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Politics and Practicality

DURING THE PAST FEW WEEKS, and especially during the conventions of the two major political parties, a great deal has been said about the plight of the American farmer. A great deal more is likely to be said between now and Nov. 6. The farmer and his problems have for decades been a favorite topic for political argument, and in an election year, expressions of sympathy for this particular minority group seem boundless—in fervor as well as frequency.

There certainly is nothing wrong with the farmer's receiving his fair share of attention from politicians. He is entitled to as much attention and service from political organizations—and from Government—as is any other group of citizens.

But the particular problems of agriculture are problems that offer little hope of solution through political action. Demand for the surplus commodities which issue from our increasingly efficient agricultural industry can no more be created by political promise or legislative action than the surpluses already on hand can be voted out of existence.

Eventually, no doubt, and perhaps within a relatively few years, the food and fiber requirements of the nation's rapidly increasing population will expand to the point of re-establishing supply-demand balance. In the meantime, however, we face the question of how to find or create markets for mountainous quantities of surplus farm products.

We think the answer lies in research. Sound research has solved a good many problems in the chemical industry—including, frequently, an unwanted surplus of some raw material or by-product—and it should be able to do as much for agriculture.

The idea seems to be catching on in Washington. Although Congress adjourned before taking action on the Capehart bill, which proposed a \$100-million program of basic research aimed at finding industrial outlets for farm surpluses, it appears likely that the bill will be reintroduced when the new Congress convenes next January. And late in July, before its adjournment, the Senate approved President Eisenhower's appointment of a five-man bipartisan Commission on Increased Industrial Use of Agricultural Products, authorized under the Soil Bank Act. Commission members, who held their first meeting in Washington Aug. 20-22, expect by January to have some preliminary recommendations for legislative action ready to present to Congress. Effective groundwork by this commission, followed by effective research legislation, could actually lead to victory over the surplus problem.

Research as a workable answer to agriculture's headaches is hardly a new idea, of course. Many readers will recall a statement made by Secretary Benson, in an exclusive interview with *AG and FOOD* three years ago (*AG and FOOD*, Aug. 5, 1953, page 658): "Research and technology can help cushion the impact of surplus supply by finding ways to reduce the cost of these products to consumers, thereby expanding consumption, and by finding alternative uses, especially as industrial raw materials. We also must remember that provision of enough food every year in a dynamic and free economy cannot be assured without having in some years more than can be immediately consumed. Research must help in such cases to find ways of preserving these supplies for later use or of finding other remunerative markets for them."