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338.1  
W67  
1989

**PROCEEDINGS OF A SYMPOSIUM**

**ON**

**THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE  
IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS  
PROGRAMS**



WAITE MEMORIAL BOOK COLLECTION  
DEPT. OF AG. AND APPLIED ECONOMICS  
1994 BUFORD AVE. - 232 COB  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
ST. PAUL, MN 55108 U.S.A.

Sponsored by the  
Cooperative State Research Service  
United States Department of Agriculture

AAEA-CSRS Symposium Held July 31, 1989

Baton Rouge, LA

February, 1990



INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES ON FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS  
RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND EXTENSION PROGRAMS IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

David Swanson<sup>5</sup>

My major purpose today is to confirm all that you have heard before. I am a consumer of your product. I am in a position to talk about some of the needs we have in industry and some changes that we in industry would like to see in the various models that you are producing for us to consume. If, indeed, one of the major lessons that American industry needs to learn is to study the foreign marketplace and produce a product that the marketplace wants, then it is appropriate to evaluate the products (services) of agricultural economics in this context. It is also important that you study your marketplace and try to be more responsive to industry needs.

It is a simple fact that the American universities in agriculture and business (from my perspective) are doing an inadequate job of preparing the managers of tomorrow. One of the elements where I have futilely, without effect or impact, used words like "shameful" is simply in the area of language. I cannot understand how someone wishes to have an international career and is not required to gain some fluency in a foreign language.

We, to a large extent, are turning over future management opportunities to foreign students and foreign executives who are learning these languages. These foreign students and executives are spending time in other countries, learning their cultures, and learning their languages.

We at Central Soya are part of a French-Italian based group. The last twelve months we have received ten requests from different components of the group, where students are required in their degree programs to spend a year working abroad on a program that has been mutually designed by the recipient company and the university. All of these requests have been from Europe. I cannot recall receiving that kind of request from any American university. I am, also, not aware of any American university that requires that kind of experience to receive a business degree or a degree in agriculture.

I simply would not have my job if I did not speak French fluently. It is that simple. My shareholders and my Board of Directors do not speak English and they are very unlikely to have a Chief Executive officer who cannot talk to them.

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As we get more and more foreign investment in the United States (and we are seeing more and more of that especially in agribusiness and food areas) what are we thinking about? That someone will always learn our language and that we do not have to understand their culture and how they think? That people will always come to us? I can guarantee that you cannot get to the top of an organization if you do not have the necessary language and cultural skills.

I have heard comments for years about the lack of an international feeling, not being an international person. An international feeling does not refer to someone's ability to speak Albanian or whatever language, but to the total experience of absorbing other cultures, understanding other cultures, being more open, and being more empathetic to different cultures and what their requirements are. We are simply just not doing the job.

There are three areas from the perspective of business that I would like to see more work done in education. One is to follow the comments of Dean Thompson. That is, you need to do a far better job to increase the economic and agricultural economic literacy of, at least, the leadership of this country and other countries. It is impossible to attempt to operate in agribusiness or production in a situation where exchange rates are said not to matter or where farm programs are guaranteed and you lose market share in oilseed production. You cannot do it. Coming up with market specialization and niche markets in the Pacific Rim is not going to solve the problems of American agriculture and agribusiness if we have stupidities being placed on us with programs from Washington, D.C. It is just that simple. It is your job to deliver that message.

I just came from a meeting of the American Soybean Association. I am not sure how many members of the Association really understand what is happening in terms of the restrictions on production and our loss of market share. The leaders nod as if they understand, but a lot of the membership certainly does not understand.

It seems to me that extension has got a major role to play in this kind of thing. We simply have got to have a more intelligent understanding of what is going on in the world if we are to get any constituency to save us from bad policy. It is that simple.

There are a lot of things that need to be understood. Our Secretary of State was caught muttering about consideration of an embargo against China. Will we ever learn?

Our growth market was the less developed countries until we slammed them with debt and choked them off. Now we do not have any markets left for a lot of our products. There is a lot we need to teach.



Another area that is of critical importance relates to the need for a lot of work in product development. The university system, the Land Grant System, is very well placed to do this work. Our company has worked on joint projects with Purdue University on market development for specialized soybean products. For example, it was a joint undertaking of industry and the universities to develop soy oil ink. There are many things like this that we simply need to do. There should be more joint efforts. We should have much more communication between industry and universities about what is needed and where are we going. Is this research something that will be useful or not useful?

The Trade Centers could provide a nice forum for evaluating perceived market opportunities overseas. Certainly, American industry does need a lot of help just in understanding that you cannot sell the same product overseas that you are making for the domestic market, period. You cannot do it. The Trade Centers can be very useful for smaller businesses, and even for some to the bigger companies.

A most important theme that is going to evolve over the next few years is the role of agriculture dealing with our environmental crises. A lot of the substitutions that will be forced upon us (by common sense and by willingness or wish to proceed through life without gagging and coughing) will come through agricultural solutions. A lot of work needs to be done via partnerships for environmental and/or industrial applications for agricultural products. This is where a lot of research needs to be focused.

Finally, I implore you to please see that some sort of language program is introduced into our educational system.