

Bridge Across the Image Gap: The St. Paul Story

R. E. (GENE) STEVENSON, EDITOR

THE IMAGE GAP between agriculture and the non-agricultural public is still there, but a "happening" at the University of Minnesota last June provides a glimmer of hope for the future. That Gamma Sigma Delta, national honor society of agriculture, chose to devote its entire biennial conclave to a program on communicating agriculture to the non-agricultural public—"Bridge Across the Image Gap," they called it—is an indication that the problem may finally be getting the serious attention it must have for any solution.

As would be expected, most of the speakers did more to identify problem areas than to offer solutions. Some ideas cropped up that seemed worthy of pursuing further, however, and discussions of problem areas pointed to things that many of us have not considered before. And there were some excellent suggestions on how to get the job done.

It was encouraging to me that I heard little of the usual crying attitude about how we in agriculture aren't appreciated for the "unselfish, sacrificing job" we do. As one speaker said, let's quit "pore-mouthing" about how agriculture is underpaid. And don't apologize because good farmers make money. We need to sell agriculture for what it is, he said, a business that produces essential products for a profit.

Program participants represented a wide range of interest and competence. Not only were there friends and supporters of agriculture in government and industry, but we heard from our critics in the consumer world.

It would be impossible to summarize such a program, but some of the presentations included ideas that we in the information

field should consider. With the qualification that many good ideas are left out, I present the following summaries:

DAVID FRYE, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL,
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA.

Uninformed, not negative. . . .

That pretty well sums up the attitude about agriculture that I found in an inter-city school survey. The kids were not aware of career opportunities in the field of agriculture and teachers had little or no interest.

It's difficult for public school students to learn anything about agriculture. There is probably less information available about agriculture than any other field. No courses are available, and conservation is the nearest thing to agriculture discussed in any course work.

Parents of school children have a nostalgic feeling about agriculture, or farming—part of the “good old days, good way of life” feeling combined. But they don't see agriculture as a suitable career for their children. All they see in this respect is hard work and low income.

Basically, agriculture's image with the young can be characterized as incomplete. To improve this image with youth, you must change the definition of agriculture as you see it or as it is listed in the dictionary—change it into “urbanese.” You must tell what it is about and point out some of the real occupational opportunities.

Making any progress in reaching big-city kids calls for a program that utilizes these four steps:

1. Get to the city teachers with information about agriculture that can be used in teaching and counseling students.
2. Get there early and keep interest up. An early, one-shot campaign won't work, and neither will you succeed if you wait until the senior year.
3. Get people to thinking agriculture.
4. Get involved and committed.

MRS. VICTOR LAPAKKA, PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA CONSUMERS
LEAGUE.

Every man is a consumer. He is both interested and apathetic, cautious and careless, and he hopes that someone out there is pro-

tecting him. However, regulation is neither as extensive nor as effective as he would like to believe. One of the problems is that, basically, consumers are really docile, lethargic, and they have been brainwashed to the point that they don't know they are brainwashed. Consumers have been conditioned to built-in obsolescence. Consumers are treated unfairly and they don't object to it. Just as long as there is apathy and docility, there is exploitation and a resulting immorality which prevades the social conscience of the whole society. Just so long as there can be a flagrant violation of fair trade practices in interest rates charged to an illiterate citizen in the ghetto area, there will also be a more sophisticated form of hanky-panky practiced in our middle class society. The organizations and citizens active in the consumer movement are trying to pry loose the fingers of greed, one by one.

The consumer today is not in total darkness. Rather, he is in a "twilight zone" of knowledge. He has some facts garnered from his own experience, plus that of his friends and relatives; from reading newspapers, popular and consumer magazines, publications of government, business, and professional organizations; from advertisements, labels, signs, and booklets. But the need for wise consumer buying is especially critical during inflationary periods, such as the record-breaking current period.

