

Facts for People

GETTING FACTS about agriculture to the people who want them has been a basic part of the work of the Department of Agriculture since it began. The law signed by President Lincoln in 1862 directed the Department to "acquire and diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture." The phrase "among the people" was prophetic. The Department's work and information activity were geared in the beginning to the needs of farm people, but as the work grew from the conduct of research and the collection of statistics of crops and livestock to include educational, regulatory, service, conservation, credit, and action programs, its functions have come to touch the lives of people in the United States and in many foreign lands. Information therefore goes not only to the man behind the plow. It goes also to the people who process, market, and transport the food and fiber he produces and to consumers who eat and wear his products.

The importance of making agricultural information public and useful was recognized in formation of the progenitor of the present Office of Information. The first Secretary of Agriculture in 1889 set up a section of Records and Editing in the Department's Division of Statistics. Secretary Coleman said in his first annual report: "The very essence of the duties developing on this Department of the Government is that its results shall be made promptly available to the public by a comprehensive scheme for publication. Time and expense, ability and experience, lavished on the work of this Department can have no practical results unless we can lay their conclusions promptly before the people who need them." Farmers' Bulletin No. 1, "The What and Why of Agricultural Experiment Stations," in June of 1889 began the oldest continuous series of publications devoted to the purpose outlined by Secretary Coleman.

Publications still are a mainstay, but new ways come into use when their value is proved. The Department in 1912 became the first executive Department to establish an exhibit organization to take information to farm people at fairs and meetings. An office was established in 1913 to enable the Department to make more materials available to the press. Today an average of 3,600 press releases are issued a year, but an aim of the 1913 effort was to furnish two articles weekly to news syndicates, which supplied

material in plate form to rural newspapers. The Department set up the first governmental motion picture operation in 1912. The Secretary of Agriculture at that time declared that the motion picture was "a work of the devil, a disreputable medium of expression." When he was enticed to see himself addressing a visiting group of corn club boys—photographed without his knowledge—he was amazed and delighted, however. From that moment, the Department's motion picture program became a going enterprise.

The enlarging activities of the Department and new methods of disseminating information sharpened the need for more effective direction and administration. To that end, the Office of Information was established in 1925. A radio service was added in 1926. The Motion Picture and the Exhibits Services became part of the Office of Information in 1942. In 1953, after some years of experimentation, a television service was initiated. The following year brought the production of all visual work to the central Office. Thus, through a process of evolution, the Office now includes facilities capable of meeting in all media the need of the Department to get information to all the people.

At the same time, a national agricultural communications network gradually came into being. Within the Department, the network begins with the information work that is carried on jointly by the Office of Information and the information staffs of the Department's agencies. The Office guides and directs the total information effort of the Department. It offers a number of services to the agencies, such as a point of contact and the distribution of materials to press, radio, and television; broad editing and policy guidance for publications; and production of visual materials—films, exhibits, arts and graphics, and photographs. A vital part is the information activities carried on in cooperation with the land-grant institutions. Information prepared by the Department is sent to the colleges through the Federal Extension Service for adaptation to local conditions and for distribution with their own materials based on research in the States. Another link is the agricultural industries that produce equipment and materials for farmers to use or that handle the products farmers produce. Through these outlets, much information is made available through trade publications, commercial information channels, trade associations, farm advertising, local dealers, and others. Through farm organizations and cooperatives, whose activities in behalf of their farmer members make them large users of Department-originated information, another way is provided to reach nearly every farm family in the United States. Cooperation is the key in all this: No group or agency dictates to another, for all depend on each other in carrying out their common task of keeping the public informed about agriculture, its achievements, and services.

The Department normally has about 4 thousand publications listed as available. They include farmers' bulletins, popular leaflets, and publications designed for use of farmers, homemakers, and consumers and technical or semitechnical bulletins for use as professional references or to carry out Government programs. About 600 of the publications are popular bulletins designed for use of farmers and homemakers. About 35 million copies of Department publications are distributed each year. By law, 80 percent of the farmers' bulletins are distributed by members of the Congress. A special listing of popular, up-to-date bulletins is made periodically for Congressmen to send to their constituents. Another 4 million copies are distributed by county agricultural agents and other State Extension offices. The Office of Information distributes an additional million copies to answer individual requests, and Department agencies usually use about 500 thousand copies in the course of carrying out their programs. Some publications are free. Others are sold by the

Publications were the first means of letting people know about developments in agriculture and the Department of Agriculture, and they remain the backbone of information work. The publications, which deal with many subjects pertaining to farming, gardening, homemaking, and so on, are available through members of the Congress, the Office of Information of the Department of Agriculture, and sometimes (as here) at exhibits.





