The Changing Role of the Agricultural College

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NOT long ago someone said, "If Land-Grant institutions fail to make adequate and proper adjustments, they could enter the Centennial Year with a glorious past and a pallid future."

There can be little question that Land-Grant Colleges have had tremendous impact on our land and time during their 100 years of existence. Our agricultural colleges have trained substantial leaders and have an impressive list of scientific achievements. The development of hybrid corn and the discovery of streptomycin are only two of a long list. The value of hybrid corn has probably repaid the entire amount spent through the years on all agricultural research. Within three years after the discovery of streptomycin, industry had constructed new buildings for its production which cost one and one half times as much as the entire cost of operating the New Jersey Station from the time of its establishment in 1880 through 1948. Its value to human welfare would be impossible to measure.

As to the future, the need to anticipate problems and to make changes and adjustments necessary to maintain effectiveness and to continue our position as having the strongest agriculture in the world represents a sizable challenge to agricultural colleges. In this connection the following quotation from the report of the 1961 Seminar on Implications of Agricultural Adjustments for Land-Grant College Administrators held at Colorado State University is of interest:

"The point was made that Land-Grant Colleges lack as part of their structure an internal process for keeping up precisely with changing needs and providing a dynamic and continuous adaptation to them. Slowness of change in university programs is a source of criticism. Difficulties of modifying and changing curricula are illustrative. (Someone has said that it's easier to move a cemetery.) Lack of flexibility and adjustments in research programs are referred to as another problem. Extension has been criticized for continuing to focus attention on county programs for which the need is past. The observation was made that 'opportunities pass by not because there is lack of understanding and vision on the part of your university leaders, but because of the lack of the formulation of adequate alternatives to which to move.' Resources need to be assigned to develop meaningful program alternatives."

Many will disagree with some of these opinions and, in support, can point to specific examples of key changes that have been or are being made to meet the many challenges.

This great need to be flexible and make vital adjustments is emphasized and becomes all the more difficult in the face of (1) the declining influence of some of our agricultural colleges in the overall university system and culture with state and federal legislators and (2) the keen competition for top students from which to draw agricultural scientists and leaders.

Many segments of industry are emphasizing technical education; that American farmers, despite their numbers, are great consumers as well as large investors that they are a major market for industrial products. They use 70% of their $37 billion annual income in material and services for further production; that they use almost half as much steel as the nation; that they are the biggest buyers from the oil industry; that they are the biggest buyers of products, but in the caliber of services available as well. Industry will be looking for more and more well-trained, capable agriculturists in the years ahead—and it will be best that is in the agricultural leadership—to be real leaders of products, but in the caliber of services as well.

Will We Be Well Armed?

What will the 1970 or 1980 farmer be like? More and more he is going to seek out scientific fact and business sense to guide his operation. He is going to expect more and better service. This is going to be the best that is in the agricultural leadership—both to detect the changing needs and to provide this educated farmer with answers and service. This places a greater premium on qualified men to do these jobs in the college, in industry, or in government.

Many segments of industry are emphasizing technical service in their programs. If this trend continues, not only will there be keen competition of products, but in the caliber of services as well. Industry will be looking for more and more capable agriculturists in the years ahead—good for agriculture if the colleges are competent to supply them.

Agricultural Enrollment—A Drop and Quality

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