



*J.B. KENDRICK, JR.  
Vice President—Agricultural Sciences  
Director, Agricultural Experiment Station  
and Cooperative Extension*

## The missing link in agricultural research

In dealings with federal and state congressional and legislative representatives from time to time, a recurring concern seems to surface. This is the wish of these representatives to know what the investment of public funds in agriculture and food research is accomplishing, a wish made more urgent by the prospect of a future world food crisis. Increasingly these legislators, who are also concerned with policy issues affecting the natural resources so essential to food and fiber production, wonder if existing programs and policies governing them are leading society into some undesirable and irreparable consequences.

From the standpoint of our public officials, who develop and articulate public policy, the potential public policy consequences of our research findings are seldom identified in our research reports. The conclusion these officials all too often reach is that research is frequently irrelevant or not directed toward the solution of problems of important public interest.

From our point of view, this is an unwarranted interpretation, since much of our activity originates from problems of immediate concern. Our research workers quite rightly focus on such problems as well as on developing fundamental, new information needed in long-term support of these life-sustaining activities. A major emphasis in Extension programs is the adaptation of information into practice. So we must necessarily work with those who use the information directly in the food, fiber, and environmental plant production, processing, and utilization systems.

The close relationship with agricultural producers, which this applied research and extension requires, leads to another concern frequently expressed to legislators. This comes

from individuals and consumer groups who fear that the benefits of public-supported research and extension may be captured solely by private interests. While this is a complex question, with arguable aspects, there is a strong rationale in support of wide public distribution of the benefits of public-supported research in food and agriculture.

This situation suggests to me that there is a missing link in much of the research reporting in the agricultural sciences. That missing link is commentary and analysis as to what research information can mean for society in general, expressed in terms that do not require a scientific education to be understood.

It is neither practical nor appropriate that each research report contain an analysis of public policy or public effect implications, but I believe we would be rendering a great service if each of us accepted the responsibility to test and report the results of our research against basic questions of public concern. Attention to this kind of analysis would, in my judgment, materially increase the public's understanding of how important our research is to their well-being, and would be of immeasurable value to policy makers as they wrestle with proposals designed to be responsive to public need.

Synthesis and analysis of our research results from a scientific point of view are a required and understood practice. Synthesis and analysis of our research results from a public interest and policy point of view are generally a "missing link" in the chain of events necessary to our program. With little additional effort, we can repair that deficiency and achieve greater understanding and appreciation among our supporting public for what we do.