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Guest Column



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Before it slips away, I hasten to grasp this opportunity to comment upon **Provincialism and People** — as these two things relate to the Branch Experiment Stations in North Dakota.

Branch station personnel are often criticized for being "provincial." Now, people advancing such criticism clearly show a lack of understanding. Of course Branch stations are provincial. They are intended to be. That is precisely why they exist.

Branch stations at Williston, Minot, Langdon, Carrington, Hettinger and Dickinson are strategically located, along with the Main Station at Fargo, to be representative of the state's different agricultural regions and varied agricultural endeavor. The following statement in the first annual report of the Dickinson Station written in 1905 by Supt. L.R. Waldron, while relating to the Dickinson station, pretty well describes the circumstances warranting establishment of the branch station network. Waldron said, "Many if not all of the problems (of farming and ranching) must be worked out under conditions existing where they are to be used." "In cooperation with the USDA, the Dickinson station, along with others, will set itself to the task of solving some of the important basic problems." "The opening up to cultivation of such immense areas brings to the surface many perplexing difficulties local in character, **which can be disposed of only where they originate.**" This understanding is as valid today as it was when Waldron wrote it over 70 years ago. Branch stations focus on agricultural endeavor as it exists in their respective regions and, while focusing may narrow a view point it also sharpens the image.

While essentially the same as that at the Main Station, the work at branch stations is as broad as all of the states' varied agricultural endeavors combined. It is soil, water and weather; it is cropland, pastureland and rangeland; it is grain crops — winter and spring, cash and feed; it is forage crops — annual and perennial, native and introduced; it is specialty crops aplenty; it is cattle, hogs and sheep, tractors and plows, planters and combines, grain bins, feedlots, corrals and barns, farrowing houses

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On the Cover: Agronomist Neil Riveland and Superintendent Ernest French of the Williston Experiment Station examine a promising new wheat variety. The question, Food or Fuel?, is again being asked about wheat and other grains as the feasibility of using grain alcohol to extend gasoline is receiving attention.



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Finally, the conservation of petroleum resources by substituting alcohol for all or part of our gasoline needs is not even a halfhearted or token effort. Gasoline consumption accounts for less than half of our petroleum consumption. If alcohol were to be added to the extent of 10 percent of all petroleum fuels, including diesel fuels, heating fuels and aircraft fuels (most of which is not even feasible) the demand for alcohol would greatly exceed any possible level of production of the necessary cereal grains. This action would seriously deprive our food and feed-stuffs of essential caloric value. Furthermore, a 10 percent replacement would extend fuel reserves only 10 percent, assuming that no petroleum-type products are used for the production of the cereal grains or alcohol. This would mean that if we have a 25-year reserve of petroleum, the use of alcohol would extend this to 27.5 years. This is not a real solution!

Energy and the Technological Society

No rational solution has been demonstrated that will permit our society to continue to consume fossil fuel energy reserves (natural gas, petroleum, coal) without coming to an end of these reserves. Unless the surface of the earth contains vastly more oil and gas than has generally been reported, some alternate source of energy must be found. Because of the high energy input needed for mechanized production of high yielding crops, it is not feasible to depend upon agricultural production to provide for the energy needs of a technological society. The technological society is dependent upon ever increasing levels of energy inputs. Unless society comes to grips with this central issue

and adjusts its energy consumption or develops alternate energy sources — solar, fusion, tides, winds and every other possibility — society will run out of gas, oil and coal, whether in this century or another.

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and seed cleaning plants. In short, just about everything a farming or ranching enterprise involves. And, the work at branch stations is in the hands of a limited number of people who are expected to be multi-proficient.

It has been my observation that research at branch stations attracts a special kind of person — part time farmer, part time livestockman, part time mechanic, part time extension specialist, part time public relations man and full time agricultural scientist. And, it has been my good fortune, for over a quarter century, to be associated with this special group of men. I have found them in the past, and continue to find new additions to the staff, to be knowledgeable, capable, imaginative, ingenious, self-reliant and dedicated people, well aware of their responsibilities as North Dakota State University's representatives in their home localities. Unfortunately, sometimes part of this talent goes to waste because branch stations are located at considerable distances from the University and the inconvenience of distance makes involvement awkward and impractical.

Branch station personnel can easily relate to General Amos Halftrack, commander of Camp Swampy in the Beetle Bailey comic strip, who waits in vain for a word, any kind of word, from the Pentagon. We get to feeling like orphans at times, and with some justification perhaps, when one considers that over the past 30 years, to my knowledge, a full complement of The Board of Higher Education has never visited the Dickinson station, and on only a couple of occasions have we had the pleasure of showing part of the Board around. Perhaps it is unfair to pick on the Board only, in this regard. As a matter of fact, often if someone does stop by it's if they are on the way to somewhere else and we only get to pass the time of day.

The branch station people have in the past, and continue to make a solid contribution to the collective knowledge that makes North Dakota's agriculture the great enterprise that it is. We're not only on the team — we're on the first team. We think you could do worse than recognize the branch stations as the real assets that they are to the Land Grant University system.

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