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CONSUMERS CALL THE TUNE

CONSUMERS ARE THE BASIS for agriculture. They buy the products and support federal and state agricultural research—as well as all kinds of other endeavors.

Consumers seem to be asking for more and more useful information from us; information on nutrition, on health, on safety. Much of this information they want on labels, not in journals. In TV ads, not at learned meetings. Not handbook figures.

Recent supermarket tests show that nutrient labels affect sales of foods. Still newer tests begin to show that ingredient labeling also guides buying. If one can of tomato juice offers 25 milligrams of vitamin C per serving and another offers 30 milligrams, which would *you* buy? If one can of corned beef hash promises 40% beef, and another promises nothing, many buyers take the hint.

These demands pose such problems to the seller that he must have information that can only be obtained by a huge research effort. Cheaper analytical methods are obviously necessary. Quality control, statistical and sampling skills, and awareness of regional, seasonal, and varietal composition effects are important. This is all merely first aid.

The real challenge to agriculture is to make the figures on the label as good as possible, as uniform as possible. This means more breeding and selection for nutrients, more careful cultivation or feeding for best composition, more adept harvesting and transporting, more skillful holding, blending, and processing for market. All of this will have to be done by newer methods which bear scrutiny not only by FDA and USDA, but also by the public.

These new burdens are imposed by the public. Public research will have to bear them so far as possible, probably without increased support.

Fortunately, state and federal agricultural research are now trying to plan and work together more and more. The Agricultural Research Service of USDA has now been reorganized into regional and area units with greater responsiveness to the public. Here, local ARS will be better informed about, and more supportive of, the California Agricultural Experiment Station work. Joint planning in answer to consumer requirements is now a reality, a necessity, in fact a pleasure.

The national USDA leaders, Dr. Ned Bayley and Mr. T. W. Edminster have selected a UC graduate, Dr. H. Rex Thomas, to head the Western Region of ARS. They have stationed him in the San Francisco Bay Area and have charged him to work with the Western Experiment Station Directors.

Some of the chemistry, the engineering, the pharmacology can be provided for the West by the 450 men and women of the Western Regional Research Laboratory of ARS. To WRRL, interaction, with UC is a reality now. For example, we provide some of the instruction and research facilities and guidance for students in Food Science at Berkeley. Our instruction and research has much to do with food safety, purity, and nutrition.

The challenge, and the organizational means are on hand. If our effort is good, the public will be grateful.