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OPENING REMARKS BY THE MODERATOR

James C. Webster
The Webster Agricultural Letter

I think it was Don Paarlberg who first made me aware of the concept that has come to be known as industrialization. It is probably a term that describes one facet of a process that is as old as humankind. It is the process of constant change.

Most of us in this room can trace who we are to some failure of agriculture. Somewhere in the past there was a failure of policy, a failure of management, a failure of something in agriculture. I know I can say this. The fact that two sets of great-grandparents—one on my mother's side and one on my father's side—found themselves in Nebraska in the 1850s was due to failures in agriculture. Specifically, there was a failure of a potato crop in Ireland and failure of an agricultural policy set in London.

I recall the first popular use of the term "industrialization" about a decade ago. I believe it was in an article in *Choices* magazine by Tom Urban and Lynn Daft. But, the concept has certainly been around for a lot of years. Certainly, over the last half century. As we heard yesterday in the debate over the virtues of the small independent operator versus the big impersonal corporation, far too frequently, I submit, the debate has been posed as either/or. You are either for the little guy or you are for unchecked efficiency, and nothing in between. My view is that this is not only a false policy choice; it is a destructive choice. My thesis is that as a policy matter, the United States and, indeed, the world cannot afford to have just one of those. I think we need both.

My own regret is that we, as a society, have not collectively faced up to the choice and honestly considered the consequences as fully as we should. That is, of course, because it has been too difficult for political leaders to do so. I think we need to recognize the importance of both an efficient world class food production system on the one hand, and the need to maintain and enhance the quality of life in rural areas on the other. I think these goals need not be mutually exclusive. So, there is a challenge to political leaders and to policy researchers.

The discussion today will first include remarks by Terry Barr and Ed McMillan. Afterward, Marvin Duncan and I will join Terry and Ed and entertain questions from the audience.