The Challenge of the Land-Grant Centennial

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THE membership of the American Society of Agronomy in its annual meeting salutes two organizations which are observing their hundredth anniversary and whose successful development in the past hundred years has had a profound influence on American agronomists. In 1862 Congress enacted two laws creating separate organizations which have contributed greatly to the welfare of all our citizens and have had an impact on many other nations of the world. The United States Department of Agriculture was created on May 15, 1862. The first Morrill Act became law on July 2 of the same year, creating the basis for the establishment of a national system of higher education—the land-grant colleges and universities. The title of agronomist was used first during the late 1890's, according to C. J. Willard. Agronomy and other agricultural science areas are products of the land-grant colleges. These colleges have produced most of the agronomists and other agricultural scientists of our nation.

It is significant that the two organizations created by the Congressional acts of one hundred years ago have paralleled each other in growth and development. This parallelism has been mutually helpful as each organization has striven to develop fully the basic objectives for which it was set up. Close cooperation between the two agencies has expressed itself in several ways, such as training by the land-grant colleges of future personnel for the Department of Agriculture, cooperation in research and extension, including joint appointments, and cooperation of the colleges with the several action agencies of the Department. This cooperation has proved advantageous to both groups.

In the development of this paper, emphasis is placed on the land-grant college, but in so doing, the constructive contribution of the United States Department of Agriculture to the colleges is equally recognized and tacitly implied.

History

Higher education in the United States had its beginning during colonial days when institutions of higher learning were established after the pattern of those in the "mother" country. In general, education was for the privileged few. The educational pattern was traditional and classical, with the principal objective being service in the learned professions of the time—law, medicine, or theology.

When our nation was established under a republican form of government "of the people, by the people, and for the people," probably as much as 85% of our population was concerned with agriculture. Most of our people were uneducated and superstitious, knew little about science, and were skeptical of change. Fortunately, we had many able, unselfish leaders who were men of vision and...