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Are the University's agricultural science programs focusing on boosting agricultural production at any cost in order to increase the profits of big agriculture? Or does their work yield large and multiple benefits for all the people of California?

At a recent conference, staff and faculty of the University's Division of Agricultural Sciences had an opportunity to hear a number of assessments of agriculture and the University's part in it. Speakers expressed serious concerns about the agricultural system's use of energy, water, and machines and about its effects on the environment, on food quality and safety, and on the welfare of farm workers. They expressed equally strong concerns about the Division's role in that system—about what it has done, what it is doing now and for whom. They also raised questions about the things we are not doing—about segments of society they felt were being ignored.

One state legislator suggested that small farms were as efficient as large ones and that communities developed around small farms were socially and economically superior to those surrounded by large operations. But in his view our research seemed to be concentrated on the needs of big agriculture and the products of research, such as mechanical harvesters, were largely used and usable only by large operators. Another state legislator reminded us that today's legislatures are more representative of the total population and in general they felt that the University was not responsive to society's needs. In his words, the new breed of legislator feels that the University's research has not kept abreast of social change, and is not addressing sufficiently problems of the environment, the consumer, and the worker. As custodians of public funds, these legislators suggested that they are obliged to see that those funds are used to address these public concerns.

A spokesperson for farm labor felt that of the three components dealing with agriculture—the workers, consumers, and growers—the University's research had helped only one. He was convinced that the University's mechanization research resulted in a loss

Are we listening?

of jobs, reduced wages, and hobbled union organization.

Two speakers from important offices in state government told us that in their opinion we were too responsive to our grower clientele, that we should provide more leadership in current problems related to the environment and land and energy use, that we have a responsibility to respond to a wider range of public concerns. A spokesperson for an environmental organization made the point that there is now a political base for concerns about natural resources and the environment. He raised questions about the efficiency of irrigation, the harmful effects of pesticides, and the energy costs of exporting agricultural products to distant markets. He felt that such problems were not receiving adequate attention by the University. Other speakers disagreed with these perceptions and affirmed the value of agricultural research to a society which has come to depend upon the increase and application of new knowledge and technology and expects to have an uninterrupted supply of wholesome food at a reasonable price.

Thus, the public, and some of its representatives in government, have new and broader expectations regarding our agricultural science programs. Their comments, while disturbing to some, are in reality encouraging because they suggest that we have something to offer a wide variety of societal groups, even those who are critical of our programs. As a land-grant institution, we do have an obligation to look at all of these issues as they relate to agriculture and as they fall within our range of competence. This does not mean the "old" problems have disappeared or diminished.

It does mean, however, that a changing society has generated a new set of tasks to add to our present programs. Contrary to the suggestions of some of the critics who would rewrite our agenda, we will need not less but more public support if we are to cope with the pressing problems of agriculture concurrently with all of the environmental and related social problems that need attention.