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Opening New Channels Of Communication

IN A PREVIOUS discussion of the process of goal setting, I mentioned the difficulties and the importance of identifying the "publics" and the critical needs to which we should be directing our efforts. Our fundamental objective is the same as it always has been—to help meet the food and fibre needs of the people of California. But those needs are changing. Agriculture has grown and diversified into something very different from what it was 25 years ago. It operates in different ways, and under different conditions. Society's needs and priorities continue to change—sometimes unpredictably and suddenly. There are new and growing concerns about the use of our resources for agricultural and non-agricultural purposes, about the quality of our environment, about the quality and safety of our food, and about our insatiable demand for energy sources.

These and other changes directly affect our mission, and they make our task more difficult and more complex. Because the Division's resources are not unlimited, it is doubly important that we stay abreast of current problems so that we can identify and be responsive to the most urgent needs. Clearly, if we are to keep on target, the lines of communication between us and our publics must be open and effective.

Beyond this, when our researchers have developed the new knowledge and the know-how to meet these needs, communications again plays a key role. Unused knowledge is a fairly sterile commodity. We can serve our publics and perform our problem-solving role effectively only if we are effective in sharing, disseminating, and applying our findings. Our information must be available, in useful form, to those who need it.

Beyond this, if we are to function effectively, we need the understanding of the public that provides our tax source support—a public which in large part is urban. As the President of the Rockefeller Foundation has pointed out, "Every

public institution is responsible to its total constituency, that is, people whom it serves, and it can only do as much as the people will allow."

At a time of cautious confidence in public institutions and increasing competition for public funds, we need to find ways to make our unique capabilities and our contributions known, understood, and appreciated. The present political realities and fiscal priorities underline the importance of improving our communications with both the agricultural and the non-agricultural public and those who shape public opinion and public policy.

Developing and maintaining channels of communications is not easy, but as the foregoing suggests, two-way transfer of information is central to the operation of the Division of Agricultural Sciences. We need inputs to keep our goals and programs relevant, and dissemination is a fundamental element in achieving our mission.

In a move to consolidate and improve our communications, I am happy to welcome Eric Thor to my staff as Director of Communications. He has returned to the University after three and a half years as Administrator of the Farmers Cooperative Service for USDA in Washington, D.C. In his new role he is responsible for the development and administration of a coordinated program of Experiment Station and Extension publications as well as all other types of communications. His responsibilities also include assisting me in maintaining appropriate University relationships with the numerous agricultural and related groups. Our objective is to improve existing information channels and to open new and more effective ones.

Director Thor brings a wealth of experience in agricultural affairs to my staff and with it he brings enthusiasm and optimism. These are ingredients of success. We want no less in our goal to establish effective two-way communication with the many publics which we serve.