

The Orbit of Communications

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Abstract

Whenever I contemplate the situation confronting us throughout the world, in America and even occasionally in my own state of New Jersey, I long for someone to tell me where we, the people of this world, shall be tomorrow, a decade or a century hence.

*The Orbit of Communications**

PHILLIP ALAMPI

WHenever I contemplate the situation confronting us throughout the world, in America and even occasionally in my own state of New Jersey, I long for someone to tell me where we, the people of this world, shall be tomorrow, a decade or a century hence. Where are we going? Are we leading or following? Are we guided by ideals or pressed by expediency?

As Reuben Brigham so successfully did, we must meet the challenge of change and progress. We have new audiences, new techniques to reach people, new things to say to them. What we have to say must be based on facts as we know them, convincing to those with whom we are communicating, and put to them in the most understandable terms possible.

Communication has gone into orbit.

We see today and we hear today things that happened half an earth away today. Half an earth is not an agricultural term alone—it means half a planet away.

How can we in agriculture put into orbit, how can we put into print and into pictures, how can we voice on radio, how can we show on television, how can we say to each other what is necessary to obtain understanding? More important, how can we establish the communication that leads to decision making—to action?

How do we get the attention we must secure? How do we send our message up and how do we get it back down to penetrate through the casual consideration of people with personal problems and other interests?

Agriculture's problems and accomplishments are competing for attention with the problems and accomplishments of 94 per cent

* This is a condensation of the address by Mr. Alampi following his receipt of the Reuben Brigham Award at the 1968 AAACE meeting.

of the rest of the nation. We in agriculture are outnumbered—badly outnumbered. Think of the people and places that quite rightly interest and concern both the non-agricultural and the agricultural among us—Trudeau, de Gaulle, Hussein, Eshkol, Ho Chi Minh, Berlin, Indonesia, Rhodesia, Cyprus, Gibraltar, and Ulbricht, for instance. One can get carried away with this sort of thing very easily, since news about these and other people and places appears and moves and submerges for a while. And then they flash into the sky again because the world must have food and peace and understanding if its population is to survive.

Consider Nation's Needs

As we seek to discover how we can communicate better, we also must consider what we can do to contribute to the needs of the nation and the needs of mankind. The concerns of food and peace are concerns we cannot ignore.

We must look ahead to survival—and much more.

We must find out where we fit, how we can fit. And there, again, is a nice, easy, comfortable word—"fit." We have got to grind, rasp, dig. We have got to plow, harrow, fertilize, fumigate, weed, nurture and, above all, broadcast our capabilities.

We have to show the basic strength of agriculture. We have to demonstrate through our output the enormous contribution that farming makes to the economy of the nation. We have to broadcast where that will do the best job and we have to plant selectively where that will do the best job and we have to plow with smooth furrows where they will best fit the circumstances.

Communication, so far as I am concerned, can spread or it can aim. If it spreads, and hits a big area, that's good—if that is what the communicator wants to do. If it aims at a specific target, and hits that target, that's fine, too. Do we bounce signals broadcast off poor old dimpled, collapsed, now burned up Echo, or do we aim a message at a particular audience from a precisely-placed newer satellite? In other words, do we achieve an impact where we want it?

At the risk of repeating a case history that some of you may have heard before, I would like to tell you a story of successful communication. A few years ago higher and higher taxes were creating serious problems for most New Jersey farmers. Some

were even forced to sell their property. An amendment to the state constitution was proposed. The amendment, if passed, would require assessment of farmlands to be made on the basis of their actual farm-use value rather than on a potential value based on residential or commercial use.

You can see how important such an assessment system could be in the most highly urbanized state in the nation.

Since the amendment had to be voted on in the New Jersey elections of 1963, the problem was how to get it passed. A number of suggestions were made for organizing support for the amendment, but they boiled down to what appeared to be a self-centered plea for a special break for farmers. In fact, the "Committee to Save New Jersey Agriculture" was proposed. This, it seemed to many of us, would be too narrow and self-defeating. We just didn't have the numbers needed to succeed.

