University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Eastern Pine and Meadow Vole Symposia | Wildlife Damage Management, Internet Center for

2-23-1978

Research Funding

C. Leslie McCombs
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/voles

Part of the Environmental Health and Protection Commons

McCombs, C. Leslie, "Research Funding" (1978). *Eastern Pine and Meadow Vole Symposia.* Paper 89.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/voles/89

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Wildlife Damage Management, Internet Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Eastern Pine and Meadow Vole Symposia by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

RESEARCH FUNDING

C. Leslie McCombs
Head, Department of Horticulture
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

The purpose of this paper is to review the past trends in funding agricultural research and focus on the current situation and offer suggestions for ways that we might help ourselves in the funding crisis that seemingly gets worse each year.

All of you are well aware that there has been a shift from a rural-farm orientation to an urban orientation and that particularly since 1950 there has been a shift of public concern and support away from agriculture to other societal problems. Perhaps the successes achieved by the land grant colleges, experiment stations and the United States Department of Agriculture have been our undoing. The high productivity per man hour in agriculture as compared to other industries and the low cost and bountiful supply of high quality food is taken for granted by the majority of our society. This attitude is particularly damaging to research funding at a time when there is a plethora of well-intentioned programs competing for appropriated dollars during this period of inflation when the purchasing power of the dollars that we do have decreases every year.

Actually total federal and non-federal funds for agricultural research has increased at an average annual rate of 8.7 percent since 1955. In addition to rising inflation affecting our costs of supplies and equipment we have faced spiraling costs in salaries, matching funds for fringe benefits and now drastic increases in the Social Security tax. Earmarking funds for research on certain commodities has reduced the administrators flexibility in shifting funds to meet changing priorities.

The other side of the coin, however, which has led to our discouragement as scientists and administrators in agricultural research is the rapid increases in support for other areas of science accompanied by a drastic decline in the proportion of the total research funds going into agriculture. It is not that we object to the development of other areas of scientific endeavor but that at this time of diminishing values of the dollar we have a real need to share in this several fold increase. Our present feelings are that we are excluded from meaningful increases. The Executive budget recently submitted to Congress demonstrates the point. Even at a time when it appears that food will be in short supply world wide and that foreign sales of agricultural commodities are one of the main means of easing the balance of payments situation we still cannot generate enthusiasm for agriculture research.

Where have we failed and what alternatives do we have? It is obvious that agricultural research scientists and agriculture producers have been about their main business to the exclusion and even disdain of engaging in public relations and being active in the political process. We simply must influence the thinking and attitudes of the general public. We have not gotten the point across that research for the continued high production of food crops at economical prices under changing conditions must be a continuous process. Our spokesmen have been active on our behalf for several years but it should be a concern of each of us. Seek

opportunities to present your message to local civic groups. Do not overlook youth groups as they are tomorrow's voters. Even members of our commodity groups should be reminded of the need for research. They need urging to express their concerns to the congressional representatives. You researchers have done an excellent job in calling attention to the special problems in pine vole control and the extensive destruction of which the rodent is capable. The apple eating public in general is ignorant of this as well as other production problems. Thus educating and influencing the attitudes of the general public still remains. To summarize this section - get involved and involve your growers in education and the political process at all levels.

On the generation of funds let us take a look at project preparation. At the working scientists' level it is understandable that much attention is given to stating objectives clearly and giving details of the methodology to be employed including statistical analysis of the data. Not enough emphasis is given to the benefits to be derived from the research or any discussion of the possible cost/benefit ratio that could be expected. The rate of return from current and additional investments in production agriculture research for apples is estimated to be 36 percent whereas the overall average rate in the economy of the United States is 15 percent. The returns from research expressed as dollars wherever possible are particularly appropriate in the progress report on the CRIS forms. These figures are combined and perhaps may influence OMB in their considerations.

It may be time to spend more effort with state legislators to increase research funds for agriculture. A few states have had some success recently in spite of the tremendous competition for tax dollars. Enlist the aid of urban representatives. Most reasonable people will respond favorably to a well-presented, factual and logical proposal that involves food commodities, a daily necessity. We are going to need the support of the urban group for any gains in research funding for the future. In project proposals and progress reports ultimate benefits to the consumers must be prominently defined.

Another source of funding, which at VPI & SU is of great importance since nearly one-third of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' operating budget is generated from this source, are grants. Many of you have learned that you must expect many rejections for each success and that you must keep submitting proposals. A grant to be truly beneficial must supplement your ongoing research program. An effort to identify and talk to the grants program administrator will be time well spent. Formulate critical questions in advance, be tenacious and obtain your answers but remember these are very busy people. Enlarge your vision in your grantsmanship effort. Develop cooperative proposals whenever possible as it should strengthen the proposal for all concerned. Again let me remind you to keep the ultimate consumer goal in mind and the dollar benefit of the research in relation to its cost.

In summary we seem to be in a crisis in funding agriculture research. We seem to be dealing with a public who takes their "food and fiber" blessings for granted. We have made some progress in Congress, e.g., the National Agriculture Research, Extension and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, which emphasizes research needs. We must maintain our integrity and organization, keep active in the political processes and when events occur that shift the tides even the least bit in our favor we will be ready to act as a group and achieve a better response for our requests for increased research funding.