

Broadcasting and The Challenge of The 1970's

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Broadcasting and The Challenge of The 1970's

Abstract

The weather outside NBC'S Chicago studios was rainy and miserable that day in 1932.

Broadcasting and The Challenge of The 1970's

DONALD W. POUCHER

THE WEATHER OUTSIDE NBC'S Chicago studios was rainy and miserable that day in 1932. And throughout this great land of ours, the general outlook then was no better than the Chicago weather. Farm prices had skidded to an alarming low. In cities, unemployment lines were getting longer by the hour. But for Everett Mitchell: "It's a beautiful day in Chicago; It's a great day to be alive and I hope it's even more beautiful wherever you are!"

Agriculture and farm broadcasting, too, have come a long way since those early gloomy days. Regardless of whether you go back to a market report in 1919 at the University of Wisconsin's radio station WHA; to KDKA, Pittsburgh in 1923; or to NBC, Chicago, and The National Farm and Home Hour in 1928, broadcasting has played a vital part in helping to make possible what has been labeled the miracle of modern American agriculture.

But let us direct our attention to the future and not to the past. For it is the future in which broadcasting has the opportunity to play its most vital role in our nation's agriculture.

Looking Ahead

It has been documented that constant change will characterize American agriculture during the decade of the 1970's. Certain trends, which developed in the 1960's, will undoubtedly continue through 1980. For example, agricultural productivity will continue to expand while farm labor requirements will continue to decline. USDA estimates a drop of at least 30 per cent in farm man hours and a 40 per cent reduction in number of people employed in agriculture by 1980.

In addition, farms will probably continue to increase in size and become fewer in number. Furthermore, scientists will continue to develop improved technology as an overall demand for the products of agriculture—food and fiber—will continue to expand both in the United States and worldwide. Perhaps one of the most significant trends during the 1970's will be that of a decrease in political power of agricultural producers. In Florida for example, legislative delegations from five populous counties can outvote those from the remaining 62 counties. Nationally, of course, a similar situation is rapidly developing.

Environmental quality also figures into the overall picture of change for agriculture in the 1970's. Research must develop techniques for not only maintaining but also increasing food and fiber production levels while, at the same time, protecting our environment.

Thus, agriculture is facing a period of perpetual change. Amid the change, mass media specialists, particularly those in broadcasting, will face one of their greatest challenges.

Broadcasting's Role

The challenge of broadcasting in agriculture becomes apparent when one examines the consequences of change in the 1970's. Improved technology, the need for greater numbers of highly-trained personnel, and decreasing farm numbers all underline broadcasting's tasks.

Research will undoubtedly develop improved technology to not only cope with increasing consumer demands for food and fiber but also to help protect the environment. But research is useless unless it is transmitted and used. And therein lies a challenge for broadcasting—to help get new technology used most effectively. Granted, the nature of the medium as we know it today limits its use for transmitting large volumes of highly scientific data. However, such a situation does not preclude an attempt at improving and renovating our own hardware as we adapt to change.

As technology increases, so does the need for additional highly-skilled technical staffs. Thus, broadcasting can perform a major service in helping agriculture recruit and train our agricultural leaders, scientists, and educators for tomorrow. If we believe that mankind's greatest challenge is that of feeding himself and others, the task is obvious. We must promote to young people

the fact that a profession in agriculture helps provide man with the necessities he needs for existence.

Finally, broadcasting's third great task during the 1970's centers around the shift of population from rural and farm oriented to urban and non-farm oriented. Broadcasting has the goal of relating agriculture to the increasing majority of non-farm citizens. Undoubtedly we have all contributed at one time or another to agriculture's image of a man with a hoe. What we must attempt to do is to promote the true image of the whole broad front of agriculture—in production, teaching and research, and management—to all segments of modern society. Our position is made clear through an old story recently quoted by University of Florida Provost for Agriculture, Dr. E. T. York, Jr., about three bricklayers working side by side on a large building. When asked what he was doing, the first one said he was "laying bricks." The second replied that he was "building a brick wall"; while the third threw out his chest and with obvious pride said, "I am constructing a great cathedral—a structure which will be one of the most beautiful of its kind in the world." Perhaps too often we in broadcasting characterize agriculture generally as a profession with a mission of simply "laying bricks" rather than "building great cathedrals." We in broadcasting then have the opportunity to relate agriculture's true mission to society. For while producers of farm products do represent a minority, the group having the greatest stake in agriculture is the total consuming public. We must seek to make the majority aware of agriculture's importance to the total consuming public.

Given what could generally be called the three great tasks of broadcasting in the 1970's, our audiences draw into focus. To the agriculturist, broadcasting must promote the use and acceptance of improved practices and technology for increasing our harvests and protecting our environment; among young people, broadcasting must promote agriculture as a career of worth; and to the public as a whole, broadcasting must relate agriculture as a science and a business of "building great cathedrals."

Broadcasting, therefore, has different tasks for different audiences. But in all of its tasks, broadcasting has a common goal. Broadcasting is a dependable and effective service to all citizens—both urban and rural. It had a place in our yesterdays, it performs a vital role today, and it has a challenging and exciting future.