild, John Holt, Fred Woods, Joe Havlicek, Ron Knutson, Emerson Babb, Dale Carley, Joe Yeager, Ed Faris, and Dick King.

I owe a big debt of gratitude to my major professors, the late Lowell Wilson at Auburn and Charlie French at Purdue. Thanks to my colleagues at Clemson, Virginia Tech, and Auburn. And thanks to my fellow graduate students at Purdue in the late 1960s and early 1970s. When I approached Charlie French with a proposed program of study, he glanced at it and said, "I don't really care what courses you take. Here are five faculty members you should be exposed to. But most of what you really learn will be from your fellow students." It was true, and that group of students has gone on to become a veritable "Who's Who" in agricultural economics over the past 20 years.

Let me make one final thank you. A short while back, I was responding to a survey from the Farm Foundation. As I listed the various programs and activities of the Foundation that I had been involved in over the years, the realization occurred that I owed a huge debt to this organization. The debt at times was paid in blood and in sleepless nights. But it was the

programs of the Farm Foundation that enabled me to interact with the best and brightest of our profession over the years. More important, it gave me the opportunity to work upon and think about some of the burning issues of the day. I do not believe I would be standing here today if it were not for the activities of the Farm Foundation.

I hope to repay some small portion of this debt. As the Farm Foundation now adjusts to changing times, issues, and pressures, I encourage agricultural economists everywhere to support its activities with a few dollars if you can afford it, but more important, with ideas and hard work. But let me issue this hard warning. University agricultural economists and social scientists may play a diminished role in future Farm Foundation priorities unless we step up to the plate. The Farm Foundation seems to me to be adapting to changing pressures from the agriculture, food, resource, and rural sectors; changing funding bases; and changing current issues faster than the profession. I urge each of you to get into the action and help recreate the program synergy that the Farm Foundation has fostered with the profession generally, and with this Association particularly over the years.

### **Return to Our Roots**

Much of this paper will be in a retrospective vein. One reason is that I looked at a number of the futuristic sessions the SAEA has held in the past, and found many of the prognostications were more than a little off base. Some examples from the 1970s: "The scientific industrialization of agriculture will continue, but less rapidly." "I doubt if the hungry people of Asia will ever gain much dollar pur-

chasing power.” “I do not expect the price of oil to rise over \$11 a barrel.” “Consumerism will be rampant in the years ahead.”

Another reason for looking backward rather than forward is that I am more than a little pessimistic about the future of our discipline and the land grant university concept.

I would like to reiterate some remarks I made in an invited session with J. B. Penn in 1989 on the 20th anniversary of this Association. Think of the changes (and the similarities) in the farm and food economy from the days of our roots:

- The Vietnam war was in full swing.
- There were 3 million farms representing 5% of the population versus 1% today.
- Farm exports were \$5.7 billion, mostly subsidized.
- Per capita income of farm population was \$2,431, three-fourths of nonfarm.
- Corn yields were 80 bu/acre, price \$1.15/bu.
- Farmland value was \$200/acre.
- The U.S. population was 75 million fewer people than today.
- Under the massive welfare programs of the Great Society, 4 million people were on food stamps, compared to 18 million now.

With respect to our profession and this brand new Association:

- Starting salaries were about \$12,000.
- Dues were \$3.00 per year.
- The profession was growing rapidly in response to our potential contribution to issues of the day, and robust federal and state funding.
- Most members had farm backgrounds.
- Only a handful of blacks and women were included in the membership.
- The Association was the fiefdom of the old-line Department Heads.
- The financial future of the Association was in grave jeopardy (in the early 1970s the

officers had to pledge personal assets to keep the Association afloat).<sup>1</sup>

So the industry we deal with has changed dramatically, the profession has changed as the issues have changed, our Association has matured. Whether the latter two changes have been sufficient can be a topic for the discussion period to follow. Only a few of the 519 charter members remain active, an exception being SAEA President, Les Myers. Let me conclude this look back at our roots here in Mobile with words from Harold Breimyer at that 1969 meeting that echo some of the challenges in my presidential address 3 years ago. Breimyer wrote that in the land grant university “the temptation, if not the trend is that toward an obscurant scholasticism. This is a denial of all that the land grant concept has stood for. If my credit line for that concept is valid, we depart from it at our peril.”

Breimyer observed that we should stay on track by “being sensitive to the needs of the times and being willing to apply our talents to them.”

That challenge was appropriate in 1969. It was appropriate 20 years later when Penn and I discussed the Association’s formative years. It was appropriate in 2000 at the beginning of the new millennium. And it is particularly appropriate today.

### Where We Are Headed

First, let me say that one could advance the hypothesis that the longtime erosion in human resources applied to agricultural economics because of declining state and federal budget support has been in part due to our failure to heed Breimyer’s warning, and in part due to our inability (or unwillingness) to articulate our past and present contributions for the good of society, our key customers, and policymak-

<sup>1</sup> With respect to this final item, I looked once again at the initial 1969 *Southern Journal of Agricultural Economics* (which does not read Volume I, No. 1, quite possibly because there was no assurance there would be a Vol. II), and there hidden in front of the back cover was a resolution thanking the Farm Foundation for defraying the printing cost of the first issue.

**Table 1.** Clemson Ag & Applied Economics (Unclassified full-time employees, 1989 and 2002)

	1989	2002
Teaching	6.5	8.25
Research	9.0	5.00
Extension	14.0 <sup>a</sup>	9.50 <sup>a</sup>
Total	29.5	22.75

<sup>a</sup> Includes 1.0 MS Lecturer/Instructor position in 1989, 5.0 in 2002. Thus "faculty" positions = 28.5 in 1989, 17.75 in 2002.

ers. Second, I would add to Fred Woods' remarks at this symposium last year that the demise of the Washington end of the federal-state partnership has put another nail in the coffin. I am not a statistician, but I can discern a trend. I have witnessed in the past 40 years budget shortfalls, and subsequent periods of good times for land grants, colleges of agriculture, and ag econ departments. My view is that the budget crisis of today and the past several years is not a random shock as all the previous ones proved to be.

I shall use Clemson, because I have access to the numbers, as a microcosm of what is going on. In 1989, my Department had 29.5 full-time employees (FTE), one of which was a nontenure-track lecturer position in the field (Table 1). Today, my estimation is that we have 22.5 FTE, five of which are Master's level positions, four of which are out in the state. The scary part is that eight faculty have con-

tracted for "early outs" that ensures their retirements in the next 1–4 years. That will leave only 9.5 FTE campus Ph.D. faculty positions. On top of that, the Administration is preparing to deal with a potential 15% budget cut in 2003–2004 by some combination of further early retirement incentives or reductions in force.

It is my assertion that my Department, if not now, will soon be below critical mass to carry out any semblance of a well-rounded extension and research program. It gets worse! Administrators and entrepreneurial faculty are carving out Centers and Institutes in issue areas that are politically popular, and financially self-supporting or largely so. Line units are taxed to fund start-up costs, and are at a disadvantage in ongoing funding (Centers get to keep all overhead costs).

Ag and Applied Economics is not going away. We will survive with a smaller, largely 9-month teaching faculty supported predominately by tuition. But we will have lost our uniqueness. Our Extension ears to the ground to guide our research and report its significance will be insufficient. Research will be even more dependent on grant funding. Some departments will be merged with Economics or other departments.

In short, Ag Econ departments or what they become will be just like all other departments in the university. In my view, that makes Breimyer's challenge given here in Mobile 34 years ago even more problematic.

