

Anderson Recalls Career at NDSU



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After serving for nearly 15 years as managing editor of *North Dakota Farm Research*, this is the last issue of the publication with which I will be officially associated before I retire from NDSU on December 31. I would like to take this occasion to reflect briefly on the evolutionary changes that I have observed over the years in North Dakota and at NDSU.

I am fortunate to have grown up on a family farm in southeastern North Dakota during the 1930s. I experienced how the hardship of the drought of the '30s and depression of the national economy drew families and communities together in the struggle for survival. While the economic depression of the period imposed considerable hardship, people learned how to cope and exhibited a genuine willingness to help one another. Those qualities are more difficult to maintain today, when individual expectations of living standards have been significantly elevated. Some of the changes in recent decades have truly been a measure of progress brought about by the development of new technologies, making the land resources of this state more productive and generating greater amounts of new wealth each year. At the same time, the vastly increased standards of living that have resulted from the evolution of new technology have made us more dependent on purchased inputs, thus greatly increasing the risk of financial loss due to the adversities of nature. These changes have made the state's agricultural economy more susceptible to major dislocation

of people, as evidenced by the economic stress of the 1980s, even though production losses then were seemingly much less severe than those of the 1930s.

Since enrolling at NDSU as a freshman in 1949, I have had the opportunity to observe more than 40 years of change at the university. The changes have been both dramatic and positive. The institution has grown from a small, obscure four-year ag school to one of national and international reputation. The two most striking changes have been the development of state-of-the-art research and teaching facilities, most of which has occurred in the last 20 years, and the steady increase in faculty numbers and in their technical and academic skills. Departments with four and five faculty members in the 1950s have grown to 10 to 20 faculty today. This growth has brought phenomenal changes in the strength of teaching and research programs, with students and agricultural producers being primary beneficiaries. NDSU graduates are sought after by other universities to enroll in their graduate programs and by employers who know the nature of the academic achievements of the teaching programs.

Probably the most dramatic changes I have observed at NDSU are in the research programs, which have been transformed over the years from predominately field-oriented applied research to basic laboratory and applied research. The result has been the rapid increase in the productivity of the state's natural resources. A review of data on the yields of the state's major crops will

reveal that productivity has more than doubled over the past 50 years. It is easy to associate a major share of these productivity increases with new technology developed by the land-grant university system. It is not by chance that North Dakota leads the nation in the production of major crops. Research will continue to be a wise investment for residents of this state and will play a major role in meeting the production challenges that arise each year as new disease, insect and weed organisms develop. All of this must be maintained in tune with environmental and food quality issues. North Dakota agriculture has become much like a fine-tuned engine that must be maintained properly if it is to continue to sustain its productivity. The gains we have made in the last 50 years could be quickly lost if research programs are neglected in the years ahead.

It has been my great pleasure to have been associated with the teaching, research and extension programs over the last 36 years. It has been an exciting and rewarding career for a farm boy from Dickey County to work with the development of agricultural research and education in North Dakota and throughout the world. In my retirement years, I expect to continue to remain active in promoting these programs at NDSU.

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An important advantage of a vice president for agriculture is that it ensures agriculture a voice at the highest administrative levels of the university, and I am strongly committed to maintaining and building upon NDSU's strong agriculture tradition. This is an exciting time for agriculture in North Dakota as new initiatives like the Dakota Growers Pasta plant at Carrington begin to add value to the state's agricultural commodities and to bring jobs and economic development to rural North Dakota. Like farmers and ranchers, agribusinesses look to NDSU for research and technical advice to help them in their enterprises, and it is critical that we maintain the capacity to deliver their services. I encourage you to communicate your views and concerns as together we forge plans for the future.