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FRUSTRATION— AGRICULTURE AND RESEARCH

ORGANIZED AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH began with passage of the Hatch Act in 1887, which required the matching of federal funds with state funds to build Agricultural Experiment Stations. At that time, agriculture was a dominant political and economic force in the United States and the purpose of the Act was to develop a primarily rural country, and a primarily agricultural industry. The present agricultural industry was built largely upon ideas coming from the resulting research programs. Industry has been successful in providing the public with an ample food supply, but problems have developed for both industry and the Agricultural Experiment Station.

Agriculture no longer dominates the American political and economic scene; only 6 per cent of our population is now involved in farming or ranching. Agriculture is not relatively as rich as other major industries because of its very low rate of return on investment. Rural areas are not rich because of this low return, and because of high unemployment rates.

In California, agriculture has severe competitive disadvantages because many of its products compete with other regions where land costs, taxes, and transportation rates are lower. California agriculture must overcome these disadvantages through rapid technological advancement. Continued technological advancement is based primarily upon research. Research costs money.

Along with the decline in the relative size of agricultural industry has come a decline in funds for agricultural research. Public and private research funds have become available for such other purposes as health, atomic energy, and space—and favoring short-term agricultural projects of three to five years duration. These research funds have filled a void caused by the increased cost of doing research. However, the short-

term approach has led to a lowered ability to respond to the long-range problems of food production and use.

Again, there is the dilemma that neither the agricultural industry nor the Experiment Station is able to respond adequately to the needs of the other. Both are short of money. With this financial paradox, isn't it likely that those segments of the agricultural economy needing more research will find it increasingly difficult to obtain money for programs that will benefit them? The present political and financial climate rejects a long-term, balanced approach, favoring short-term, quick-answer kinds of research, thus bringing a hodge-podge of uncoordinated efforts.

What is the answer? Will support come from those who benefit from research in food production and use? The American people today, with ample food supplies at comparatively low prices, are not interested in agricultural research—even though they are the main beneficiaries. They now spend less than 18 per cent of their disposable income for food purchases. To interest the public, the answer probably lies in a re-examination of the philosophy and goals of both the agricultural industry and the Agricultural Experiment Station.

The question is not what the agriculture industry requires, nor what the Agricultural Experiment Station needs, but rather, what the people of California need from our research. These needs include a guaranteed supply of high quality food, good financial returns from a strong agricultural industry, and assurance of wise use of our natural resources for the benefit of both the public and the agricultural industry. Response to these needs through research programming would benefit both the public and agriculture—and bring the necessary political and financial support.