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Guest Column

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Associate Dean and Director



The Hatch Act of 1887 started a century of progress in agricultural research in the United States that is unrivaled throughout the world. As we look to the second century of research in agriculture, it's time to look ahead to exciting new horizons in agricultural technology and identify new priorities for the research agenda. We also need to reflect on the past and evaluate why progress has been achieved in the Land-Grant system that far surpasses the technological base of other sectors of the world. We can speculate about many forces that have influenced our progress over the last century. I would like to suggest several that have been key to the development of technological progress in agriculture. The stable political and economic climate in the United States compared with relative instability in many other parts of the globe have created a stable funding base for agricultural research since the initial resources were initiated by the Hatch Act in 1887. This has allowed the bench scientist to engage in long-term basic studies without fear of frequent unplanned interruptions. This has led to steady and significant progress toward creating today's production efficiencies.

What about the future? Some would suggest that we should abandon basic production-related research because of current overcapacity in the sector and concentrate all our efforts on marketing, utilization and environmental issues. While all of these issues will demand greater attention in the second century of agricultural research, I believe that we must continue to keep balance in our research programs if we are to keep United States agriculture competitive in the world market. A fundamental reason for continuing a viable production research orientation is created by the evolution of crop and livestock pests that make the new generation of insects or plant diseases resistant to presently used control measures. We would rapidly fall behind our competitors throughout the world if we didn't continually seek new and more efficient means of controlling the insect and disease enemies of our production system.

The second century will bring new emphasis on environmental issues. We must rise to the challenge of keeping our environment from being degraded. Agriculture along with all other industries will need new research efforts to meet these challenges. New uses for agricultural products will also be high on the research agenda for the second century. Many of the products that are based on non-renewable resources will look to agriculture to provide the raw materials that will substitute for the depleted natural resources. Our research programs will need to develop "new crops" or find ways that existing crops can satisfy these needs.

The next issue of this magazine will look to the future to speculate on some of the new research efforts that will be required to solve the problems of agriculture and society in the "second century."

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On the Cover: Most Experiment Station acreage is devoted to field crops, but Ron Smith, extension horticulturist, planted a miniature test plot to miniature pumpkins, seeing how a variety called Jack Be Little would produce in North Dakota. Photo by Gary Moran.

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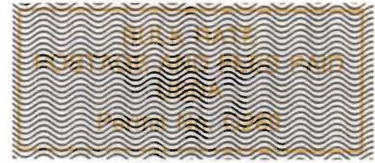
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