

Talk File - General

THE CHALLENGE - TEAMWORK APPROACH TO AGRICULTURAL PROBLEMS IN NORTH CAROLINA  
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At almost the exact mid-point of the twentieth century, the agricultural leaders of North Carolina realized that an aggressive, dynamic, comprehensive and practical long-time agricultural program was perhaps the only way North Carolina's agriculture could be kept on a stable basis. Realizing that the end of the Korean conflict would bring about economic conditions, particularly upsetting to North Carolina's agriculture, we faced a real crisis. North Carolina's stake in foreign developments is due to the fact that approximately twenty-five per cent of our agricultural products are exported. Any major interruption of the flow of these goods could bring disastrous results to our producers. The North Carolina farmer had been called upon to make six or seven major adjustments in his farming pattern in the 50 years of the 1900's. He had boosted his production to help feed and clothe the world during two wars, and he had scaled it back after each. He had weathered the nation's worst depression and had gradually made a remarkable recovery. He had heard national leaders declare that regardless of the outcome in Korea, he could count on a period of sustained crisis. He was asked to deliver all-out production as it was needed without impairing his capacity for all-out production in the future.

Clearly, agricultural planning would have to be more thorough than it had been in the past. The farmer had met all the demands made upon him, but the planning had been haphazard, temporary, and often short-sighted. It seems that they were borrowing from the future by depleting their soil and stripping their woodlands. The challenge now confronting them was to increase production, and at the same time conserve and improve their soil, water, woodlands and other resources.

Almost four years ago the leaders of the major farm organizations and agri-

cultural agencies, both state and federal, met to study the situation. Out of this meeting there came into being "The North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies". This was composed of the heads of the state agencies and the farm organizations. Repeated meetings to discuss our problems revealed that a long-time program must be set forth. The term "long-time program" had been used so often that some of us did not like the idea of another long-time program. So many such programs had lasted for a year or two and then gradually faded out of the picture. We are resolved that this effort should be really planned as a long-time program, and the fact that it has been in existence for about three and a half years and is more firmly entrenched in the minds of our leaders now would indicate that perhaps at last we are on the right track in matters of this sort.

In addition to the world shaking events abroad, there were nation shaking changes taking place in our own country and state shaking changes in North Carolina. Technological improvements such as tractors, machinery suited to the agriculture of North Carolina, improved pasture, better pest control, artificial insemination, and many others call for extensive changes in the farming pattern. Perhaps more fundamentally important was a decided change in the attitude of our people. Higher prices with resulting improved living standards had brought challenges for still greater effort on the road to prosperity. In every county there were people ready for drastic changes which would result in greater economic benefit with the consequent raising of the standard of living. Fortunately, the 1950 census had just been completed, and its results provided reliable facts available for planning at a very timely period. In January 1951, the Board voted to prepare a long-time agricultural program and gave it the name "North Carolina Accepts the Challenge Through a United Agricultural Program". This program has since been published in a very attractive form, and copies are available upon request. Although it consists of only 74 pages of printed material, pictures, and charts, the preliminary material submitted by all

departments and divisions and interested groups comprised over 600 pages of typewritten material.

This challenge program is dedicated to six great fundamentals: (1) increased per capita income; (2) greater security; (3) improved educational opportunities; (4) finer spiritual values; (5) stronger community life; (6) more dignity and contentment in rural living. The challenge itself was prepared in four parts: First, the challenge in which was set forth the resources and the opportunities of the State; second, a program for better living through the improvement of crops, poultry, livestock, the conservation of our resources and ways of increasing income; third, the program for better family living in the home and in the community; fourth, suggestions as to how the program should be carried out. Of course, this last is the meat of the whole matter.

