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## Agriculture, Research, and Shortages of Funds and Food

Agricultural research in this country is being starved at the very time that rising prices and tight supplies of food both at home and abroad demand that it be given major support as one of the nation's top tasks.

America's ability to produce an abundance of food represents this country's greatest potential for doing good in the world and for making its influence felt in the world. During World War II, America greatly contributed to the breadbasket of our allies, and after that war American food helped to sustain the populations and rebuild the economies of a score of countries, those of wartime friends and foes alike. That crisis over, American agricultural know-how, machines, seeds, and fertilizers energized and modernized agricultural economies in many parts of the world and lifted regions previously fettered by ineffectual traditional methods to unheard-of levels of performance in farming and food production. At home, America's agriculture has provided for our citizens ample food of a staggering variety, for a far smaller percentage of the average take-home pay than is the rule almost anywhere in the world.

Agricultural research of a scope and variety unparalleled anywhere, any time, has been the wellspring from which this bounty has flowed. That research, begun in an empirical fashion in the early days of the Republic, grew later into a broad, sophisticated enterprise extending from the field to the laboratory, from the packing shed to the pilot plant, from the feedlot to the experimental kitchen. Such was the success of this research and the agriculture to which it gave rise that "food surpluses" became an issue for politicians appealing to a predominantly urban population complacently accustomed to supermarket shelves well stocked with food at reasonable prices.

The euphoria of rising agricultural production, worldwide, and of cheap food at home is over. Drought on four continents and other factors have curtailed food supplies and raised the specter of starvation. Massive shipments of wheat and other foods have done away with the safeguard of full granaries in the United States. The Department of Agriculture has discontinued its monthly list of plentiful foods because there aren't enough items to qualify, with supplies tight and prices high and climbing.

This is not the place for an analysis of the many factors that have conspired to bring this situation about. But one thing is certain: if the attrition now afflicting agricultural research in this country is not reversed, the prospect of improvement of the current situation will recede ever farther into the future. Throughout the country, budgets for agricultural research, especially research aimed at production, are stationary or shrinking. Funds earmarked for production research are cut at a time of much concern for urban and ghetto problems, as if getting enough cheap food were not important to the people who live there. Positions at land grant colleges and agricultural experiment stations which used to be staffed the year around are being cut to 9 months, as though, like students, crops and livestock took summer vacations. Grant support, always hard to come by for agricultural research, is getting even more scarce.

Food, in adequate quantity and at moderate cost, is the most keenly felt need of the people everywhere. We, as a nation, must resolve to put first things first. Food is first. We must reemphasize and revitalize agricultural research. No single other investment can do more to earn for this country goodwill abroad, and at home, to restore to Americans their traditional confidence in having a reliable supply of ample, cheap food. —EMANUEL EPSTEIN, *Professor of Plant Nutrition, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, University of California, Davis 95616*