Food has gone up more than any other commodity except used cars. Out of every \$100 spent for food, the farmer now gets \$38 as compared to the \$50 he received before World War II. American families now spend \$78 BILLION a year for food as compared with \$51 BILLION 10 years ago, an increase of 46 per cent. However, of this increase of \$25 BILLION, only \$7 BILLION can be attributed to higher food prices—72 per cent is from higher marketing costs. But the average consumer doesn't know that despite farm price increases, other costs of getting food into consumer hands are rising more rapidly and leaving farmers with about the same share of the housewife's dollar that they usually get. The average consumer doesn't know that farm production costs are rising faster than the price of farm products, resulting in lower purchasing power for farm income. And nobody is getting this information across. As a housewife and a consumer, I really had to look to find such statistics.

We hear a lot about parity and the failure of farmers to achieve parity of income at current farm prices. But what does all of this mean to me, and how does it translate into everyday

living and communication between the farmer, the farm organizations, and the public at large. According to Webster, parity is "an equivalence between the farmer's current purchasing power and their purchasing power at a selected base period maintained by government support of agricultural commodity prices." One of the farm organizations in their definition of parity says: "Federal farm and international policies and programs should be utilized to the maximum to insure that the families who operate family farms in our Nation can earn and get a parity income, defined as returns on family labor, management, capital investment, and risk comparable to the returns that similar production resources received elsewhere in the national economy." I have read both definitions but I still don't understand it. I have yet to find any of the farm organizations agreeing on what the needs and programs for the family farmer should be. If these groups can't agree, how can you expect understanding from the general public.

We know there is hunger and malnutrition all over the world, while at the same time there are farm programs which subsidize the farmer for not planting crops and surplus foods that are not being used. During 1969 there was a series of district workshops on "Hunger in America" which culminated in the conference called by President Nixon in Washington in February 1970. Recommendations that came out of these regional workshops were all in the same vein: "The government should encourage farmers to grow food instead of paying them to let land stand idle, and see that people who need the food not only get it but get information about how to use it."

Several years ago, when the food surplus program began and America was storing food across this land, the newspapers carried stories about hundreds of thousands of people who were starving in other nations. I asked a government official why we just didn't send this stored food off to the people who were starving to death. His response was that we could not do that because it would upset the balance of the economy. This may be sound economics, but it is a real contradiction of our expressed concerns for humanity.

We hear the talk about the rural poor, who are also defined as the "hidden poor." We also read about the thousands and thousands of dollars paid to an individual farmer under subsidy programs, which are never truly translated to laymen language. And

yet in the same region where the land is lying idle, there is malnutrition, hunger, and ignorance on the part of the disadvantaged on what constitutes a balanced diet. Not only that, but there is resistance on the part of state, county, and local officials to make available to these people such programs as food stamps, school lunches, etc. How do you communicate agriculture's position in situations such as these?

The housewife across the land is attempting to strike back at the high cost of food. There have been pickets at food stores, demonstrations, and lots of frustration. She is not too sure where her protest should be directed, or against whom, and I am sure that in many instances she feels that agriculture is to blame.

To bridge a gap, one must know where and what the gap is. In today's complex world, all agencies, organizations, and segments of our society have communication problems and gaps. Believe it or not, all of us, just as you, are trying to remedy the situation. I have gone to many seminars on today's problems, and it always gets back to a lack of communications and a need to change our public image. Many of us who are immersed in programs develop a language of our own which is not understood by "outsiders." We are so close to the work we are doing that we assume that everyone knows all about it and understands it. Unfortunately this is not true in too many cases, including agriculture.

Agriculture is not getting its message across.

PAUL WHITE, RESEARCH ANALYST, THE MINNESOTA POLL,
Minneapolis Tribune.

Agriculture's image, among the non-agricultural community, is comprised of bits and pieces of widely diversified factors. It is unlikely that any single event can truly be traced to a person's image of the industry; but, rather, the image a person holds is the result of a lifetime of experiences. Nor can a poor image be shrugged off because it is based on ignorance.

To provide a basic reading on agriculture's image among adult Minnesotans, the *Minneapolis Tribune's* Minnesota Poll recently included questions in its regular statewide opinion survey to measure state residents' attitudes toward agriculture and the farmer. The survey is based on interviews of 600 persons chosen at random, and represents a cross section of the state's adult population.

