

Specialists in Agriculture

WE COMMEND to the reading of all interested in agriculture and the industries related to it, an article in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1955, by Roy W. Longstreet. Entitled "Sales to Farmers," the article expresses logically developed confidence in the soundness of our agricultural situation.

Mr. Longstreet takes into consideration increasing population, productivity, and income level and the tendency to spend an increasing proportion of income on food. He concludes that there will be an expansion of economy that will consume all the milk, eggs, and meat produced. Corn surplus, he estimates, is temporary; wheat and cotton may be more difficult.

From the other end, he observes hopefully the lower unit costs of farm production, particularly through technical advances. An estimated reduction of farm population by 10% within the next decade will reduce the number sharing the pie. These factors convince the author that increased consumption and lower cost production comprise a better solution to the problem than artificial supports, drought, or war.

This view, coupled with the recent statement by Undersecretary of Agriculture Morse that the current farm position of \$17 billion in debts with assets of \$162 billion (page 289), presents a picture that is not discouraging. In the same speech, Mr. Morse called attention to some other figures that are quite significant in relationship to Mr. Longstreet's comments. He noted that the USDA budget for research was increased \$2.6 million in 1954, \$12.3 million in 1955, and the present Congress is being asked for another \$8 million.

The success of scientific improvement of agricultural practices has led to growing acceptance of its value. There is a demand for more. Agriculture research budgets are on the increase in government as well as industry (current figures are about \$140 million for industry and \$143 million for government). Today's modern companies are counting a majority of their products as new during the past decade (page 362), sprung from research. The acceptance of new chemicals on the farm is striking; in Iowa the use of soil insecticides in corn jumped from zero in 1950 to one acre in 17 in 1954.

What will the situation be 10 years hence? The evidence of which we have spoken indicates that the trend will continue in order progressively to reduce unit production cost and keep agriculture sound. But during the next decade it seems likely that the equipment and materials used in farming will become so technical and specialized that specialists will be needed. The farm manager, his staff, or his consultants will need to be well informed experts. It is not inconceivable that groups of experts to take care of the entire job of analysis, prescription, and application will become fairly common.

It is important then, in the interest of sound agriculture, that we continue the search for new and better pesticides, fertilizers, equipment, and management practices. But also we must give active attention to the training in sufficient numbers of professional experts capable of guiding and advising on the most effective use of new materials and ideas to prevent our bogging down amidst too much progress. There are indications that our economy is expanding to consume increased agricultural production. Farmers are becoming educated to dependence on ex-



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panding development of technology to be able to produce economically within that economy. There is a responsibility to be accepted by those leading agriculture, education, and industry to see that the development of skills for making use of our scientific accomplishments keeps pace with the material achievements.

Scientific and technical knowledge is of little practical value unless it is disseminated to those who can use it directly or are in the unique position of being a technical adviser to the user. This service, essential to further progress in agriculture and further growth in consumption and sales of chemicals for agriculture, is one of the basic responsibilities of AG AND FOOD and a major reason for its establishment.

Food Legislation Again

THE NEXT ROUND of efforts to get satisfactory legislation on food additives has begun (page 292). Action is promised in the relatively near future with hearings expected to begin by the end of next month. Again this year, the bills that have taken the lead are discouraging to the development of new additives.

Prominent among the characteristics of the three bills proposed to date is the giving of powers that amount virtually to licensing to the Food and Drug Administration. Previously on this page, we have pointed out that the FDA has an inadequate budget for the provision of sufficient scientific staff to attend properly the duties it already has. There is reasonable doubt that it is equipped adequately to assess the scientific evidence presented in substantiation of the safety of new food additives. Furthermore, we have observed a considerable body of significant opinion holding that the proper function of the FDA is inspection and policing, rather than licensing.

The requirements for acceptance contained in the most lenient bill now offered for consideration amount virtually to a proof of harmlessness. Absolute proof of a negative is an unreasonable if not illogical request, and would be virtually impossible to establish for most of our accepted foods. Safety is another matter when defined as freedom from hazard to man under anticipated conditions of use.

The passage of the Delaney, O'Hara, or Priest bills as they now stand would set such barriers against the development of new and useful additives as to discourage research. Industry has a good record, by admission of the FDA, of responsible action. Research has contributed greatly to the improvement of our diet. Any food additive control laws passed by Congress should be carefully designed not only to protect the health of the public, but also to encourage improvement in the diet made available through scientific processing and formulation.