IV. Professional Competence and Pride

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I WOULD like to explain my concepts of professional competence and pride as well as giving some of the important reasons for attaining such qualities. In my opinion, professional competence is the attaining of sufficient knowledge and abilities to do a good job in a given field. To attain genuine competence with a proper degree of humility requires a lot of studying, training, and experience.

There are at least three reasons why I believe professional competence is important:

1. Competence is the tool for the accomplishments and contributions a person will make to his profession and society.
2. Competence leads to more satisfaction in one's profession, hence a greater sense of dedication.
3. Competence leads to a comfortable living. By this I mean that a person who enjoys his work merits a salary sufficient to meet his needs and enable him to enjoy a few luxuries he desires.

The first two of these are of primary importance. Professional pride means self-respect and reasonable delight in one's position, achievements, and possessions. To develop a true pride, a person must have competence and interest in his work. Once a person attains this pride it works on him in mysterious ways; as the Army would say, pride bolsters morale. When a soldier feels his company is the best, his platoon is the best, and he is the best individual in the outfit, then he is said to have high morale. When a person has high morale he automatically develops refined techniques to maintain this status. If a person is doing an outstanding job in a field which he sincerely believes in, then he will exert the maximum effort.

The development of competence and pride has long been a problem and much has been accomplished. The Alpha Zeta Fraternity was founded to recognize scholarship, leadership, and character in students of agriculture. The primary objective in the minds and hearts of its co-founders was to glorify agriculture.

I am sure that some of you may remember when people in agriculture were often referred to as clod-hoppers or country hicks, which resulted in many farm boys pursuing a non-agricultural curriculum in college. However, due to recent wars and demands for agricultural products the postwar college enrollment in agriculture steadily increased until Agronomy departments were "bursting at the seams."

More recently it has begun to decline, and the decrease in farm population has made the problem of maintaining competence and pride much greater since fewer people are left to sell prospective students on the opportunities and advantages of the agricultural way of life.

Because of this decline in agricultural college enrollment and farm population there arises this question: Are we returning to the point where the public will look at us as a non-technical profession? If so, what can be done about it?

I believe this problem in agriculture can be partially alleviated by the staff members of various Agronomy Departments over the United States. Most of the students interested in agriculture who come to college know very little about the term Agronomy. When I enrolled in college I hadn't the faintest idea of the scope of Agronomy. I was raised on a farm, yet I was unfamiliar with the broad aspects of Agronomy. I feel that ignorance of this field is common to many high school graduates.

To me there seem to be several ways that members of the Agronomy staff might help with this problem. First, instructors could orient their students. By this I mean that instructors could explain to them the meaning of the term Agronomy and enlighten them concerning opportunities in the field, particularly as a branch of science. At present, many of the instructors are devoted to Agronomy and some have a tendency to assume students are similarly devoted. The instructor then proceeds to discuss principles of agronomic practices for which many of the students have not yet acquired an interest. If the combination of orienting and explaining principles could be practiced, I feel that more could be accomplished. Second, beginning textbooks need to be written and used so as to persuade students to accept the Agronomic field with pride and enthusiasm. Both the books and the teaching should stimulate and arouse the student's curiosity and entice him to seek more information on the subject.

In closing, I would like to challenge the faculty to consider at least three possible ways to increase the students' competence and pride in his field of endeavor. (1) Part-time work should be made available for those who desire and need it. Apprenticeship of this nature helps to improve competence and instill pride. (2) The faculty should take an active part in the local Agronomy clubs or chapters and show an interest in the Student Section of the A. S. A. (3) The faculty should continually keep Agronomy majors and prospective majors posted on agronomic opportunities available. This can be done through orientation groups, bulletin boards, club speakers, and seminars.

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