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Managing Agriculture

... in the public interest

THE PEOPLE who will be in agriculture tomorrow are those who are now broadening their concepts of management into areas we didn't think of as agriculture a generation ago.

Defining management has never been easy. Agricultural economists have annoyed farmers by tossing the word management around without defining it. For what it is worth, management is defined as: "The art of applying economic, business, and scientific principles in organizing and operating a farm (or ranch) to maximize earnings or to attain other goals."

That, of course, is oversimplifying. Agricultural management is too many things to fit into a few words.

Management is making decisions. Decisions must be made with the best available knowledge. So management is also information gathering.

Management is getting the greatest production with the least use of resources: land, labor, and capital. So management is juggling the proportions of those resources to the best advantage. And that can be a desperate juggling act to stay alive in the competitive business agriculture is.

Management is engineering, because the juggling of those three essentials of agriculture means, more and more, the substitution of machines for costly labor.

Machines, though, are capital. And machines cost money. So management means using money—which is expensive in these high-interest days—to get the most productive use from it. Using money efficiently may mean tying up very little of it in ownership of anything. Good management of money may mean putting it all into production items such as land rental, and contracting for ma-

chinery as well as equipment operators—even management skills.

But the authors of the definition left the door wide open with their final phrase: "to attain other goals." Management of agriculture—especially in the future—has many other goals. Agriculture must be managed in the public interest, just as all other enterprises in this interdependent world.

Managing agriculture in the public interest means managing wastes of feedlots, poultry operations, grain fields, and orchards without offending neighbors. It means managing pesticides and fertilizers to preserve the quality of soil and water. It means managing people: through motivating them to be productive parts of the agricultural enterprise, through training them in advancing technology, and through planning changes in methods and machines with the least disruption of lives.

Managing agriculture must mean adding new skills in using the environment without damaging it. Agricultural land—in crops, pasture, range, or forest—is becoming the only open land. People seeking open-air recreation must look to land that must also be producing food or fiber. The multiple use of agricultural land is going to be very much one of agricultural management's "other goals" in the future.

All these new aspects of agriculture demand new knowledge. University research and teaching must produce the technology for better use of all resources—land, machines, money, credit, and people—in the best interests of people, the economy and the environment. That is our share—the University's—in the responsibility for tomorrow's agricultural management.