During the months required for the assembling, digesting, editing, and printing of the "Challenge", the Board was making steady progress in setting up a way of implementing the program. The North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service had a "Program Planning" section. Naturally this work was thought of as falling into the field of this group. It soon became evident that the program was too large for the personnel to handle and three additional full-time people have been assigned to this work. The Board began holding regular monthly meetings with such additional meetings of the full Board and of committees as were needed. The spirit of cooperation took hold and agencies that once inclined to go their separate ways were steadily and firmly being united. It was evident, however, that the unification at the top level was not enough. Many of the agencies had district and county level personnel. One of the challenges within the "Challenge" appeared to be the welding together of all interests at all levels to carry out the program. This has required some real doing and is not yet complete. We can truthfully say,

however, that the progress made has astounded all of us -- and if the program were to stop now, the results in stimulating teamwork and cooperation, which will persist as long as the present personnel is employed, would be well worth all the effort that has gone into this work.

For administrative and planning purposes, the State was divided into five areas -- the boundaries of which did not coincide with the boundaries of any of the administrative districts of the participating agencies. It is unfortunate that all agencies do not have the same administrative districts, but it so happened that none of them coincided. While this brings up certain administrative problems, it has some advantages also. These areas were known as "Challenge" areas, and the district personnel of all agencies was broken down into logical divisions as indicated by the boundaries of the areas. These district supervisors were organized into groups by challenge areas. This has been one of the major accomplishments of the program to date. Where lack of cooperation, lack of understanding, and even in some cases perhaps actual suspicion and jealousy existed before -- we now have harmonious understanding and joint participation in all activities. These area supervisors meet regularly, have their own chairman and secretary, and discuss the current problems relating to the program and to the day-by-day needs of the area.

The real challenge lay in the development of programs in the counties. It was decided that the first step would be to weld the county level personnel of all agricultural agencies and farm organizations into a working organization. Most of the effort of our field people working on the challenge program has been devoted to this end. I am happy to report that of the hundred counties of the State, 86 have taken definite steps to organize, and many of them have their long-time county programs well under way. Most of these counties have published county challenge programs which have brought about a very fine spirit in the county.

Along with the many fine activities in connection with this program, the "County of the Year in Rural Progress Contest" has focused the attention of the people of the county to the possibility of developing its resources. This contest has been in effect for two years, and we are now entering the third contest. In 1953, 77 of the hundred counties entered the contest. Over \$3500 in cash prizes are awarded to the five winning counties. Another project which has brought statewide attention to the challenge program has been the exhibits at North Carolina State Fair where selected counties demonstrate what they have accomplished during the preceding year. Liberal prizes and expense county, and strong competition, have made these exhibits outstanding.

It is recognized that for a program of this nature to succeed it must be brought down not only to the county and the community level, but to enter into the family and personal life of all the people. It is all very well to say that the average corn production per acre should be raised by ten bushels. The trick is to get the individual farmer to actually raise his production by ten bushels. Perhaps a brief statement on the program of the 1953 County of the Year in Rural Progress winner would illustrate this point. Orange County, North Carolina is a relatively small county with no large cities. It is a piedmont county with red soils which erode easily and 200 years of cotton, tobacco, and corn have left their toll. This county has an average quota of agricultural workers from all agencies. Here are the three requirements for every farm family in Orange County as set forth in the 1953 contest rules: (1) Raise the family income by one thousand dollars gross; (2) make at least one major improvement in the home; (3) join with your neighbors to make at least one major improvement in the community. It can be seen how these three simple requirements could be the basis of discussion at every dining room table in Orange County. There was no reference made to the "county averages", or relative comparisons with other counties. It was just as simple as 1, 2, 3: Increase your income, use that income and your own efforts to improve your home and your community. Of the approximately 2,000 farm families

in the county, over 1400 took part in the contest. Of course there were prizes. Local merchants, professional men and others donated liberally. Of course these prizes in many cases were the motivating factor, but the results accomplished were simply astounding. As a matter of fact, so astounding that I took our entire staff over to Orange County to a meeting in the beautiful Grange Hall donated by one of the great merchandising companies of this country as the national award some years ago for community progress. This award was the completely equipped Grange Hall worth over \$50,000. In this building so indicative of the spirit to be found in the county, the farm leaders -- men and women, white and Negro -- together with their paid agricultural workers, explained to us what this program has meant to them. If I could bring to you the sense of accomplishment and the pride in telling it that was evident that day, you would realize why this "Challenge" program in North Carolina means so much to all of us.