

State's Agriculture Plays Vital Role

THE Chamber of Commerce committee had been called together to review objectives and projects for its agricultural interests for 1981.

Someone not present had suggested that the Agri-Business Council be dissolved and its functions distributed among other units of the division. The proposal was rejected quickly by the committee but it points to the frequent lack of recognition of agriculture's vital importance to our state.

"Many people think of Oklahoma County as strictly an urban area," said Allan D. Williams, a committee member who also serves as chairman of the Oklahoma County Conservation District. "But this county has 65,000 acres of cropland, 104,000 acres of rangeland, 120,000 acres of pasture land and 35,000 acres of forest land. Part of this may be inside some city limits, but it is agricultural nevertheless."

The Oklahoma Crop and Livestock Reporting Service's new publication, "Oklahoma Agricultural Statistics, 1979," shows that last

year this urban county produced 1,380,000 bushels of wheat, 48,000 tons of hay, 10,000 bushels of soybeans and 161,000 bushels of oats.

The livestock inventory for January 1, 1980, showed 20,000 cattle and calves, mostly beef animals, 900 sheep and 1,200 hogs and pigs.

That isn't large production, but it shows there are a few farmers left and adjacent counties are major producers. The state ranks fifth in beef cattle, second or third in wheat and is important to other commodities. Oklahoma is an agricultural state.

The major consideration is that Oklahoma City is the agri-business center for the entire state and beyond. Numerous supply houses operate out of here, there is a major livestock market and meat packing industry, nearly all of the state's cottonseed are processed here.

Moreover, this is an agricultural credit and transportation center. Farmers borrow from local bankers, but their money needs frequently require assistance from big city correspondent banks.

Only the surface of our state's agri-business potential has been scratched. Most of our livestock production is shipped out of state for processing into consumer products. Practically all wheat, lint cotton, peanuts and other raw commodities are shipped to other states, where somebody makes a profit on them. Why not Oklahomans?

One of the principal objectives of the Agri-Business Council of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce has been to attract and develop agri-industry, but not nearly enough has been accomplished.

Lack of perception of opportunities by industrial investors may be one reason. Lack of capital to expand existing agri-businesses certainly is a factor. Such problems could be overcome.

Agri-business industries might be this state's "acres of diamonds." They could be developed without abatement of the search for factories that might move out of the Snow Belt into the Sun Belt. Raw materials for agricultural processing plants already are here!