Results would indicate, as one might assume, that the image of agriculture and the farmer varies within the different segments of the population. One way to look at the image of agriculture, and the one that naturally comes to mind first, is that of the urban community.

The particular technique employed in this survey was to give the urban respondent six statements and ask if he agrees or disagrees. Results for urban residents were:

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Agree, per cent</i>	<i>Disagree, per cent</i>	<i>No opinion, per cent</i>
Agriculture plays a vital role in Minnesota's economy	93	4	3
Farmers have contributed substantially to the increase in food prices	21	75	4
Farmers are not as well informed on state and national issues as people living in cities	20	74	6
Farmers rely too much on the government to solve their problems	42	49	9
Farmers get too much of their income from government subsidy payments	36	44	20
Farmers pay a larger share of general taxes than they should	17	53	30

It is interesting to note that, in five out of six statements, the percentage of urban residents giving each of the responses tracks very closely with those of rural farm residents in the survey. Only in the sensitive area of taxation was there wide disagreement between urban and rural farm residents. Although there is a positive reaction in all but the area of taxation, the spread becomes narrower after the strong support in response to agriculture's contribution to the economy. In responses to the question after farmers relying too much on the government to solve their problems—42 per cent agree, 49 per cent disagree, and 9 per cent no opinion—we find ourselves getting into more of a neutral area with a spread of 7 percentage points between agree and disagree. Then to the last statement, half say the farmer is not necessarily paying more than his share of taxes, and only 17 per cent say he is overtaxed.

It is interesting to note that fewer than 10 per cent expressed no opinion on four of the six statements. How did they become so well informed about agriculture and the farmer? Remember, we are talking about an "image."

An image is a complex concept based on bits and pieces of ex-

perience gathered and assimilated throughout one's lifetime — a lifetime of experience that has been tainted by a person's background, his knowledge, and, unfortunately, his lack of knowledge. Using my own background as a reference point, I grew up in a town of about 15,000 population in Iowa, a state that is not unknown for its role in agriculture. Compare, if you will, that type of background to the individual that grew up in a large metropolitan area and has never met a farmer. Yet on the other end of the scale, compare the same background to that of a person raised on a farm.

Knowledge, too, comes in differing degrees—from complete to incomplete, or even faulty. The natural tendency, of course, is to shrug off anything that is based on incorrect knowledge with the feeling that this person cannot be helped. However, this cannot be done. When an image is based on faulty information, it leads to perhaps a much harder task, that of re-education rather than just education.

But by the same token it is often necessary that we all stand back to take a closer look at ourselves—the idea of “I can't see the forest for the trees.” Perhaps people in the non-agricultural community are better able to see some of the things you may overlook because you are so close.

Early last year the Minnesota Poll took another reading on farm price support programs.

The question was: For a number of years, the federal government has carried on a farm price support program. It has been suggested that the government begin reducing farm price supports until eventually the market conditions of supply and demand set farm prices. Do you favor or oppose that suggestion?

Among city residents, slightly over half favored, about three out of 10 opposed, and 15 per cent had no opinion.

To put the percentages in proper perspective, an 80 per cent favorable-20 per cent unfavorable split gives a fairly comfortable feeling. But it still means that one out of five has a negative attitude. A 70-30 split also seems quite comfortable, but indicates an even larger number of persons with unfavorable attitudes.

Reliance on the government in the March 1970 survey read out at 49 per cent favorable and 42 per cent unfavorable—a critical area. If this were being put to a test of voters it would probably fail, because feelings of opposition tend to be stronger than feelings of support.

Poll results show that agriculture does better among men than women in its importance, relation to food prices, and farmers' knowledge of state and national issues. However, men are more critical on subsidy payments, reliance on the government, and taxation.

Older persons see agriculture as more vital to the state's economy and farmers placing less reliance on the government. On the other hand, younger persons see a better informed farm population and less emphasis on government payments than older persons. A larger percentage of younger and older persons put blame on the farmer for increases in food prices than those in the middle age groups. Persons over 50 are more inclined to think farmers are paying a larger share of taxes than they should than those under 50. By and large, those with more education and higher income have a more favorable image of agriculture than those with less education and lower income.

