

IT'S NOT ALWAYS TRUE that success is self-perpetuating. A case in point is our often discussed failure to get the agricultural story across to the non-farm population. A major problem in communicating with urban people through the press actually stems from past successes with agricultural audiences. Because ag college editors have long been recognized for their top-notch job of reporting farm news, it's difficult to get our copy past the "farm editor," regardless of what it is about. A perfectly good

The Editor's Corner

consumer story—tailored precisely to the urban reader—often winds up on the farm page along with stories about crops and livestock. Since the reputation of ag college editors has been handed down to succeeding generations of newsmen, it doesn't matter that the reporter on the desk has no interest in agriculture, or that the college editor who wrote the story may be an entirely different breed from yesterday's ag editor. The ag college return address means that the story deals with farming, so it goes to the farm page to be ignored by the very audience it was written for.

Selling Job Needed

The need for recognizing audience changes and tailoring our writing accordingly is well documented by stories in this issue. But there seems to be another job facing us—one that falls in the category of selling, or public relations. We must find a way to convince the middle man in this communications game—the newspaper, magazine, and TV editor—that information from ag colleges is pertinent to all the people. (Of course, if we do convince him, then we must deliver the goods.) This is where many of us are failing. Some shy away from public relations work because it is not "professional" enough. Others see no real need for change. And others are too bogged down with the multitude of insignificant chores that often find their way to the information office.

Getting past the "farm page correspondent" tag is not easy. Last year at Auburn, as part of National Lawn and Garden Week, it was decided to make a special effort to report our research information on lawn management, landscaping, and backyard gardening to the city dweller. Newspaper editors seemed enthusiastic

when furnished sample stories in advance, with explanations that all articles were slanted to urban home owners and gardeners. Although results were gratifying (there were special garden editions and other good use of stories in city editions), some unbelievable things happened. At one paper that planned a special insert section, the editor who handles farm news failed to get the word. He got to the copy first, broke the release date and filled his farm page. A paper in one of our biggest cities used everything on the weekly farm page, one at a time. Television efforts were a little better (we had offered guests for interview programs), although one station scheduled us on their farm show. I suppose the information we were pushing seems too much like farm material, but it serves to illustrate the point.

Other Groups Getting Concerned

Although we may look at this communications barrier as a problem of information workers, it can only be solved by help from all segments of agriculture. It's encouraging to note awareness of the problem by some of scientific agriculture's top leaders, and their desire to help. For example, the June 1970 conclave of Gamma Sigma Delta, national honor society of agriculture, at University of Minnesota, will have as its theme, "Communicating Agriculture to the Non-Agricultural Public." Such efforts deserve the support of AAACE members.

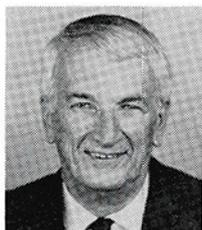
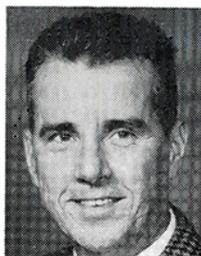
Another Side to the Coin

Without taking away from the seriousness of this communications problem, let me point out another side to the situation. I'm happy that newsmen see us as competent reporters of the agricultural scene. This is still a major responsibility we have, and its importance won't diminish as the world population continues to explode with new mouths to feed and bodies to clothe and house. I'm proud to be associated with agriculture, and I hope we never revive the recent trend toward wholesale renaming of colleges of agriculture and experiment stations to eliminate the word agriculture.

R.E.S.

Meet AAACE Authors

TOM McCORMICK was a radio writer for United Press in New York and worked for Vermont papers before joining Vermont Extension in 1960, where he is associate editor. A Wesleyan University graduate, he piloted a Navy dive bomber in WWII. The father of eight children, McCormick completed his M.S. Degree in 1968.



WARD W. KONKLE, editor of *Agricultural Science Review* (the CSRS, USDA, publication), was experiment station editor at Ohio State before going to Washington in 1957. He holds the USDA Superior Service award and has been a writing consultant and instructor in technical writing for several federal agencies and the USDA Graduate School. The University of Pittsburgh journalism graduate has served on several AAACE committees.

C. B. RATCHFORD is vice-president of University of Missouri for Extension, and is responsible for the extension programs at all four campuses. The North Carolina native holds B.S. and M.S. degrees from North Carolina State and a doctorate from Duke. He worked for North Carolina's Extension Service before joining the Missouri staff in 1959 as Extension Director. He became dean of the Extension Division in 1960 and vice-president in 1965.



RALPH S. YOHE serves as editor of *Wisconsin Agriculturist* and coordinates editorial research for the three Farm Progress publications. The farm reared Illinois native graduated from University of Illinois and was a Navy officer during WWII. He has traveled through Europe and the Middle East, observing and reporting on agricultural conditions. He authored the book, *What Farmers Can Learn from Other Lands*, and helped write two others.

RALPH L. REEDER has been visiting editor at Iowa State since 1967, while on leave from Purdue University where he had been director of agricultural information since 1950. During the year he was president of AAACE, Reeder studied at Michigan State University under a Ford Foundation grant. The following five years he taught communications at the University of Arizona winter school. His first editorial job was at University of Nebraska.



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