



LOWELL N. LEWIS
*Associate Dean
for Research
College of Biological
and Agricultural
Sciences, Riverside*

Research . . . for whom?

WHOM DOES agricultural research benefit? Corporate farmers? Small farmers? Rural people? Urban society? Absolutely everyone! The fact is that every person who eats food benefits from agricultural research. Unfortunately, however, the connection between the package of food a housewife buys in the supermarket and the efficient growing of the crop by the farmer is rarely made in the minds of most of us today.

A half century ago agricultural research began to make real progress: crop varieties were improved; hybrid corn covered the Midwest; farm machinery development made the tractor a reality; crop and animal nutrition was improved; storage and shipping of products expanded markets and seasons. At that time, it took 30% of the population to produce our food and fiber. Not only did food cost 32¢ out of each income dollar, but food supply was seasonal, and there was less variety along with generally poorer quality. Gradually, food costs and the manpower needs of agriculture decreased until we arrived at today's food cost of 16¢ out of each disposable income dollar. On today's income base, that means about \$1500 per family per year in food savings. In addition, today's food is produced by only 5% of our population, freeing more people for such needed professions as nurses, doctors, lawyers, businessmen, educators, and technicians. The major portion of this saving was possible because of the research done to improve agricultural efficiency. This saving in food cost and the improved quality of life is a benefit to everyone. Legislators and representatives from urban communities cannot afford to minimize the importance of agricultural groups; accusations that such research is done only for the farmer are pure nonsense. Others claim that the cost is too

great for the benefits; however, the state of California spends only about \$4 per family each year for agricultural research, while nationally the state and federal expenses are only about \$10 per family.

A 1972 report entitled "Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times" berated the experiment stations of this country for squandering their research funds to benefit conglomerate agriculture while doing nothing to help rural Americans. I agree that not only rural, but also urban and suburban Americans have many needs that are not being met by experiment stations. I submit, however, that we have already satisfied every American's first need: to have food at a reasonable price. It will take even greater diligence in the future to keep satisfying it.

Recent justified concerns over the quality of our environment have caused many people to ask what will happen to agriculture if certain pesticides, fertilizers, or animal hormones are eliminated from use. The answer, of course, is that agriculture would be hurt, if only slightly. Its efficiency would decrease, some crops might not be economical to produce, and farming would be more work. But somehow farmers would continue to produce. The real effect would be on the consumer. Food would cost more; it will be of lower quality; and we would face the inevitable danger that the \$1500 per year of food savings for each family will sharply decrease.

The research being done every day to increase agricultural efficiency, to increase engineering technology, to increase medical know-how, to increase the quality of our environment is not carried out for farmers, engineers, doctors, or pollution control officers. It is done so these people can bring everyone a better way of life.