With these findings, can we now sit back with confidence, knowing that here in a state that is becoming more urbanized each day, city residents still tend to have a favorable image of agriculture after all these years? Can we reject the idea that the urban-rural split is a myth because urban residents tend to side with agriculture and the farmer on five of the six statements? Can we say agriculture is firmly entrenched in Minnesota and there is no need for concern, just because nine out of ten feel it is a vital part of the state's economy?

Unfortunately, no.

We must remember that an image is the result of hundreds of factors and a lifetime of experience. Not just six factors measured in March 1970.

The agricultural industry must also gaze into its crystal ball with the hope of averting future problems. The big thing now is ecology—pollution and over population. Will agriculture be able to stem the tide of widespread criticism of pollution from feedlots and agricultural chemicals if it arises? And will it be geared to meet the "image" problems of five years, or 10 years, or 15 years from now?

The image of agriculture, like that of any other industry, changes over a period of time, both favorably and unfavorably. The process of education directed toward improving agriculture's image—or even retaining the status quo—is an ongoing process.

KENNETH ERICKSON, VICE-PRESIDENT, NORTHRUP KING CO.

First of all, the "agricultural image" needs definition. Many think of it only as farming, but that is not true today. Farming is only a small percentage of total agriculture that includes the total agri-business industry. Farmers are the smallest part of it.

This total agri-business world has an image of conservatism, and being a "low-profit" industry populated by hard working, sincere, dedicated, honest, dependable people. Unfortunately, the bulk of those not directly in contact with farmers think of farmers in a blue denim or striped overall image.

Second, government has had and will continue to have a large influence in agriculture. Today's chatter about the "farm bloc" losing its influence may be true in part, but this completely overlooks a major identity which they represent. How can Senators say they no longer have an agricultural constituency? They overlook the fact that it isn't really a farm constituency—it's a "food constituency," and every person is vitally concerned about food. Food is of critical importance to both poor and rich, and to all city, urban, and rural voters.

Third, agriculture in total has had spectacular change over the past few decades, and continued growth and change is essential. It will continue in the immediate future.

It's also important to recognize that farm crops are primarily "raw materials" that are utilized for the production of other products. As such, they are one input in the final product. For that reason, marketing of farm produce will continue to be done by others in the agri-business field, rather than by farmers themselves.

Agricultural research, among its many other challenges, has an opportunity to explore more intensively two basic universes: (1) We need to brainstorm more intensively new basic crops to break the "wheat syndrome" and other crops to which many of our producing areas are oriented. (2) We need to explore more imaginatively and aggressively than we have some new uses for existing crops.

The five basic areas mentioned are not generally understood by the U. S. public. Urban ignorance of the total agri-business picture is massive.

In business, management groups look at farming and its allies in agri-business as an important, basic part of our economy and

level of existence. They understand generally, I believe, the general farm picture. However, their employees frequently misunderstand and incorrectly refer to the agricultural picture today.

What can be done to better inform the public and to "untarnish" the agricultural image? Let's explore a few basics:

1. First, let's determine to whom we should speak, for there is a real danger in just talking to ourselves or other sympathetic minds. And let's remember age groups. It's unlikely that middle-aged adults will change their understanding much. But, the young marrieds and today's achievers who are striving to establish themselves offer more open minds. And the under-20 group takes in the "learners" who are now formulating their image of agriculture.

2. Much is already being done by our agricultural schools and colleges and the federal departments. Farm organizations and business also are doing more than many realize, but much of this effort is communication back to the farmer, rather than to the general public.

In our own firm, we constantly explore ways of communicating our segment of the agricultural story to the public in our advertising and publicity, in our literature, in our tour groups, in our research farm plantings.

3. Let's determine what we want to say and why it should be said. Nothing gets done unless there is an urgent, core reason that speaks action.

