

Dechant Says Ag Research Has Failed

The National President of the Farmers Union said this week that agricultural research has failed and is "systematically irrelevant fragmented evades issues and is ultimately corrupt of purpose"

Tony Dechant of Denver, Colo. called on the Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges to return agricultural research to "service of the public interest" by submitting to public planning, return-

ing to public financing, and re-dedicating themselves to the high purposes of scientific inquiry

Dechant cited goal of research as outlined in "A National Program of Research for Agriculture" developed jointly by the Association and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He said research has not "insured a stable and productive agriculture for the future." "Can we really define as 'stable' a seg-

ment of our economy whose debt has increased eleven fold in the last generation?" asked Dechant. Can we define it as stable when it has lost nearly half of its producers in that same period?"

Other failures cited by Dechant were the upset in the ecological balance that threatens life on the planet, new products that may be hazardous to human life, and a marketing system that "requires an ever greater portion of the consumer dollar, and must rely on a new corporate giant — advertising — to sell its packages and processes to an affluent but perhaps doubting public."

He accused researchers of often engaging in research for their own self serving purposes. "But agricultural research is getting a steadily smaller share of the research dollar," he said. "In 1940, 40 percent of federal dollars going into research was going into agriculture. It is now less than 1 1/2 percent of our research budget."

He was critical of the trend to private financing of research which he suggested often serves only the short term interests of large corporations. Are we evading questions that may embarrass private contributors? Are we afraid, for example, to pry too deeply into competitive interrelationships?" he asked.

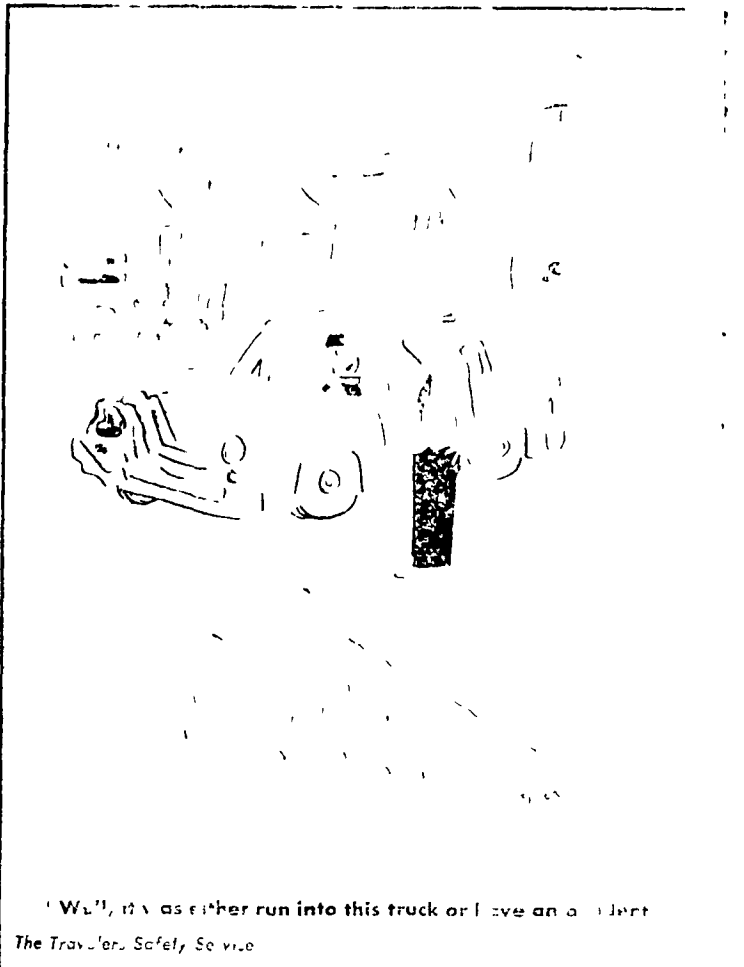
Dechant was particularly critical of agricultural research devoted to marketing and competition. Although the Task Force report to which he referred calls for 75 to 80 percent increase in this type of research he said it was "almost hopelessly inadequate."

Dechant said service to the public interest requires "broadly based planning." "This planning must involve all of the scientific disciplines," he said. "It must also involve all for whom the research is being done and all who will be affected by its outcome. We must move back toward public financing, not away from it. Public control will assure service to the public interest."

Public financing will be available, he said particularly when

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