



MARK T. BUCHANAN
*Director-at-Large,
Western Association of
Agricultural Experiment
Station Directors*

. . . challenge for the future

THE "REGIONAL RESEARCH FUND, state agricultural experiment stations" (Section 3C3, P.L. 352, 84th Congress, and earlier Acts) provided the first, formal support to cooperative research among two or more states. The ensuing program, financed about one-third from the "Regional research fund" and about two-thirds from other sources, is called RRF. Critics give the program mixed, but, on balance, good marks. Many point to improved coordination of research among states and with USDA as a major outcome of the RRF program.

The greatest present challenge within the area of regional research is to concentrate more efforts at one location on one set of problems, at another on another set, and so forth. Ultimately, each state and each region would concentrate its efforts on fewer lines of work to the benefit of all.

Despite the fact that RRF funds comprise less than five per cent of the total funds available for support of agricultural research in the western region, there are opportunities for the support of more projects of the type in which one or a few states do research for all. A start has been made in this direction with RRF funding.

Thus RRF project W-6, "Introduction, multiplication, maintenance and evaluation of plant germ plasm" (Western Regional Plant Introduction Station, Pullman, Washington) provides a plant germ plasm source for the western region. Funding is from the Agricultural Research Service, USDA, and RRF funds "off-the-top" for the western region. RRF project IR-2, "Obtaining and preserving virus free deciduous fruit tree clones," headquartered at Prosser, Washington is another example. This one is financed by ARS and by RRF funds "off-the-top" for all regions. There have been and are several other RRF projects in which resources are concentrated in one or a few locations.

Of more potential importance, however, is the kind of program that could ensue from cooperative planning among

the states and USDA research agencies concerned with the use of other (non-RRF) resources available to them. RRF funds could be used as a catalyst to achieve the kind of cooperation and specialization and trade within the total agricultural research program that could make for more effective use of available resources.

The implementation of such a program will be dependent on acceptance by the Directors of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations concerned, and of their superiors at their home institutions, of the concept that concentration as described here is a good thing—and that specialization and trade of the type indicated is possible. Obviously, there will be problems within each state as a result of the relationship of the State Agricultural Experiment Station program to the teaching program within the college of agriculture and within the university as a whole.

There may also be a problem of "industry" acceptance of the results of research obtained in another state. There is considerable evidence, however, that the latter of these, industry acceptance, is less serious now than it might have been some years ago. Today's advanced, well-educated, and well-informed farmers, and other representatives of the agricultural community are quite accustomed to seeking answers from the centers they consider to be best qualified to do research on problems with which they are concerned.

The matter of the relationship of the research to the teaching program also may be less of a problem than it appears to be at first. Is it necessary for every state to provide advanced educational opportunities in all subject areas? Would not educational as well as research funds be used more effectively if a portion of them were utilized for the kind of concentration and exchange discussed here?

These and similar questions merit our careful attention as we plan for the years ahead.