4. Apply the "Agnew factor." Get it said colorfully enough to get editors to print it, commentators to talk about it, and the public to form an opinion about it and discuss it.

5. Who will do it? Uncle Sam? Educators? Farm organizations? Business? Trade groups such as the National Agricultural Advertising and Marketing Association? Kiwanians or Rotarians? Our farm youth groups like FFA and 4-H (who, incidentally, are some of the most effective spokesmen that agriculture has)?

We need to employ Newton's Law, "a body in motion tends to stay in motion," and not Olson's Law, "let Johnson do it."

6. Where and how can it be told?

Best of all—in person and in public appearance.

In mass media—newspapers, radio, TV.

Even in farm press, though already well covered.

By mail.

In meetings—why not a reverse Farm Forum?

Fairs and exhibits.

Signs.

Education—in schools; for example, student counselors and advisors are not informed on agri-business, and general classroom materials and visuals are lacking.

What is really needed, then, is a confluence of communication—many rivers of information flowing together to create a favorable, memorable image for agriculture, an image as understood, as pleasantly associated, as often mentioned, and as immediately recognized as the Jolly Green Giant.

ROBERT G. RUPP, EDITOR, *The Farmer*.

There's a paradox in agriculture today. On the one hand, a feeling that our story is not being told . . . that agriculture has a poor image . . . that it has its hand out to government subsidies . . . that it talks to itself instead of communicating with other segments of the national economy.

Ed Wheeler, president of the Fertilizer Institute, told farm editors recently that agri-business leaders, including those in communications, are perpetuating a disservice to an essential, national minority—farmers—by not telling their story to non-farm publics. He calls agriculture the only major U. S. industry without an effective sales, advertising, and public relations program directed to the ultimate consumer.

On the other side of this paradox is an attitude by non-farmers which does not jibe with these accusations. A survey in New Jersey by Gallup International shows farmers in at least the Garden State to have a good public image. The non-farm segment in New Jersey looks upon farm people as hard working, friendly, honest, and contributing more than their share to the state's economy. A majority says farmers aren't to blame for high food prices and that farmers make less money than equally-competent workers in other fields. New Jerseyites place farmers third as greatest contributors to their well being. Professionals (doctors, lawyers) and skilled laborers ranked highest.

Other polls—for example in Delaware, Missouri, Minnesota—bear out these findings.

So we have a contradiction. Farmers are a minority group,

poorly represented. Yet pre-conceived prejudices may not bear out in fact.

Whichever your sentiments, it is a fact that agricultural income is lower than comparable non-farm industry. And the general public is unaware that farm income has not been keeping pace with farm operating costs.

And the situation won't improve—not without help. Census takers found more empty farm homes this spring than they expected. The American farmer has already lost his power at the ballot box. By 1980 he may be outvoted by 50 to 1. Other ways must be found to tell agriculture's story—to explain the need for improving farming practices, increased research, better chemicals and fertilizers, new feed antibiotics and medications to help those left on the land to produce the increasing supply of food and fiber needed ahead, and at a profit to the producer.

So, this is the job we face. This is the bridge we need to build across the image gap.

How do we accomplish it?

Representative Carl Albert, House majority leader from Oklahoma, suggested the silent farm minority borrow the tactics of confrontation used so effectively the past few years by other groups. In this case, a confrontation of facts to counter the growing fiction about American agriculture. He feels an aggressive, persistent, and systematic confrontation could work if enough farmers and farm spokesmen, armed with facts, would undertake the task.

How do we accomplish this?

Is it through an organization like the National Educational Institute of Agriculture, organized a few months ago by Shug Hatcher, a Colorado wheat farmer, and other producers to awaken the public to agriculture's true contributions?

Is it through organizations like the Industry Information Council of the American National Cattlemen's Association that, with the American Cowbells, sent a producer, a feeder, and a Cowbelle to Pittsburgh for a week of speeches, informal meetings with civic leaders, press conferences, and radio and TV interviews?

Or is it through a brochure such as, "Wheat, Who Cares," put together by the Washington State Wheat Commission? Written by a Salt Lake City public relations firm from material prepared

by Washington State University ag economists, the booklet briefly tells wheat's story to interested parties and provides a reference for farmer spokesmen.

