IN the August 15, 1969 issue of Life magazine a report indicated that 61% of the people surveyed regarding their ordinary purchases said they received poor values from money spent for food and beverages. This was the highest poor value rating for any category of expenditure. Nevertheless, the facts are that the people of United States spend less than 17% of their income for food, and the percentage is decreasing yearly. By comparison with other countries food is a real bargain in the United States. For example, in Europe people spend about twice this percentage of their income for food.

The dissatisfaction expressed by those whom Life interviewed indicates that something is missing. We agronomists have demonstrated a real lack of imagination in informing the public about our achievements as well as our goals. There is a pressing need to establish that the agronomist is essential to our agricultural economy and to the well-being of the world. Simple statistics on the tip of our tongues will help. We have a tremendous story to tell about past accomplishments and the exciting future . . . . but who knows about it?

“Agronomist” is a tough word, but people can learn its meaning. It didn’t take us long to understand such terms as astronaut, supersonic, blitz, nuclear, and scrambling quarterback. Is it too difficult to expect people to appreciate that an agronomist deals with soil and crop science and is involved in studies on soil and crop management in order to improve crop yields? I don’t think so — if we put and keep agronomy before the public.

How many of your friends and co-workers outside of agriculture know what an agronomist is? Have you checked with the workers in your grocery store to see if they know our role in food production? If you ask your friends where their meat or bread comes from will they just name the grocery store? How many of you have been told by some of your university friends that they didn’t know the university had an “astronomy” department?

Why Be Concerned About Our Image?

Every organization has an image by which it is recognized among a larger or smaller portion of the people. I think there are four reasons why we must work to improve the image of the agronomist among all people.

1. An informed public will facilitate efforts to obtain funds to support and extend our activities. The shift from rural-oriented to urban-oriented legislators in state and national capitals makes it increasingly important that a favorable image be created.

2. A strong public image will help to include the agronomist in the world picture in planning solutions for the problem of hunger and other agriculturally related environmental problems.

3. Counselors, parents, and young people will realize the importance of agronomy and more and better students will be attracted to the profession.

4. People will understand and appreciate our profession and thereby enhance our prestige and personal satisfaction.