ASA Presidential Address
The Agronomist and the American Society of Agronomy

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The business of agronomists and of the American Society of Agronomy is increasing, disseminating, and using knowledge of crops and soils and the conditions affecting them. In his presidential address of 1939 (Agron. J. 31:993–1001) Dr. Ralph J. Garber succinctly stated the scope of agronomy: "Well nigh every item of human food and clothing has, somewhere along the line from its source to its final synthesis, challenged the interest of an agronomist." With many recent developments in the profession of agronomy and the rapid advances within the Society, it seems appropriate at this time for us to take inventory of our profession and of our Society. One can scarcely consider them separately. As we promote the general welfare of mankind through agronomic service, we build the stature and prestige of our profession. And the public image of our profession is the American Society of Agronomy.

THE AGRONOMIST

The first agronomist, by this name or title, was employed at the University of Illinois in 1900. The USDA Bureau of Plant Industry listed a position as Agronomist to be filled through Civil Service in 1901. Today, there are in the USA an estimated 18,000 to 25,000 trained agronomists, i.e., persons with a bachelor's degree or higher training in agronomy or trained in a closely related field and now engaged in the agronomic subject matter field.

More than 700 new agronomists are added annually to these ranks through graduation. Approximately 10% of these have Ph.D. degrees, 25% have M.S. degrees, and 65% have the Bachelor of Science degree. Challenging opportunities await these graduating agronomists—opportunities to serve mankind through agriculture in the world struggle to provide adequate food, clothing, and shelter for all, opportunities to grow professionally through experience in agronomic endeavors both at home and abroad.

Today, agronomists are by no means restricted to the academic roles of teaching, research, extension, and related activities on governmental appointments. More and more, agronomists are employed by business and industry, or are salesmen, or as part of the management team to constitute an important and expanding segment of the agronomic profession. As industry and business begin to recognize increasingly profitable to employ agronomists, the demand for people with agronomic training for agronomists in public agencies will continue to grow at the rate which available government funds will support. But, the most striking increase in demand for agronomists is in business and industry.

An estimated 2500 agronomists are now employed in business and industry. Data provided by the Committee on Employment of Agronomists of Division XI1 indicate approximately 20% of the new graduates each year are going into business and industry. Two-thirds of the American Chemical Society's 90,000 members are in business. Those especially interested in agribusiness should receive training that will adequately prepare them to specialize in agribusiness.

Some ASA presidential addresses of the 1930's dealt with the great depression and the retrenchment in agriculture that seemed necessary. Yet at that very time government programs were expanding, and the demand for agronomists was tremendous. For example, many of the positions for agronomists in the newly formed Conservation Service went begging and had to be filled by agronomists who were otherwise employed. If we would fill those positions which cannot be filled by agronomists, we must impress upon the students the nature of these opportunities and encourage them to specialize in agronomy. When advising young men on their training for a career in agronomy, we must bear in mind the growing demand for agronomic services in business. Those especially interested in agronomic services in business should receive training that will adequately prepare them for this type of employment. Since advising of students is done by agronomists, it behooves them to be familiar with the opportunities. He should portray to the student the great opportunities awaiting these graduating agronomists-opportunities that seemed necessary. Yet at that very time government programs were expanding, and the demand for agronomists was tremendous. For example, many of the positions for agronomists in the newly formed Conservation Service went begging and had to be filled by agronomists who were otherwise employed. If we would fill those positions which cannot be filled by agronomists, we must impress upon the students the nature of these opportunities and encourage them to specialize in agronomy. When advising young men on their training for a career in agronomy, we must bear in mind the growing demand for agronomic services in business. Those especially interested in agronomic services in business should receive training that will adequately prepare them for this type of employment. Since advising of students is done by agronomists, it behooves them to be familiar with the opportunities. He should portray to the student the great opportunities awaiting these graduating agronomists.