Is it through statements on soil stewardship put on tables in restaurants, as King's Food did?

Is it through educational TV, such as the series on farm policy done by the Great Plains Agricultural Council?

Is it through industry effort, such as the New Holland brochure, "How're They Really Doing Down on the Farm"?

Or is it hiring Jack Linkletter at \$2,000 per month, as the Australian Trade Council did to promote Aussie meat sales in the U. S.?

The news media is often accused of reporting only the bad—never the good. I heard in church that papers write about the three or four per cent of college reactionaries who stage protests, but never about the 96 per cent who go to class, turn in papers on time, and graduate in four years.

I don't accept that accusation. Editors judge what goes into their papers on its news value, good or bad, with interest to the greatest number of readers.

So, as you discuss the techniques for getting agriculture's story told, consider also how to make that story news. Consider the form as well as the formula for getting into print—the what and the how to reach the who.

We have a story to tell—a factual, positive story of an industry essential to the welfare of us all. We have an audience apparently favorably disposed toward farmers as producers. How do we put it all together?

L. E. PETERS, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, NEW HOLLAND DIVISION, SPERRY-RAND.

You've heard the old definition of public relations: It's living right, and letting everyone know it. And that's exactly what we had in mind when we began work on the "farm fallacy fighter," a brochure entitled, "How're They Really Doing Down on the Farm." (Editor's note: For directing this project for New Holland, Peters won the 1970 Crystal Award from the Fertilizer Institute for doing the most in "promoting urban understanding of American agriculture.")

Naturally we wanted to reach the people of influence inside and outside of agriculture with our brochure telling the true story of agriculture, so we lined up our targets and proceeded to hit them one by one. Members of Congress were in the first wave of mailings, and we were pleased and surprised to get many good responses and requests for quantities of the brochure. Some of the early mailing went to agricultural communicators, and the reaction was good.

We mailed to people in our own trade, of course, the publications produced for farm equipment dealers and all the national, regional, and state dealer associations, as well as to the 2,000 New Holland dealers in the U.S. We stocked our own branches with copies, mailed to county agents and vo-ag teachers. By then we had just about gone through the initial press run of 25,000.

The story might have ended there. You know how we PR types are—about the time we've generated a flicker of public awareness of some idea, we're tired of the thing and want to move on to some other grand scheme. But people wouldn't let us move away from "How're They Doing" even if we really wanted to. Peculiar things began happening. Like getting requests for quantities from people we hadn't mailed to, and getting letters from people who had seen the brochure mentioned in someone's column.

So we went back on press and got ready for round two. This time, mailings went to all state legislators and state departments of agriculture, along with influence people in many walks of life. Then we hit all daily and weekly newspapers and all the general publications, plus syndicates and columnists. Letters went with all mailings, and news releases with most. The releases got used, probably better than anything we ever put out.

Meanwhile, more requests for quantities, largely from county agents and vo-ag teachers and a lot of them from farmers. One farmer wrote, "I passed it around at a meeting the other night and I plan on showing it at some city clubs to which I also belong." He concluded his letter requesting copies with the meaningful words: "We farmers must be heard." The many wonderful letters we received illustrate the genuine degree of gratitude farmers felt when they learned that someone was telling their story. This response refutes the old saying that people only write when they have something to complain about.

Nothing new in technique was used. We tried to remember

the value of good mailing lists . . . of making it easy for editors and broadcasters to pick up and use our stuff . . . of playing down any company or commercial angle that might be involved.

The only real problem we encountered was getting off our dead centers and doing something. Maybe that's the problem a lot of people have. Another problem sometimes is finding and being willing to spend the money. It wasn't any great sum for this job, and it was a good investment.

