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LET'S COMMUNICATE

COMMUNICATION IS something like motherhood, everyone is—or was—for it, but not everyone practices it. There is good evidence to suggest that every member of the agricultural community should begin to practice it.

We know that agriculture is the bulwark of our state's economy, and that its products are necessities for every citizen. We, in agricultural sciences, know that our institution has been dedicated to public service since its inception, and that we have made, and are making contributions to the well-being of every California citizen. Yet even the most sheltered among us must know by now that public support for the University, and public recognition of the importance of agriculture, have declined drastically.

This may indicate that virtue is not its own reward. It indicates a failure of communication—a nonsuccess in our public relations. If good public relations consists of a job well done and well told, and if we have complete faith in what we are *doing*, it must be that we fail in the *telling*.

We can accept our status as a disadvantaged minority and lament the ingratitude of the urban majority. Or, we can assess our new political environment and make constructive adjustments. We are affected by, and must be responsive to, all segments of society. If we want intelligent public policy and public decisions regarding agriculture we need to understand our dependence and effectively interpret ourselves to the public. If we are to serve our supporting public well, by meeting the food and fiber needs and the environmental pollution problems of the future, one of our key objectives should be a more enlightened public understanding.

And because the responsibility for this enlightenment is ours, we, the agricultural community, may be the most important public of all, and our first target. We need to develop motivation for, and awareness of, our need to work together in our common interest. The best spokesmen for the story of agriculture are the people who believe in it.

The non-agricultural public doesn't understand our needs—or their need for us. Many of us do not understand our need to tell them. Many of us are so engrossed within our own narrow frame of reference that we have no interest in, or understanding of, our fellow agriculturist. We are compartmentalized by specialty, commodity, government agency, department, discipline, and geography.

Within the Division of Agricultural Sciences, for example, there are valued scientists so absorbed in their specialty that their awareness of political reality or their connection with agriculture seems problematical. There is academic territorialism, imperialism, and competition. There is the commodity-oriented researcher who does not recognize the use of the interdisciplinary approach to problems. When this happens, the agricultural community loses the problem-solving capability that comes from the cross-pollination of ideas, shared concepts, and multiple perspectives brought together in concerted action.

Establishing and maintaining channels of communication is not easy. It requires positive effort involving the destruction of barriers and old comfortable rigidities. If we can find the time, the ways, and the will, the pay-off will be substantial in terms of increasing our strength and our service to the citizens of California.