

A PRODUCER'S VIEW OF HORTICULTURAL RESEARCH FUNDING

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Heringer Farms produces 6,500 acres of row, field and deciduous tree crops. Because of our proximity to University of California, Davis, and the diversity of our crops, we have been associated with much of the research conducted by the University as well as that carried on under the marketing order system that covers many of our California crops. Although marketing orders are not my subject today, I would like to make the comment that research funding under market orders forces each grower to contribute his fair share to the research being conducted on specific problems in a specific crop. Last year, market order assessments in the amount of \$30,000 were paid by Heringer Farms.

Over the years, I have witnessed some truly great developments brought about through research. One of the most dramatic, and one in which Heringer Farms played a part, was that of the mechanization of the California processing tomato industry. Mechanical harvest varieties and machines were developed over a period of four short years and an industry that generated \$500 million in the state's economy was saved. This was one of the great successes.

I have seen others that were dismal failures, in which researchers plodded along not truly understanding their goals, and those who were financing the research did not provide adequate direction, leadership, or objective evaluation of results. I am sure that farmers, who by nature stand somewhat in awe of the academic mind, are more guilty than industry in providing inadequate leadership in defining research goals and in demanding that progress be shown. And I have seen agriculture continue to finance projects where not even a faint glimmer of light appeared at the end of the tunnel.

Horticultural research funding

But we are here today to talk about horticultural research funding and how it should be accomplished, not about the success or failure of that research. Everyone on this panel and everyone in this audience is well aware of the role that research has played in producing the abundance of food that the consumers of this nation somehow took for granted – until the recent period of food price expansion!

Our land grant college system has been responsible for making two blades of grass grow where one grew before. As a result the average U.S. citizen believes that cheap food is his birthright. While the cost of food has increased 44% in the past 20 years, the percent of the wage earner's income spent for that food has steadily decreased to 16%. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the cost of food, the most basic of all human needs, has increased less than that of housing, which has risen 61%; medical care, up 128%; and wages, which have increased by 136% since 1952.

I personally feel that the present food shortages have done more than any other recent development to increase the awareness of the average consumer of the tremendous need to keep agriculture producing profitably. Previously, the only way the farmer could increase his net and stay in business was to grow two blades of grass in that same piece of ground where only one was meant to grow, even though as Secretary of Agriculture Butz has pointed out, in many cases the farmer still only got paid for one blade.

Research was the dominant factor in helping the farmer, and if we are wise, we will seize every opportunity to point out to the consumer that he, too, has a stake in continuing funding of agricultural research, for he is the ultimate beneficiary. The farmer hasn't been getting rich as a result of the research, but the wage earner has been able to spend less and less of his 136% increase in wages for food. Although many consumers apparently don't know it, greater abundance is the key to lower food prices, and greater abundance has come about through research.

Now, at a time when more and more demands are being put on agriculture by the government, by the public, and by environmentalists, at a time when traditional production areas are being dislocated by concrete (and certainly this is most apparent in the great valley of California), at a time when American diet patterns

have shifted dramatically from grains and cereals to meat and poultry, we also find a hue and cry from the urban public to limit funds for agricultural research. I sometimes wonder what the U.S. consumer really wants, and even more, what he is willing to pay for.

To those who claim that agriculture has been taking a free ride, that the farmer is the only beneficiary of agricultural research and therefore should foot the bill, I say "Let's look at the record."

The California farmer contributes enormously to the tax base of the state. He supplies a job for one out of every three persons in the state. He contributes to research in the form of cooperation with University researchers in donations of land, applied skills and time. And this aspect of his contributions, although extremely important, is frequently overlooked. He contributes additional direct money through market order assessments. And I don't think he is getting his money's worth! If, as the general public seems to believe, costs should be in direct proportion to benefits, then the farmer has been short-changed.

Plight of the farmer

Here's what's happened to him. Constantly rising farm production costs have caused the net income line to remain in the same narrow groove for the past 10 years and largely because of the cost-price squeeze, the number of farmers in California has dropped from 108,000 in 1960, to 57,000 in 1970, a decrease of about one-half. Obviously, the individual farmer has not benefited in proportion to his contributions to research and has been squeezed out of business. However, virtually every farmer I know is a great believer in research and is more than willing to continue to contribute both directly and indirectly to its cost. As an example, this year, California tomato growers are providing in excess of \$200,000 for research on canning tomatoes alone.

There is only a handful of government subsidized crops produced in California, representing only 1½% of the total on-farm value of all crops produced. The vast majority of California crops is marketed under highly competitive, supply-demand conditions, and only the super-efficient farmer who is indeed producing those two blades of grass, and in some instances, three, has been able to survive. Now he finds himself running out of good land. It is estimated that 300 acres of agricultural land is taken out of production each day and is being replaced by subdivisions, shopping centers, and other urban developments. Furthermore, the farmer is running out of energy to run the tractor and other high-cost equipment that he must have to stay in business. Previously, the only method available to him to remain in food production was to expand his acreage, become bigger, to mechanize, and to take advantage of every scrap of research possible. Now, all these avenues are being closed to him.

Are present research goals cognizant of the real situation being faced by agriculture? Are there too many researchers still following some small and private goal of their own, rather than devoting themselves to the truly mind-boggling problems that we who are in the business of producing food for the nation and the world are facing. Where does the leadership for this kind of research come from and who pays for it?

When I look over the published lists each month of contributions to agricultural research made by industry to the University of California to solve specific problems, I believe that industry is paying its share of the costs. As an example, during June, approximately \$215,000 was contributed directly to the University of California by industry. Remember, this is only one month and only one university in the nation. Nationwide, and on an annual basis, the contributions have to be enormous. As you undoubtedly have observed from the tenor of my remarks, I believe that the farmer is paying more than his share. I do not believe, however, that the general public is paying its share, if that share is to be defined as in proportion to benefits.

There has never been a greater need for agricultural research nor a greater urgency in solving the problems we face. And all of us – researchers, industry and agriculture – have failed to force awareness on the part of the general public of the great stake that it has in the solution to those problems.

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