The Agronomist’s Role in Point Four Programs

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The agronomist, as we know, is a man who works with crops. The Point Four man is a man who works with people. The Point Four agronomist is a man who works with people by helping them do a better job of growing their crops. In this dual role he works both as scientist and as teacher.

Point Four work is just about that simple because the basic needs of people are often that simple. Enough food to eat is the main concern of millions—simple foods such as wheat, corn, and rice, and enough of each to prevent hunger. The agronomist is playing a fundamental part in our new humanitarian and practical effort to build a peaceful future by helping the world to live better.

This is a big job. An agronomist working here in the State of Pennsylvania is concerned with the crops of some 6 million acres. The Point Four agronomist finds that his field has become the world, whose crops cover 1 billion acres. If he happens to be stationed in Central America, he will be working with farmers who put over 80% of their land into corn. If he is assigned to the Far East, he will find himself working with farmers who put the greater part of their land into rice. From country to country he will encounter every color of skin, every custom, and every language known to man. Of one thing the Point Four agronomist can be sure—he will never die of boredom.

The Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations now has 21 agronomists and soil scientists assigned to Point Four work. In a few months we expect to have double this number—or 42—aeronomists and soil scientists doing Point Four work. Also, we are cooperating in the similar agricultural work of other agencies, such as F.A.O. and E.C.A.

In addition to our agronomists, we of course have a number of other agricultural specialists working in foreign assignments. They include animal and dairy husbandmen, agricultural chemists, agricultural engineers, entomologists, extension specialists, foresters, horticulturists, pathologists, and others. They are working as teams in some 20 different countries, on agricultural problems that run the gamut from production to processing to use.

We are proud of the overseas accomplishments of American agronomists. Wherever they go they are making contributions to agriculture, and they are making friends for the United States. I'm thinking for the moment of one of our agronomists down in a Latin American country and his contribution to the area's production of wheat. One of his co-workers sent us an enthusiastic letter recently in which he reported that if the wheat growers of that country had their say, our agronomist could be elected to any national office he wanted! We're not going to recommend that a North American agronomist try to cut a figure on a limited scale, ever since the days of the Pilgrims.

You are familiar with the history of our present effort to exchange abilities and knowledge for the rest of the world. This effort is popularly termed the Point Four program because, on January 2, 1949, it was enunciated as the fourth point of the President's address. A few key sentences summarize what we are now trying to meet:

“Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for improving the benefits of our scientific advances and press available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.

“More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and to them and to more prosperous areas.

“Only by helping the least fortunate can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people.”

That challenge was enunciated 2½ years ago. Today we are off to a meeting it. We have entered a historic period of truly great scientific and technical cooperation between the free countries of the world.

Our country is sharing its so-called “know-how” and its human and natural resources. Experience shows that our contributions will help other countries develop their own resources, industrially and economically.

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