Extension Agronomist—Past, Present and Future

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The Extension Agronomist occupies an important position in the Land Grant College System. His responsibilities are great and his opportunities are almost unlimited. His field is a broad one. He cannot be simply a teacher of subject matter furnished by the resident teaching staff. He must analyze the needs of his state and the individual counties and develop a comprehensive program to meet these needs. His responsibilities reach all farms. Since he works with the soil, he is not limited to certain specialties. He must spend considerable time in the study of research of his own experiment station and other stations.

Since agronomists deal with the soil and plant life, the work of the agronomist applies to agriculture as a whole. The success of an agricultural program depends in a large measure on the use and management of the soil. The cash crops and animal enterprises are dependent upon wise land use and sound soil management practices. From the beginning of the Extension Service the extension agronomist has been a careful planner. He has been a student. The position of agronomist has been more than a professional job. In the early days the extension agronomist worked largely with the county agent and assisted him with numerous community meetings and individual contacts. From the beginning the extension agronomist was preaching good soil management and the full use of cover crops to protect the precious soil. In other words, he was the pioneer conservationist.

The early extension agronomist developed program plans and procedures which proved to be basic. Their planning and methods of work served as a pattern for many other lines of activity.

A distinctive characteristic of the early extension agronomist, one which has continued, is his close connection with research. My earliest experience with extension agronomists was long before I became an agronomist. The extension agronomist stood out in my mind as the evangelist for research. Later when I became an extension agronomist I felt first hand the very close relationship between our profession and research. When a group of extension agronomists get together they may talk about the weather and the latest football game for a few minutes, but you can be sure that conversation will very soon drift to some phase of agronomic research. They are just built up that way. So often you can hear folks say that the agronomist just can't talk or think about anything but agronomy. To me this is a great compliment. It simply means that the extension agronomist has a message and he believes in it.

I have been fortunate to work throughout the entire history of the staff has been the finest. Our good relations the high lights in my experience of nearly 30 years as an extension agronomist. This is as it should be. One extension agronomist takes his field problems to the research worker. The research worker keeps the extension agronomist informed. In the words of E. L. Worthen of New York, "Neglect on the part of the Extension man to add constantly to his supply of information was suicide."

A comprehensive appraisal of the past in this short time. Only a few examples can be

One of the first big jobs undertaken by extension agronomists was to acquaint the people with the importance of cover crops to protect the soil from the ravages of water and wind erosion and to add nitrogen. They promoted the use of sweet clover, other legumes in the north. In the south it was vetch, crimson clover, Austrian peas, buckwheat, lupine.

They started out promoting the use of superior varieties; programs were made projected to promote the use of good seed by efforts of men like Hackleman of Illinois, Clapp of Kansas, Jackman of Oregon. Crop improvement associations were developed. They were organized into a national crop improvement association. Today this organization is the recognized authority for the promotion of superior varieties. The development of this program is due to O. S. Fisher, federal extension agronomist.

In my own region, the southeast, the job was done with fertilizers. The early extension agronomist recognized the importance of fertilizer in crop production. Research work showed that much of the fertilizer on the market did not meet the crop needs. Men like Boyd of Alabama, Hamilton of South Carolina, Miller of Texas and Burleson of Arkansas took the better fertilizer message to the people. By 1930 fertilizer reform movements were well under way. Once the movement was under way the fertilizer educational program is due to the people. The fertilizer educational program is one of the most effective and valuable parts of agronomy work in the Southeast.

Developing and projecting long-time improvement projects has been outstanding features. If I refer to cotton, we tried several methods of cotton production. In 1930 we adopted a long-time improvement program which was projected to promote the use of good seed. Through the efforts of men like Hackleman of Illinois, Clapp of Kansas, Jackman of Oregon. Crop improvement associations were developed. They were organized into a national crop improvement association. Today this organization is the recognized authority for the promotion of superior varieties. The development of this program is due to O. S. Fisher, federal extension agronomist.

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