

AGRICULTURE'S IMAGE got a real boost last year when the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to an agricultural scientist. The resulting news coverage on Norman E. Borlaug emphasized contributions of his scientific work toward overcoming world hunger, making it clear that this was the basis for the award. Although the award was to an individual, the entire agricultural industry could not fail to profit from the honor. And the general impression left by the award was one of unselfish contributions to one of the world's major problems—hunger—by the science of agriculture.

This is the kind of public relations for agriculture that we are always working for, and it brings up a point that we must always keep in mind: Promotion should be in proportion to the product or program you're trying to sell. In this case, there was a good story to tell. The result was good public relations. But we cannot expect equal results from some insignificant event that is of importance to only a limited group.

## *The Editor's Corner*

We often try to make a big deal out of some honor from a "society for mutual admiration" to one of our bosses or associates, but such an effort usually falls flat, as it should.

### *A Lesson for Ag Editors*

There's another lesson from the Nobel Prize news coverage that many of us could profit from using—the "humanizing" of scientific stories. Borlaug was described as a "quiet scientist who has made harvests more bountiful in hungry countries . . . who helped develop better yielding grains through the so-called Green Revolution." He was quoted as saying there must have been a mistake made, and as telling his associates, "Well, we better start producing some superwheat." How different this sounds from the usual statements, complete with all the high sounding scientific terms, that we often include in our stories about researchers and their accomplishments. So long as we continue writing news stories to please our scientists or administrators, instead of tailoring them to the audience, we are failing to get our story across to the masses. The stories I read about Borlaug may not impress his fellow scientists, but I have no doubt that he received an excellent image with the majority of newspaper readers.

The little extra effort it would take to humanize our scientists and their work would pay real dividends in the press treatment we would receive. And I'm convinced that our researchers would applaud such efforts. (But that's another story, one I hope to get into later.)

### *How Bad Is Agriculture's Image?*

I'm one of the few who believe that agriculture's image isn't as bad as we have heard. I'm convinced that most people want to think good thoughts about farmers, and agriculture in general. Most opinion polls support this view. For example, Delaware consumers said food prices are too high but few (two per cent) blamed farmers for this. Similar findings are reported from Missouri, New Jersey, and Minnesota surveys. The Gallup Poll in New Jersey found that residents of that state viewed the farmer as hard working, friendly, and contributing more than his share to the state's economy.

Sometimes we are a little too quick to take offense. Sure there are loud complaints about high support payments going to large farming operations, especially when the owner is a public official. And who can defend this practice to a consumer who is struggling to raise a family, regardless of the economic implications of the program. In the area of taxes we may find a little different belief about agriculture by urban dwellers. In Minnesota, for example, the *Minneapolis Tribune's* Poll found that most people do not think that farmers pay more general taxes than they should. But this should not be unexpected. Every group complains about its tax rate being unfair in relation to others. It should be encouraging that only 53 per cent disagreed with the statement that farmers pay too big a share of taxes.

Everybody wants to be loved, but I'm afraid we in agriculture expect too much. Sure we need to concentrate on keeping a good image, but that does not mean that we should try to keep a shiny halo on the industry. It's too much to expect that the diverse industry of agriculture is always right, that its actions are always in the public interest. This being the case, we can expect to get an occasional black eye to go with the more regular pat on the back.

We have a good story to tell, and I think it will continue to be well received if we tell it like it is.

R.E.S.

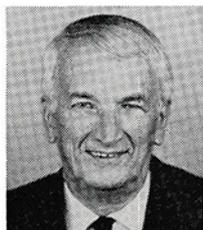
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