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PEOPLE-IZING AGRICULTURE

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH is devoting too much time to people research," is an often-heard opinion in farm circles, and there is some truth in it. Agricultural experiment stations and extension services nationwide are focusing on the needs of people more than ever before.

The urban dweller controls the legislature, through which the tax money to support research comes. Unless the taxpayer recognizes (as he once did) the importance of agriculture and research, continued support is unlikely.

Unfortunately, too many urban dwellers lack an appreciation of agriculture. Some view it (factually or fancifully) as the source of some of our most urgent problems: ghettos; welfare; pollution of air, soil, and water; and—incredibly—as the cause of what they consider to be the high price of food. Thus it is clear that the Agricultural Experiment Station and Extension Service must focus teaching, research, and continuing education on programs more directly related to the supporting public.

The support budget for the University of California's Division of Agricultural Sciences has not increased since 1959. Considering the affects of inflation, it is estimated that we are actually operating with \$1,000,000 less research purchasing power at Davis than we were 10 years ago. This loss is compounded by the increased sophistication required to solve today's agricultural problems. We can solve them better and more quickly, but it costs more, and we are already working at a deficit.

Less than three per cent of the state's population is located on fewer than 60,000 farms, and these figures are expected to be halved within 10 years. There is a message here that cannot be ignored: the Division of Agricultural Sciences must expand its focus on the other 97 per cent of our society, and the agriculture industry must significantly expand direct support for research.

Currently the Davis unit of the Experiment Station allocates 50 per cent of its funds for production research. With

"over-production" a problem in many commodities, and with a majority of the American people enjoying a more than adequate diet, this high an allocation is difficult to continue to justify. In actual fact the more critical problems of the agriculture industry are in such "people-oriented" areas as:

(1) *Distribution and marketing.* Why do we have surpluses in a world where two-thirds of the people are on inadequate diets? Why do distribution and marketing costs of farm products often exceed total production and processing costs?

(2) *Processing and product quality.* Homemakers today demand an increasing amount of convenience foods. It is even predicted that within 10 years, 50 per cent of the meals served in the United States will be eaten outside the home. What will be the nutritional and agricultural impact of this change?

(3) *Pollution of air, soil, and water.* Is it not clear that agriculture is now—and will always be—deeply involved in issues of environmental quality? Is it not likely that restrictive legislation on fertilizer and pesticide use—legislation born of public hysteria—may curtail production more than will traditional problems?

(4) *Land use and taxation.* Does the agriculture industry not recognize that research must be intensified to provide local, state, and federal agencies with acceptable guidelines to protect agricultural land from urban encroachment and excessive taxation? Should we not be looking very hard at means of rejuvenating small rural towns to build and maintain broader agricultural tax bases.

These are more than rhetorical questions. Answers are demanded, answers which must come through reorienting teaching, research, and public service programs to "people-related" areas. If we do not change—or if the public does not respond—the agriculture industry in California will very likely be faced with paying the entire cost of its research needs. And the toll in dollars, in our environment, and in problems to our people will be unbearably high.