Catherine A. Nawn, meat specialist in the Agricultural Marketing Service, illustrates the grades of meat and their use at a Department exhibit at the International Livestock Show in Chicago.

Superintendent of Documents, the Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C. To keep the materials up to date, 300 to 400 new publications are issued each year, and about 40 publications undergo revision.

In working with the public media (newspapers, radio, and television news outlets), the Department makes information freely available to all. Information of current interest is prepared in forms that will be useful to newspapers, magazines, and other publications. Writers, editors, and others come to the Department to obtain prepared information or to interview administrators and specialists. A prime source of information, particularly about policies, is the Secretary of Agriculture. A chief means of obtaining his views are his news conferences, which press, radio, and television news correspondents attend and report.

Many of the 9 thousand weekly newspapers published in the United States receive information from the Department through the State Agricultural Extension editors at land-grant institutions, who adapt and reissue the information. The Department reaches the



Jack Towers, radio specialist in the Department, interviews Howard P. Davis, Director of the Food Distribution Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, on the progress of the Food Stamp Plan, which was initiated experimentally in 1961, for Agri-Tape, a recorded weekly radio service for about 325 stations.

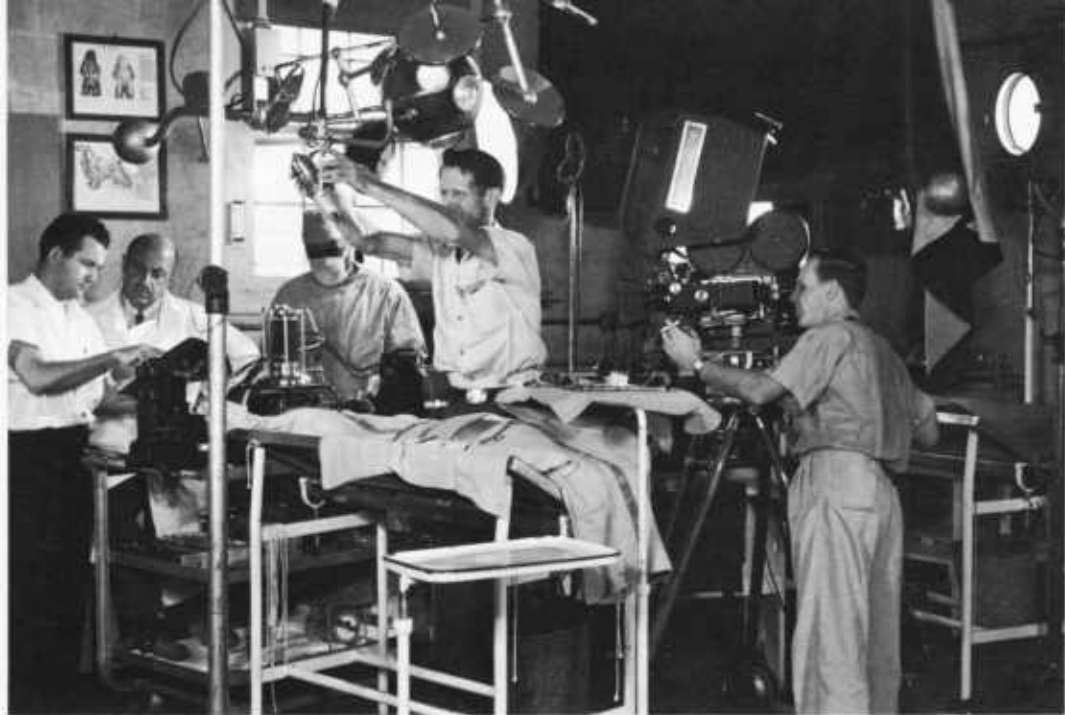
Inga Rundvold, who presents a women's show, "Inga's Angle," on WRC-TV, Washington, and Edith T. Swing, a radio and television specialist in the Department of Agriculture, discuss and demonstrate the uses of dry milk.



