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Public service research at its best

We have on several occasions in the recent past utilized special issues of *California Agriculture* to highlight research at the University of California in a particular area of interest. This issue, devoted to research on mosquito control, is another effort in that direction. As one of the earliest, and certainly one of the most productive, goal-oriented research activities of the University, it merits the special attention it is given here.

The mosquito research program is unusual in several respects. First, it is not primarily agricultural; it is not intended directly to improve food production or to solve a cultural or management problem (although mosquito control, of course, is of direct economic concern to farmers). The primary purpose of mosquito control programs, and of research to find ways to achieve better control, is to eliminate mosquito-borne diseases. Mosquito control research, therefore, is a public service program. The direct, immediate beneficiaries of the program are all citizens of the state of California and the hundreds of millions of people who live in those areas of the world where mosquito-borne diseases persist as major causes of death and debilitation.

A second unusual aspect of our mosquito research is that it extends well beyond the jurisdiction of the Agricultural Experiment Station. This is not only a multi-disciplinary effort calling for the expertise of entomologists, animal scientists, geneticists, soils and water specialists, and public health researchers, it is truly a multi-agency effort involving local mosquito abatement districts, state and federal government units, and even international groups.

The collaboration and participation of these groups in the mosquito research program is one of its great strengths. The close working relationships with mosquito abatement districts is especially noteworthy. This effective liaison between researchers and implementors has paid handsome dividends to Californians.

The major mosquito-borne diseases, such as encephalitis and malaria, which plagued the state in its early days and seriously impeded its progress, have virtually disappeared. Resurgence of these diseases has been prevented despite their continual reintroduction to the state by travelers from infested regions of the world.

The use of chemical pesticides to control mosquitoes has been dramatically reduced and now stands at only a third of the levels used just 10 years ago.

Following the spectacular successes of DDT as a weapon against mosquitoes 35 years ago, it was widely felt that we were on the way to total eradication of mosquitoes as a public health menace. The pest proved too tough and too adaptable to fulfill that wish, but there remains the expectation by some that we may again, through research, achieve the breakthrough that will permit us to relax our guard against mosquitoes.

We promise no such breakthrough here. Our research is based on acceptance of the fact that the mosquito as a disease carrier will probably never be eradicated. It can be effectively controlled through a continuing program of research and application of new knowledge.

California has been a leader in the development of effective, coordinated mosquito control programs. I am confident that we will continue to play a key role.