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## Guilt by association

Food and fiber, like health care, are both necessities and concerns of all people. When they become less available or more costly everyone is affected and spokesmen comment on the reasons for these consequences. Specialists who deal with these two vital human needs are either blamed or credited for the changes that are perceived as detrimental or beneficial for human well being. In our present society, we find ourselves arbitrarily segregated into groups which too often develop adversary positions.

In agriculture we can roughly define these groups as producers, workers, suppliers, processors, marketers, and consumers. All of these are essential components of the food-fiber production-consumption system. If any one of these groups is distressed in some way the entire system is affected adversely. It should not be surprising, therefore, that searching inquiries are initiated when the system operates in a way not totally satisfying to one of the components. When consumer prices rise, consumers want to know why. When workers' jobs are eliminated, they want to know why. When production costs rise or production falls off in volume, producers want to know why. These questions are understandable, but the answers are often obscured by our preoccupation with fixing the blame.

Agricultural research in our publicly supported experiment stations and governmental agencies has always been concerned with production and marketing problems. This has been a major factor in the miraculous success of American agriculture. With supply and demand governing the costs of our food commodities, the production of abundant supplies of food and fiber has for the most part resulted in benefits for both producer and consumer.

When anything limits the orderly flow of food and

fiber to the market place the resulting scarcity produces higher market prices and the public at large is adversely affected. As production problems have increased in magnitude and complexity, because of environmental concerns and declining supplies of vital basic natural resources, researchers have had to work closely with producers, suppliers, and processors to understand and solve these problems.

Agribusiness is a term describing the sum total of all farm production operations, the manufacture of farm supplies and equipment, and the processing and distribution of food and fiber.

Because the agribusiness components are profit making enterprises in our American system, the non-"business" components perceive (falsely, I believe) that agribusiness defines the problems to be solved and receives the benefits from our agricultural research activity. This mistaken perception is not easily discounted, however false it may be.

Recognizing the perception and the reasons for it will help us correct this disquieting disharmony in the food-fiber system. We conduct research on a wide range of problems beyond production agriculture, and even production research yields many benefits beyond abundant, low-cost food supplies. But researchers also need to recognize that non-production problems similarly affect the economic and social health of the total food-fiber enterprise and to develop more research programs to meet those concerns.

Our strength will be in addressing seriously all of the researchable problems associated with the component parts of the food-fiber system. But first it must be recognized by all that we are dealing with an interdependent system and that the University's goal is to ensure the health of all of its parts.