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## Team Approach Studies Suggest Commodity Marketing Changes

**S**HORTLY AFTER his appointment, Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz faced the realities of attempting to improve farm income. While the Secretary had a number of options open to him with respect to commodities under government programs, the other half of agriculture's problems had no such easily recognizable alternatives. A number of top staff members suggested attacking the problems of selected commodities undergoing financial distress by forming teams of government, industry, and university personnel to recommend creative and innovative approaches to solving specific commodity marketing problems. I helped form and coordinate these teams.

The five commodities selected for initial studies were pork, eggs, apples, potatoes, and canning peaches. Potatoes were selected because of the chronic low prices that have plagued the industry. Eggs were selected because of the instability of egg prices and the fact that producers had been in a loss position for 24 continuous months. Apples were selected because of low prices and increasing imports, coupled with a build-up in acreage. Canning peaches, although a regional crop, were selected because of a combination of low prices and burdensome and increasing surpluses in spite of the operation of a marketing order to cope with these problems. Of the five, only pork was not in a distressed price position at the time the teams were selected. However, pork producers have traditionally experienced alternating high-low price movements, and problems were being forecast in future months.

Even though the teams were basically charged with studying marketing problems, it was decided very early that the approach would also have to include production problems as well. For example, many marketing problems in apples were

being caused because certain apple varieties were in low demand, and because old and diseased orchards were producing low-grade apples. Other examples are even more graphic. Consider the possible increase in pork consumption if trichinosis were completely eradicated in this country. Or consider the potential for low cholesterol eggs.

The teams represented all scientific disciplines, and were largely selected from the ranks of researchers within USDA. It was decided that the teams should do their work in as short a time period as possible and report to the Secretary by midsummer. At the very least the teams would identify problems, catalog research on hand to meet these problems, and indicate areas of further research. What did occur were some concrete recommendations to both government and industry concerning the problems identified.

The recommendations of the teams are too numerous to detail here. More important, however, is the fact that a multiple-discipline team of professionals was able to come up with some concrete recommendations to improve the marketing of the commodities they studied. I feel the value and importance of the studies lies in the future, and will serve as a focal point and catalyst during the next 5 to 10 years for industry members in specific commodities to work on their problems.

I feel the team approach can be adapted to other commodities and other organizations. The University can play a very useful role in this respect by using the team approach to look at some of the problems in agriculture and our society. Some research work using this approach is now underway, but further investigation of the potential of the study team concept is needed if the University is to meet California's needs with the limited resources available.