SYMPOSIUM—THE LEGUME PROBLEM

1. THE ECONOMICS OF INCREASED LEGUME PRODUCTION

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It must be obvious to those who have thought of the economic soundness of programs seeking to increase legume production in the United States that the subject is much too general to be considered without limitations in the matter of species and variety as well as in other features. A group of plants as large and as varied as the Leguminosae would be unusual indeed if it did not contain species differing greatly in their economic characteristics. There is no group of plants with such diverse members that is held in such high esteem in agriculture as are the legumes. If a slight exaggeration may be pardoned, legumes in general have been hailed as an agricultural panacea almost from time out of mind. The effect of this view has indeed been very great. As agriculture developed with the advance of civilization, appreciation of the value of certain legumes became particularly widespread. Their soil-improving qualities were known long before bacteria of any kind were discovered, and their high forage value was recognized before chemical analyses were even thought of, but the discovery of nitrogen fixing bacteria and of protein naturally gave impetus to their popularity. So many excellent leguminous crop plants came into use that enthusiasm for them extended to the entire group. In recent times this enthusiasm has not lagged but has frequently resulted in campaigns for increased legume production. Certain features of such campaigns will be dealt with in this discussion.

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