

PROBLEMS IN WEED RESEARCH/EXTENSION LIAISON

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The use of 2,4-D and other early phenoxy-acetic herbicides for selective weed control in crops foreshadowed the discovery and use of many synthesized chemical compounds capable of greatly increasing crop productivity. It is therefore not surprising that most weed research workers committed themselves very fully to herbicide screening and associated problems. This action was for many years closely in line with the feedback of weed problem definition by extension officers. Farmers looked for dynamic answers to weed problems which were supplied by herbicide testing.

More recently Departmental weed research workers have been encouraged to direct their thinking into other longer-term areas of research. These include the ecology and biology of weedy plants and broader aspects of herbicide use and crop ecology. They have been encouraged to develop weed control systems in which herbicides play a role, but are not the only technique to be used.

At the same time, they have been expected to undertake some short-term projects in respect of problems which have appeared to be amenable to such an approach. Thus research agronomists of this Department following this path are satisfying Departmental objectives more effectively in the medium- and long-term than they would had they followed the more ad hoc role which tended to be adopted in the past. Moreover, they have been provided with an opportunity to achieve higher professional status, to satisfy promotional barriers and to contribute to the total body of scientific knowledge.

Problems of research/extension liaison have been encountered with the emphasis on medium- and long-term research, as many extension officers have tended to react to farmer pressures for short-term answers. These pressures are commonly based on symptoms of a more deeply based ecological problem and unless this is understood by all parties misunderstandings can arise. Thus the research worker must learn to discuss his work more frankly with extension officers and clearly establish them as an important resource in problem definition. Within a similar context it is necessary to establish more clearly the role of chemical companies in herbicide evaluation and definition to ensure a better understanding of the research roles to be