

research on them has been. The phenomenon of dormancy in seeds is one aspect that has been studied in great detail, but the more we learn about it the more complicated it becomes.

The effect of germination inhibitors and stimulators on metabolism merits a chapter of its own, since this phase of germination has recently assumed considerable economic importance to agriculture. Unfortunately, far too little is known about the effects of our common herbicides on seed germination.

A chapter on the ecology of germination relates the factors described earlier in the book to actual occurrences in nature.

In the final chapter rest period and dormancy in other organisms are discussed and compared with seeds. Comparing rest periods in different organisms is very difficult, and the authors rightly conclude that much more must be known about the fundamentals of dormancy and many other related phenomena.

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## Agricultural Economics

**American Farm Policy.** A case study of centralized decision-making. Don Paarlberg. Wiley, New York, 1964. xiv + 375 pp. Illus. \$6.95.

College professors who hold high offices in government but see their recommendations repeatedly ignored and rejected by the political process often feel compelled to write something to prove that they were correct all along. Don Paarlberg, an important and loyal member of the Eisenhower Administration, held a key post in the Department of Agriculture for many years and, in the last years of the Administration, served on the White House staff. This book is his presentation of why Secretary Benson's policy should have been followed rather than ignored.

The thesis is simple and straightforward. Paarlberg contends that our commodity price support programs, conceived in the 1930's, are utter failures and that they are incapable of dealing with present or future farm problems. They are failures because they maintain farm prices at higher than market-clearing levels but do not control output, so that we incur huge fed-

eral budget expenditures and chronic surpluses under the programs. Moreover, Paarlberg asserts that the programs are the wrong approach and that if they had worked as intended things might be even worse than they are.

The subtitle "A case study of centralized decision-making," is a misnomer. The reason that our farm programs have failed to control production has been the lack of controls to inhibit decision-making by the individual farmer. We have not had centralized decision-making under our farm programs, or even quite centralized price fixing. We have had a policy whereby the government stood ready to buy enough farm products to put a floor under the price levels for the output of the industry, but relatively few strings have been attached to farmers' decisions. In my opinion, it is incorrect to represent our price support policy as an experience in centralized decision-making.

The book is divided into seven sections: The Setting, Defining the Problem, The Politics of Agriculture, The Economics of Agriculture, Commodity Programs, Types of Direct Action Programs, and Toward a Way Out. The sections are short and readable. Even the section in which the author defines the problems and discusses the economics of agriculture is relatively simple, perhaps too simple to adequately treat the industry's adjustment problems.

The sections on commodity program experiences are interesting, although many observers will not concede, as does Paarlberg, that these programs have failed. Moreover, the livestock industry, which he cites as successful without government intervention, owes, in the eyes of most observers, much of its success to the feed grain program, which he says has failed. In fact, his attempt to separate the feed-livestock economy of U.S. agriculture may well cause some agricultural economists to question Paarlberg's entire analysis, because this separation is so against all of the evidence related to the structure of the industry.

The reason for this wrongheaded farm policy lies with politicians and government officials, according to Paarlberg. It is in his treatment of the politics of agriculture that I find his discussion somewhat ambivalent. He professes respect and admiration for civil servants and elected officials, but he cannot avoid numerous unfavorable references to participants in the politi-

cal processes and he suggests that among these are some of "the sentimental, the selfish, the subversive, and the reactionary" (p. 150). Finally, he says that the "true voice of the people is not always heard by government, and even when it is heard, the voice of the people should not be considered to be the voice of God" (p. 131). This interesting attitude may go far to explain why Paarlberg and his associates had some difficulty in their relationship with Congress.

Those who are familiar with farm policy prescriptions will find nothing new in this book. The "Way Out" is a straightforward, easily recognized prescription—lower farm prices and sell more farm products, improve the opportunities of farm youths by providing better educational opportunities, and, with respect to the land, retire some land from use and apply some conservation programs. Since lowering farm prices is the only one of these that reduces governmental spending, it naturally is the most important. This prescription assumes that the surplus problem is a temporary one which is primarily due to overpricing a few farm products. It assumes there is no chronic problem with respect to our capacity for overproduction, an assumption that will be hotly challenged by many economists.

Although one can quarrel with many of Paarlberg's views on farm policy, nearly an equal number of his views will win almost unanimous support. He is correct in asserting that our price support programs do almost nothing for the very poor in agriculture. Most will agree that international disposal is not a cure-all for our surpluses. And, hardly anyone will argue that government programs should attempt to thwart economic progress in agriculture rather than to help live with it. Many will agree about the direction of adjustment needed in the agricultural industry.

Non-economists who are interested in farm policy will find this book an interesting and readable approach to the subject, but they should not regard Paarlberg's views as universally shared by all specialists in the area. Specialists in the field will find it readable, sometimes penetrating, and sometimes irritating. The ratio between the latter two depend largely on the observer.

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