1,800 daily newspapers through the national news wire services, which cover the Department daily from the Department's press-room, and through other Washington correspondents. A weekly Farm Paper Letter and specialized services prepared especially for the farm press summarize developments in the Department. Close working relationships are maintained with two associations representing the farm press—the Newspaper Farm Editors Association and the American Association of Agricultural Editors (farm magazines). The newspaper farm editors reach about 10 million readers; the 150 farm magazines have a readership of about 22 million. Food and Home Notes, also weekly, is designed to meet the needs of more than a thousand editors of women's pages, food editors of newspapers and magazines, and directors of women's radio and television programs. Information of interest to homemakers and consumers is stressed, including such subjects as foods plentiful on the market, nutrition, clothing, and home management. News releases also are prepared weekly for the Negro press, which comprises about 175 publications.

Many radio and television stations have people trained in agriculture who present programs for farm and city people. Most of them are members of the National Association of Radio and Television Farm Directors, and they have millions of listeners. Weekly tape-recorded services of the Department are used by about 425 stations and cover news and features of national and regional interest. Television stations are served with specially prepared package features made up of film clips, still photographs, slides, and other artwork and scripts. Occasionally newsreel-type films report on new developments. These are designed for use within regularly scheduled live programs of interest to farmers and consumers, and reach an estimated 10 million viewers via about 300 stations. News and features are furnished weekly to two radio network outlets—the NBC Farm Review over the National Broadcasting Company and the American Farmer, produced cooperatively by the Department and the American Broadcasting Company. Radio material is regularly supplied also to the Mutual Broadcasting System and the Columbia Broadcasting System.

The Department makes and issues motion picture films that touch on almost every phase of American agriculture. Films that inform or instruct cover scientific discoveries and program activities. A few examples: In a nationwide program to eradicate brucellosis, "Back the Attack on Brucellosis;" in the continuing fight against plant pests, "Fire Ant on Trial;" in the effort to modernize rural America, "The REA Story;" in the multiple use of forest resources, "The Forest;" in watershed management, "Waters of Coweeta;" in agricultural economics, "Compass for Agriculture;" in conservation in the Great Plains, "The Dust is Dying." Usually



A motion picture crew prepares to shoot laboratory scenes of two veterinarians performing an operation on a dog in a film concerned with veterinary work. About 60 new agricultural films are produced by the Department annually. The crew includes (left) Homer Boor, Joseph J. Sanders, Jr., and Richard Milstead.

Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman at a news conference in his office in Washington gives press, radio, and television news correspondents—and, through them, people throughout the country—an opportunity to obtain information.



about 300 film titles are included in a catalog listing their availability. About 60 new films are made each year. For television programs, films that run up to 13.5 and 27.5 minutes are replacing the one- and two-reelers, and most films are cleared for television use. TV shorts, 10 to 60 seconds long, announce anything from currently plentiful foods to recommended agricultural practices. The Department's films are seen by millions of persons. The Department maintains a supply of films in Washington that are available on request and are listed in a catalog. Seventy film libraries, most of them at land-grant institutions, receive and distribute prints to county agents, schools, and other outlets in all States.

Exhibits are used at State fairs, conventions, field days, shopping centers, farm-and-home weeks, conferences, and other places to inform rural and urban audiences about agriculture. The exhibits tell the story of agriculture in dimension. They range broadly in size and cover subjects of current interest. Some exhibits are made for easy transportation from place to place and so can be seen at local meetings, in window displays, and as TV background. Others are of a size for display at fairs and conventions and for major displays at large expositions in the United States and abroad. Exhibits are shown in the Department's buildings in Washington or are distributed through arrangements with the agencies of the State Agricultural Extension Services. They have come to be important in the promotion of foreign trade. Some recent major exhibits in which the Department has participated include the Eleventh World Poultry Congress in Mexico City; the First World Agricultural Fair in New Delhi, India; International Agricultural Exhibition in Cairo, Egypt; World Forestry Congress in Seattle; and several agricultural trade shows, such as the British Food Fair in London.

Of great service in all this work are broadscale information "campaigns," art and graphics facilities, which support many types of information activities, and a photographic library, which makes subject-matter pictures available to editors and writers and has on file about 100 thousand prints.

All segments I have mentioned perform a useful and efficient service to the public. A new aspect has been emerging, however, of which we must be mindful: Even more vital in the future will be the service that information must do to interpret agriculture to the people who live in our towns and cities. At the end of the Department's first century, our farm people represent about 9 percent of our total population, a fact that has broad implications from the standpoint of the support and understanding that agriculture must have from labor, industry, and the general public. Information work in the future will have the obligation to tell about the problems of agriculture, its status in our economy, and its contribution to the health and welfare of all people. (*Harold R. Lewis*)