Once we got going, we just didn't have any problems, other than keeping the orders filled and the letters answered. The rural people we were talking to had a built-in interest in the subject, so they were anxious to help. City folks, especially those on city newspapers, seemed to be intrigued by the idea of running an expose' on how things really are on the farm. I'm convinced there is a certain nostalgia connected with farming—even on the part of the people who have seldom been west of the Hudson River. It seems especially true of the hard-nosed but soft-hearted newspaper people we contacted. True, their mental picture of the farm is pretty distorted. They still visualize it as a primitive place, where the men wear overalls and spit tobacco juice. You and I know this isn't true, but let's don't get carried away by our own enthusiasm. They don't all wear business suits and carry attache cases, either. The rustic charm of the farmer is a never-ending source of fascination to city people, and city newspapers, so let's be careful not to louse it up by portraying the farm as just another business.

We had a meeting at our place a few months ago with a fellow by the name of Charlie Shuman, who said he doesn't think the farm story should be told in a "poor mouth" manner. He points out that the farmer is doing a tremendous job, and fully deserves to enjoy the same standard of living he has done so much to create for his fellow man. But, he said, let's not talk about the poor, impoverished, downtrodden farmer.

I think he's right. Farmers are proud people, and most of them farm because they love to farm. But they do want and need a fair return on the big investment they have in a very high risk enterprise. Our job is to convince people farmers ought to make more money from their farms than they'd make if they sold out and invested in tax-free municipal bonds. And we need to tell people they ought to be willing to pay a little bigger share of their incomes for the best and most abundant food supply in

the world, if it'll help keep agriculture healthy. Maybe that's the toughest communications problem of all—convincing city people, who have problems of their own, that food is still the greatest bargain around. People don't like to let go of their pet beliefs, like the idea that food prices are outrageously high.

As we talk about agriculture, I don't think we should deny that there's a good side to the rural life—a fringe benefit millions of city people would like to enjoy. I live in New Holland, Pennsylvania, population 3,500. I don't have a farm, but I'm close enough to share the feeling of being close to the land. How much is that worth? I don't know, but it would take a lot of money to lure me away. A lot of farmers feel the same way—maybe more so.

I guess what our experience really proves is that the story of agriculture we all want to tell is a very acceptable story among many audiences at all levels. We don't have to fear that praising the farm and the farmer is going to bring Urban League pickets to our door.

PAUL C. JOHNSON, EDITOR EMERITUS, *The Prairie Farmer*.

I do not agree with the often-stated opinion that farmers have bad public relations. I think we spend too much time worrying about whether people think we are good guys or bad guys. Most non-farmers, and especially city people, like to think well of agriculture as a vocation and farmers as people. They have come to take a cheap and adequate food supply for granted, and they have plenty of other problems—local, national, international—to think about. Farmers can best earn their goodwill by helping to solve these problems.

Many things have happened in the last few years to sharpen the opportunities and push back the horizons of the rural community, both agricultural and non-farm. This is the time for aggressive and imaginative leadership, not for defensiveness and bellyaching.

Planners, sociologists, economists, and politicians have lost their obsession with the inner city and they are now talking about population dispersal, new cities, functional economic areas consisting of clusters of villages and smaller cities. There is reason to believe that legislation and public money will follow this trend.

Space and distance which were once considered enemies of society have become assets. Land use has become very important and land values have moved ahead.

Rural people are in the best position to provide the needed leadership in the programs of shifting population from big cities to rural areas. Leadership from the rural sector in this endeavor will not only protect the agricultural interest, but it will be a needed public service that will improve agriculture's image in the public eye.

The agricultural community should get off the defensive, quit apologizing for our involvement with government, quit bellyaching about our economic problems, quit worrying about whether we are properly appreciated.

Our success in putting abundant food on the table is something to be proud of, but it is only part of our job. Our communities, which are no longer primarily agricultural, are desperately in need of remodeling. Our rural institutions are often obsolete and need to be rebuilt for today's urgent tasks.

We have proved that we can produce food successfully. We have proved that we could be good citizens in the rural community that was. We have yet to prove we can successfully contribute to the rural community that is to be. If we prove to our neighbors, both urban and country non-farm, that we can throw our influence and our skills in organization on the side of solving the total social problems of our times, we won't need to worry about our public relations.