WHY PLANT RESEARCH?1

FREDERICK D. RICHEY2

I SUPPOSE that most retiring presidents of this Society have surveyed the addresses of their predecessors looking for inspiration. I further suppose that many of them finished the task with an intense desire that they, too, might contribute something as worth while as that which they had surveyed. At least, that has been my experience.

President Salter, in his address last year, stressed the need for integrating the determined facts of agronomy in sane and successful agricultural planning. I agree with him as to the importance of this challenge to the agronomists of the future. I am certain, however, that he would agree equally with me that this is not the sole challenge. Tonight, therefore, I intend to consider why plant research must continue, and something of what it may be expected to accomplish. I know of no better way of anticipating the future than from the experience of the past.

PLANT RESEARCH AND SURPLUSES

We have been confronted recently with something of an obsession about the responsibility of plant research for the crop surpluses that have been a plague to both our houses,—farmers and business, alike. Let us disclaim responsibility for the stimulated production due to high prices during and following the World War, and the bringing into cultivation of lands which never should have been plowed—and which were broken in spite of the recommendations of agronomists. Then let us admit fairly our part of the responsibility, and claim credit for it.

My thesis can be presented most easily by some examples. Let’s look at the record. The hard-red-spring and durum wheat region was settled in the 70’s and 80’s. The early settlers brought with them the varieties of wheat which they had grown in their former homes in Eastern America and in Europe. Of these, Bluestem and Fife soon became predominant. The reputation of hard red spring wheat as the

---

1Presidential address delivered before the thirtieth annual meeting of the Society held in Chicago, Illinois, December 2, 1937.