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PROCEEDINGS OF A SYMPOSIUM
ON
REGIONAL RESEARCH: LESSONS FOR
A GLOBAL RESEARCH AGENDA



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REGIONAL RESEARCH: LESSONS FOR A GLOBAL RESEARCH AGENDA--AN INTRODUCTION

Robert L. Beck¹

The Research and Marketing Act of 1946 ushered in a new era in the organization and cooperation of the USDA and Agricultural Experiment Stations in conducting research. The legislation provided for a regional approach to research with up to 25% of Hatch Funds to be used in this way. The legislation responded to: 1) criticism of duplication of research efforts among state experiment stations and 2) a changing structure of American agriculture.

The duplication in state research reflected the major role of individual investigators who received most of the rewards for research activity. Their role was supported by state research administrators who highlighted results of research by their own faculties. This situation contributed substantially to overall progress in research. But questions were raised as to whether the major problems were being addressed, whether some of the research was unduly duplicative, and ultimately, whether it was the best use of research funds.

Following World War II, competition faced by farmers was no longer confined to state boundaries. Many problems required a regional approach. Studies focusing on competitiveness among regions became fashionable. Much of agricultural research took on a regional dimension. In agricultural marketing, the regional focus became especially crucial. In recognition of a need for the regional approach in dealing with marketing problems, many of the early regional projects were agricultural marketing projects.

These organizational benefits of regional research are now recognized and documented. However, other equally important benefits have accrued to the profession from the regional approach. Perhaps the most important contribution of regional research has been to provide a forum (regional and even national) leading to cooperative professional dialogue, planning, and much of the coalescing of research professionalism during the past few decades. The Agricultural Economics profession has benefitted immeasurably from this aspect of regional research.

Five decades later, a need exists to expand our research efforts. The focus has shifted from regional to global problems. Cooperation in research with colleagues in other countries is now becoming feasible. Research in international trade and in economic development already reflect the global dimension.

The basis for the symposium is a recently completed evaluation of the North Central regional dairy marketing research. The presenters are professors emeriti who have been involved in agricultural marketing research (both regional and state) for most of their

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professional life, either as researchers or administrators. Thus, they speak from a vast knowledge base plus extensive experience. A broader research perspective is provided by Directors Anderson and Klindt, members of the Committee of Nine. The symposium provides a unique opportunity to document and share this very timely assessment of the regional approach with the profession and to explore its validity as a format for future research efforts which take on global dimensions.