

Public Relations Goal—Telling How Agricultural Progress Benefits All

O. B. Copeland

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Recommended Citation

Copeland, O. B. (1970) "Public Relations Goal—Telling How Agricultural Progress Benefits All," *Journal of Applied Communications*: Vol. 53: Iss. 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.2104>

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Abstract

It may be trite to list the production marvels in agriculture for the various "publics" with whom we work through universities, agri-business firms, government agencies, and the like.

Public Relations Goal—Telling How Agricultural Progress Benefits All

O. B. COPELAND

IT MAY BE TRITE to list the production marvels in agriculture for the various “publics” with whom we work through universities, agri-business firms, government agencies, and the like. But it isn’t old hat to challenge these audiences, or any other groups in America today, to help translate the benefits of scientific agriculture into usefulness for all mankind!

Only about 5 per cent of our nation’s population are engaged in agricultural **production** work, but 100 per cent of the people of the United States, and millions in foreign lands, benefit from our highly efficient, science-oriented farm production.

Yet, today, we are witnessing a severe erosion of good will for the farming business on the part of national lawmakers and on the part of the man in the street, who is agriculture’s customer. Far too many persons today discount agriculture’s contributions to the nation’s well being and magnify agriculture’s role in receiving subsidies, and adding to pollution problems.

But think with me about a few scientific achievements in agriculture during the past century. This first one has been called one of the greatest discoveries of this age . . . a period that brought us nuclear power and the computer.

One hundred years ago, this past decade, an Austrian Monk named Gregor Mendel published some of his findings on the principles of inheritance. Forty years later, Dr. George Shull and Dr. E. M. West, working at Carnegie Institute, Illinois Agricultural College, and Connecticut Agricultural College, were fascinated by the hybrid vigor they noticed when using corn for inbreeding work.

Following that step, it was another 10 years before Dr. D. F. Jones, of Connecticut, reported on the double-cross method in hybrid corn breeding.

And, finally, nearly 50 years after Dr. Jones' work revolutionized corn growing in this country, two Purdue University scientists, late in the decade just finished, showed how to get more protein and more of the essential amino acid, lysine, into commercial corn hybrids. All these advances mean that millions of persons in a protein-hungry world are better off. Here are dramatic results from a century of scientific achievements in just one narrow field of endeavor—the field of genetics—and how new knowledge of genetics was applied to one food crop, corn.

Poultry Industry A Good Example

And how about the drama in a third of a century of changes in the poultry industry.

Production, processing, and marketing scientists teamed up to develop such an efficient industry that today the most humble families in the United States and low-income persons around the earth can enjoy high-protein meat at a price they can afford to pay. Many disciplines made a contribution to the present-day, fast-growing, feed-conserving, broiler chicken.

The geneticist, of course, was important.

So were the . . .

nutritionists,

agronomists,

pathologists,

economists,

agricultural engineers,

transportation engineers, and

a host of others.

What about the beef cattle and pork industries?

Well, the longhorn steer on which the American beef industry was founded, and the fat, lardy hog of a couple of generations ago are as much out-of-date in 1970 as the T-Model Ford would be in an age of moon trips.

Again, many disciplines had a part in the transformation that came about in the beef and pork industries. . . .

animal breeders,

grass and forage crop breeders,

fertilizer researchers,

nutritionists,

weed, disease, and insect control scientists, and

many others.

food crops,

the use of land for recreation,

lawn grasses,

tree breeding for pulp and lumber production, or
in farm machinery advances.

And in each instance, a nation, and really much of the world, gained as a result. True, agriculture is made more efficient—but all the world is served by these scientific advances.

Take a plane trip over any state in nearly any part of the nation today, and look down on the vast number of man-made fish ponds and lakes. Agricultural scientists developed the techniques for building the ponds and growing the fish in them. Auburn University, in my state, is probably the foremost land grant college fish research center in the world. And farm and city folk, alike, enjoy this sport of fishing.

Many states now boast good turkey and deer hunting, but these prized game species were found only in remote areas of my region a few decades ago. Farm-related scientists, vitally concerned about natural resources, share the credit for these changes that benefit city and rural persons alike.

City Dweller Uses Many Developments

Today, the urban dweller in my region is more interested in his lawn and shrubbery than ever before.

What he probably doesn't know is that 35 years ago an agronomist in Alabama, who was searching for a better forage plant, found one introduction that seemed especially promising for lawn use. From this came *Zoysia matrella* and the family of zoysias for lawn and turf use. In Georgia, a grass breeder searching for a better bermudagrass, discovered some fine-leaved types that appeared to be worth trying for lawns and golf courses. The famous Tift lawn and golf grasses are the result.

Agriculture will continue to move ahead with giant strides. Technology tends to increase by geometric progression—not by simple addition. And we have the technology in agriculture to **leap ahead** in the next 30 years.

It seems reasonable that within the next two or three decades we may have . . .

- Reasonably successful attempts to control weather for crop and livestock production.
- The complete eradication of some livestock and crop pests.
- A variety of machines and mechanized systems that will continue to cut down farm hand labor needs.
- More efficient marketing complexes than we ever dream of here in 1970.
- Crop varieties that will astound us with their yield potentials, and their food and feed value.
- Livestock breeds that will completely eclipse the performance of those we know today.
- The addition of thousands and thousands of acres of land to high level production status—if we need it.

It's true that all of these are designed to help farmers and agri-business firms, but **all** of society will **benefit**.

So, those of us in the agricultural agencies, the land-grant colleges, the agri-business complexes, or in the farm magazine business simply cannot afford to be anything other than highly skilled and totally committed as we attempt to guide persons in this fast-paced field. **But** we must keep customers of agriculture informed . . . we must communicate to these customers the role agriculture plays in improving living standards for all the world.

If all the people recognize that agricultural programs have merit, we've taken a first giant step. The next one is to do a superior job of acquainting all segments of the population with agriculture's contributions.

Urbanites Must Get True Story

During these next decades we must have agricultural workers who can translate their efforts and goals for city persons who may not recognize, at all, how agricultural progress benefits them. We're thinking, here, of persons who may consider any agricultural expenditures for research, for soil conservation, for education, as subsidies for the farmer and a direct cost to the consumer through taxes deducted from monthly or weekly paychecks.

Copeland: Public Relations Goal—Telling How Agricultural Progress Benefits
Agricultural editors in the colleges, or in the agencies, or the farm press can be of help in communicating agriculture's story. But every person in agriculture has a responsibility. In the final analysis, the communication of the agricultural story to city people—the kind of agricultural public relations agriculture will enjoy or fail to enjoy—depends largely upon each of us, whatever our agricultural responsibilities may be.

So, the story of agriculture in the U.S. for today and for **future generations** must be a story of an industry serving **all** the people.

It must be a story of teamwork among the . . .

farmers,

colleges,

USDA agencies,

machinery manufacturers,

chemical industry,

fertilizer industry,

marketing and processing complexes, and

the farm press.

And this teamwork can bring results we cannot dream of in 1970!