



J. B. KENDRICK, JR.

Vice President –
Agriculture and
University Services

An agenda for U.S. agriculture's future

The United States is favored over nearly all countries of the world in its agricultural production and food supply. This status has been achieved because of an abundance of arable land and other natural resources, favorable climates, long-term public support of research, extension, and teaching in subjects supporting agricultural development, a literate and industrious people engaged in agricultural pursuits, and a highly developed system for the production, processing, distribution, and marketing of agricultural products.

Whether this status will be sustained 20 or 30 years hence depends on how well we adjust our programs and activities to respond to trends in the factors that contributed to our past and present successes.

Arable land, air, water, and mineral resources show signs of being depleted or degraded rather than replenished and restored in our highly industrialized agricultural system. We must intensify research and educational programs to ameliorate the effects of agricultural practices on our natural resources.

Agriculture will remain a major U.S. activity as long as it is economically viable and can compete favorably at home and abroad with other countries. There are disturbing indications that U.S. agriculture is losing its competitive advantage in the world market. This trend suggests a need for a clearly stated national agricultural policy that relates to our economic health and national security. It suggests, too, that agricultural research must be directed toward improving the efficiency of our production, processing, and marketing systems. It follows, then, that we must also improve our ability to predict the outcome of biological plant and animal systems operating within varied environments.

We have moved rapidly into an age of computer-based technology. The challenge for research, extension, and education is to find more ways to incorporate these technological advances into all agricultural practices.

As the production phase of U.S. agriculture becomes more industrialized, involving larger units and fewer people, questions arise concerning the appropriateness of publicly funded assistance programs. Most of these programs were originally conceived to aid a large and unorganized farming population struggling to produce not only a living for themselves, but also food and fiber for others. Today, a generally unrecognized and little-appre-

ciated consequence of these programs is the abundance and diversity of agricultural products available to the consuming U.S. public at lower costs than in any other country. We need to restate the justification for these publicly supported programs in terms of today's benefits and those anticipated in the decades ahead. Careful economic analysis and education will be required to substantiate this need.

To sustain agriculture's important position in our national productive economy requires the participation of bright and industrious men and women in all phases of its activities from farming to marketing, and especially in its supporting research, education, and policy bodies and in governmental agencies. The fact that most of our population has little or no association with agricultural pursuits, together with the lure of other higher paying occupations, makes it especially difficult to attract these bright young people into careers in agriculture. Agricultural curricula must be designed to prepare young men and women for rewarding careers in an increasingly technological era.

U.S. agriculture is science-based. The most significant advances in our productive capacity can be traced to discoveries arising out of fundamental studies in physics, chemistry, and biology. The more unfavorable or hostile the environment in which agriculture operates, the greater the need for information to overcome these adversities. Science offers the best means of supplying needed answers, even though misapplications of scientifically obtained truths have sometimes complicated our problems rather than solved them. We need a renewed dedication to and investment in the fundamental sciences supporting agriculture, because the environments in which food and fiber will be produced are almost certain to become less favorable and more complex than they are today.

Serious attention to these issues by people in a position to influence policies affecting agriculture will go far to assuring the future well-being of U.S. and world agriculture as it strives to meet the food demands of a burgeoning global population.