

Defense research 25 times ag budget

Animal ag group urges increase in research

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Agricultural research must immediately be bolstered and targeted to meet future human needs for nutritious, safe and affordable meat, milk and eggs.

This was urged by a Task Force representing agricultural scientists, producers and consumers who also warned that the store of animal agriculture research information is close to being "picked bare."

They said more scientific knowledge is urgently needed to help maintain and improve livestock efficiency and productivity in the face of increasingly scarce land, water, energy and other critical resources.

They said investments in research and development "have not kept pace with the growing demand for animal products, with problems of dwindling natural resources, or with consumer demands for nutrition and food safety."

The Task Force for Animal Agriculture Research represents more than 200 U.S. scientists, producers and consumers who worked in multidisciplinary teams to identify the most urgent research needs. Their view of animal agriculture encompassed human nutrition, food safety, resource conservation, and public policy, as well as the traditional agricultural sciences.

Their recommendations were released yesterday in the report, "Animal Agriculture Research to Meet Human Needs in the 21st Century."

The Task Force was set up, according to coordinator Henry Fitzhugh, to "express the urgency of the need for support for research — private and public, state and federal."

The need was emphasized by U.S. Department of Agriculture's scientific director, Anson Bertrand. "The base of fundamental knowledge from which most of us in science are working today is extremely limited. The general public does not have the slightest idea how precarious our position is."

From another perspective, Sylvan Wittwer, Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station Director, pointed out

that "the U.S. is no longer the world's leader in agricultural research."

"The free world has fallen behind the Soviets, not only in the arms race, but they have edged us out in research investments relating to the production and stability of our food supplies."

"Traditionally, animal producers and scientists have not aggressively sought support for research," Fitzhugh explained. "They recognized the obvious need and thought the public would, too. But 20 years without a real increase in support for animal agriculture has brought us to the brink of crisis."

Today, agricultural research receives only two percent of the total USDA budget, in contrast to the 10 percent allocated in 1955. Moreover, the level of funding for agricultural research is strikingly low when compared to other federal R&D appropriations.

In fiscal 1980, federal research appropriations for defense totalled \$15 billion; for space, \$4.6 billion; for energy, \$3.7 billion; for human health, \$3.6 billion. In sharp contrast, total federal spending for all agricultural R&D reached only \$600 million, the Task Force pointed out, of which about half went to animal agriculture research.

This low level is ironic when compared with the results that could be obtained, they said. "Agricultural research has been a consistently good investment, with average annual returns of 50 percent on each dollar spent on research. And the principal benefits go to consumers in the form of more, better, and less expensive food."

"Because it pays off year after year in terms of more and lower-priced food, agricultural research particularly benefits low income groups," they added.

"Food assistance programs are targeted to low income groups which must spend about 30 percent of their income for food, as compared to 16 percent for the average U.S. food buyer."

If federal investment in agricultural research were to equal only 10 percent of that spent on food assistance

— some \$12 billion in 1980 — the research investment would double."

The Task Force pointed out some examples of past advances in animal productivity which stemmed directly from research:

One Holstein cow produced a record 55,000 pounds of milk in one lactation — enough to supply 100 average Americans with milk for one year. And, since 1945, the average milk yield per cow has more than doubled, from 4,500 pounds to 11,700 pounds.

This has resulted in greater efficiency in feed and energy use.

Pigs now reach the market younger and leaner. The time required to reach market weight has been reduced by 20 percent, from 280 to 160 days, with 14 percent less carcass fat.

These improvements alone save more than four million tons of feed grain per year.

A vaccine developed to prevent Marek's Disease in poultry has practically eliminated death loss from MD in broilers and was a major factor increasing average eggs laid per hen, from 219 in 1970 to 232 in 1974.

The value of these improvements is estimated to be \$168 million in 1974 alone, most of which was passed on to consumers in lower prices for poultry and eggs.

In addition, these studies of MD produced a side benefit, according to F.L. Raucher, former head of the National Cancer Institute.

He said they "will contribute substantially, not only to the control of this cancer in chickens, but

also to the prevention and control of cancers in man."

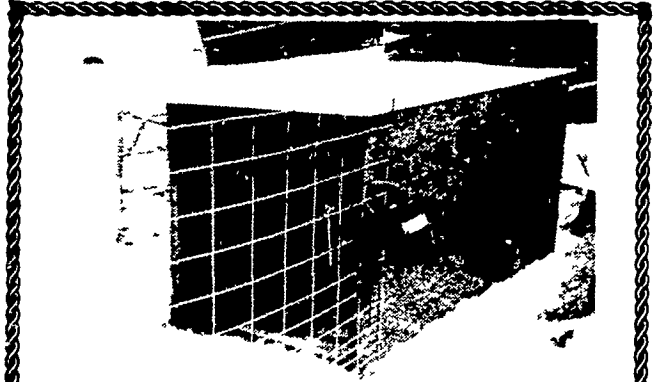
The Task Force noted that such advances resulted from research completed years earlier, and that productive research requires both time and concentration of effort to implement. To meet the challenges of the near term and the coming century, they said more research is needed now in such areas as

Resource conservation — to better utilize low quality ligno-cellulosic materials for animal feed, and animal wastes for fuel and fertilizer, to reduce loss of food value due to animal disease, product contamination or inadequate packaging; to protect environmental resources by using animals to produce human food from fragile ecosystems which would be damaged by crop agriculture.

Human health — to establish requirements for

animal product-supplied and health; to evaluate nutrients; to determine transfer of resistance relationships between diet

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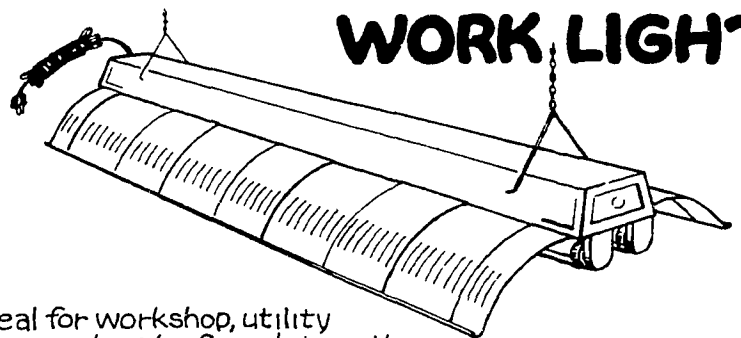
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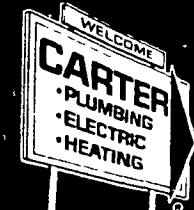
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