Then I came up with an idea. Call the campaign SOS—so about six months before the election, we established a citizens committee to "Save Open Space."

"Save Open Space" wasn't just a farm pitch. SOS meant something to everybody. We said that a vote for the SOS amendment would assure the preservation of some open space in the Garden State for all citizens and their children. This open space, we pointed out, would be maintained by the farm owners, free of costs to the general public, which would benefit through the favorable environment provided.

The citizens committee wasn't headed by a farmer or a professional farm organization man. It was headed by the president of one of our largest chemical companies whose company had nothing to gain, except the preservation of agricultural land as part of a total "Save Open Space" program for the state. He, in turn, loaned the services on a full-time basis for six months of one of his top executives at the company's expense.

The citizens committee of 67 people grew. It included college presidents, editors, legislators, educators, labor leaders, government officials, and a host of businessmen. Publicity releases, billboards, radio, television, speeches, interviews, and letter-writing campaigns poured out reasons why SOS must get a "yes" vote. A sum of \$50,000 was raised for these campaigns from farmers, businessmen—yes all of agribusiness. Only \$42,000 was spent.

On November 5, 1963, the vote was 1,042,789 to 467,448.

And where did the the heavy majority come from? From the seven urban counties of the state, ironically not from the 14 rural counties.

We in New Jersey, the most urbanized state in the nation, sit in the middle of the biggest urban area in the world—an area running from Boston to Richmond—an area fattening and lengthening year by year. Our agriculture, then, has to face many problems before those same problems plague farmers in other states.

We who are concerned with agriculture must reconcile ourselves to this new environment and make the most of the opportunities and challenges that confront us. Our problem is primarily how we can adapt to and exploit this new urban way of living.

I believe and I urge you to consider that we must face up to the need for better relations between our urban and rural populations. These are two groups that have been rather distinctly separated in the past. Unfortunately, differences and even some old prejudices have survived.

Farm-City Cooperation Essential

Our success with SOS leads me to urge that you, who bridge the gap between farm and city so well, make every effort to promote interest, greater understanding, and cooperation between farm and city groups. They can no longer afford to neglect their mutual interests. Both can make a substantial contribution to the betterment of the more urban environment that is destined to prevail in more and more of the country.

Here, then, is a task for communication. As the minority, it is incumbent upon us to take the initiative.

In agriculture we have two great resources—people and land. We are losing both. Our most valuable crop is the young people we send to the cities. In New Jersey and in many other states the next most valuable farm crop is real estate.

We cannot sit quietly in our state departments of agriculture and on our land-grant college and university campuses doing what comes habitually. We serve agriculture, but we also serve a larger public interest. Farmers, and those who serve farmers, cannot sit and try to hoard their assets. Those assets will trickle or be torn or teased away.

In my lifetime I have seen incredible changes, almost unbelievable developments in electronics, jet transport, mechanization, automation, and provision for human comfort and welfare. But looming above all of these, I see the radiant light of education; the blessing of medical science; the willingness of business executives to negotiate with their employees; and the attainment of a higher standard of living for all.

To maintain this trend toward better things we have to feed, clothe, shelter, water, air, refresh, and recreate outdoors the total population of a rapidly-proliferating nation. Therefore, to maintain the manpower, management abilities, and sufficient farmland and woodland, we in agriculture must establish working arrangements with our urban and suburban neighbors.

Communication the Key

Barring an autocratic, dictatorial governmental system of land control bred out of desperation by fear of food shortages, we can best achieve those working arrangements through communication.

It is my prediction that the time will come when the public will be asked to make a decision on the basic uses of one of our most prized possessions—the land. Will the public be willing to set aside a portion of our valuable land for agriculture, for recreation, for additional reservoirs, and other uses dedicated to the public interest? We must not, we cannot, allow our land to be wasted. It must be used in a manner which will meet the basic needs of an improved environment and a more beautiful United States, dedicated to the health and welfare of all of our people.

For years we have been working out techniques to extend information. We have thrown lots of ideas in the air—most of them good ones.

In this new age we must use every modern method to achieve the most effective communications possible. Let's put them in orbit. Let's make sure that the re-entry is on target.