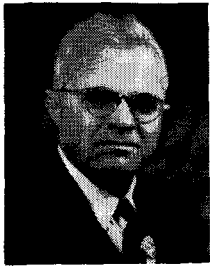


The Basic Approach Is Overdue

HERSCHEL D. NEWSOM, Master, The National Grange

IF YOU HAVE BEEN AWAY from the land 2 or 3 years, you may well be 20 years behind the "agricultural times" in terms of changes in farming practices prior to 1920. During the past 30 or 40 years, this country has experienced a massive food and fiber production revolution. This revolution has snowballed with the years, and its impact is still gaining



H. D. Newsom

momentum. Yet it goes on scarcely noticed.

This is partly because the headlines are constantly filled with the story of the struggle and the problems centering around farm price supports. The editorials, the Washington fanfare, and rural debates everywhere hinge around this controversial "price-floor" controversy in the present agricultural world. Yet, the fundamental story of farm progress is the production revolution. It is the heart of the drama that has made our people the best fed nation in the history of the world, for the smallest proportion of their spendable income.

Price supports in some form or other, on the other hand, have their place. Because of the peculiar situation in which farmers singularly find themselves as a class, it would be economic heresy to drop them now. This does not underestimate changes that must be made of necessity in the current program. The Grange is dedicated to the proposition that price supports must be used to enable agriculture to shift from a war-time level of production to peace-time requirements without it having to suffer a period of severe deflation, which it has always had to do in the past following periods of war-born inflation. This, we feel, is in the national interest.

It is imperative, meanwhile, that all of us place values in their proper perspective in any over-all appraisal of the business of farming. That is why it is so essential that the general public understand the true story of agricultural progress—the story of the agricultural revolution of the past 40 years. The public, private industry, state legislatures, and the Congress must understand the cheapest money they can now spend is for research and education. Yet, in the field

of appropriations all too often funds for agricultural research and education are the wallflower in the dance to the public treasury. Other projects are more tangible and carry with them greater "vote appeal." It is far easier for the farm groups in Washington to get \$100 million for direct subsidy payments than it is to get a \$10 million increase for research and for educational purposes. Only at this current session of Congress were we successful in breaking a log-jam of many years of failure in materially upping appropriations for these purposes.

Supporting prices at a satisfactory level will, of course, help farmers put into practice many of the scientific developments that flow from the laboratory and experiment stations. The greater challenge, however, ahead of the agricultural industry is how to build up public support for the less spectacular and more fundamental aspects of long-range progress on the farms and ranches that make up rural America. That segment of private industry that is closely related to our rural economy will take care of its end of research and educational responsibilities because it is and will remain profitable.

Five million individual farmers, on the other hand, have found no way of pooling their funds to support research and education except through government. The government route to these ends is basically sound. The consumer, you see, benefits as much, or more, in the results achieved as the farmer.

Public Needs Convincing

How then can we show the great masses where they can spend their tax expenditures and receive these amazing returns. Unless the general public understands these issues and influences State Legislatures and Congress, the farm groups will continue to have difficulty in securing adequate appropriations for research and education. The laboratory, the test pilot, the microscope, and our incessant search for knowledge and know-how must become an accepted basic urge that demands universal attention and support. Consumers, farmers, management, workers, and public officials must see, hear, and know of this urgency. They must know of the full meaning of better land use; increased efficiency in the field of livestock and poultry management; breeding and feeding; improved varieties; modern tillage practices; effective insect and disease control; labor-

saving marvels; the harvesting revolution, and the chemical weed killers—not to mention the possibilities of irrigation, managed weather, and a thousand other 20th century developments. They must know that this trend of producing more and more, plus better and better foods and fiber, for less and less is in the public interest. This is perhaps our No. 1 problem in rural public relations. It is a task that all of us must face. It cannot be left up to the scientist because, as a rule, he is the world's worst salesman.

"Part-Time Farmers"

There is a special group in the world of agriculture, however, that requires special attention. This is the group which numerically amounts to about one-half of our total number of farmers. It is the 50% of our farms that for one reason or another produce only 10% of our total food and fiber. Price supports mean little to this group, since high prices for a low volume of output still means a low income. To some degree, this group is made up of "part-time farmers." The bigger problem, however, stems from that group of hard-working farm people who are located in the less productive areas, or who are "stuck" with small farm units in hilly or mountainous territories that must, of necessity, be devoted in the future largely to forest and grazing lands. They do not have the capital to double perhaps the size of their units. Off-the-job opportunities must be available for the fellow who sells his farm so that someone else may double the size of his farm. It takes more money than most of these farmers can raise to embark upon an ample soil-building, erosion-control, pasture-renovation, and hayland improvement program. These are the people who must depend more and more on the grazing types of enterprises, and the roughage-consuming animals. Here again, it takes time and money to get into this type of farm operation as they trend away from the row crop type of agriculture.

Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, is to be commended for recognizing this problem for what it is. In cooperation with the farm organizations, he is currently planning to develop a long-range program to meet this basic problem in agriculture. A well-planned basic approach to this delicate problem is long overdue. Yet if agriculture is to meet another challenge of the day. . . if the U. S. farmer is to continue to lead the world in production efficiency, and if all rural America is to achieve a fair and satisfactory level of living. . . this problem must be met.