AGRONOMY AND THE PUBLIC WELFARE

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The development of agronomic science during the last twenty-five years has been amazing. Improvements in methods of breeding crop plants, the development of new kinds of fertilizers, along with new methods of fertilizer application, new methods of seedbed preparation and tillage, new crops and cropping systems and many kindred advances in agronomic techniques have made possible great agricultural advancement. Moreover, the extent to which these have been accepted by intelligent farmers is most gratifying to the agronomists of the country. We need only consider what the situation regarding food production might have been during the last war if all our farmers had been dependent on the rule of thumb methods of their fathers.

I have long been interested in the development of agricultural science and its relation to the public welfare, particularly in that for which agronomists are responsible. It would seem that we now have a far greater responsibility to the public than ever before. The influence of food production on the war effort made people food conscious. Under the food rationing system, too, they came to realize the real importance of food and one could sense a widespread concern regarding the future of our food resources. Press and radio statements regarding soil losses through erosion and soil depletion resulted in positive anxiety among many city people as to the future of their own food supply. Certainly the public now realizes as never before, the very important position that food production occupies in our national economy.

More recently the country has been called upon to supply large quantities of food to the war devastated countries. The international food conferences have directed attention to the importance of the food supply the world over. In all of this the agronomists have a real responsibility. This was forcefully presented by Drs. Cardon and Bradfield at the meeting of this Society last year.

There are, of course, those who question the feasibility of an international coordination of food production. They argue that in certain countries food shortages will always exist. They contend, too, that in those densely populated areas of the globe, such as parts of China and India, the Malthusian law will continue to operate. They insist that an abundance of food supplied these existing populations, would merely be the signal for a still further population increase until starvation conditions would again prevail. There are, of course, grounds for such a belief. Unless the birth rate can be controlled it seems quite likely that the law of Malthus will prevail. But be that as it may, one of the greatest opportunities in developing a permanent peace is through an improved production

1Presented at the annual meeting of the Society, Omaha, Neb., November 21, 1946.
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