

Agriculture 2000: An Insight Into What's Ahead

By Ferdie J. Deering
"Tell me, where is agriculture going in the future?" Bob Graham asked during dinner conversation at the Oklahoma City Farm Club. That's a good question.

When J.D. Fleming, club president, opened the meeting, Wayne Liles, program chairman, introduced Donald P. Edson, vice president of the farmer-owned Federal Intermediate Credit Bank of Wichita. His illustrated discussion of "Agriculture 2000" provided a lot of insight on our outlook.

Edson served as chairman of the Production Credit Association's committee that worked with Battelle Memorial Institute, Columbus, Ohio, to produce a comprehensive study and book, titled "Agriculture 2000," as part of the celebration of PCA's 50th anniversary. Local PCAs have the books available.

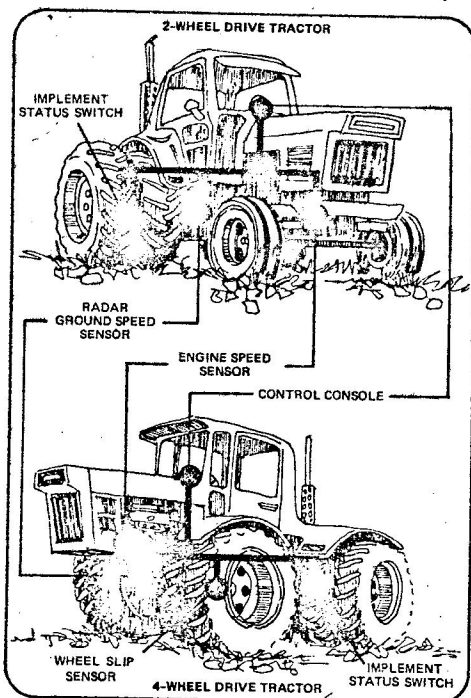
The study focused on evolving technologies and trends that will affect how farmers and ranchers will grow crops, raise livestock, market their output, purchase supplies and finance their operations. They will be more expert in all areas.

Here are excerpts from Edson's speech and the book that offer a sample of what may be ahead for agriculture.

The farmer of the future will concentrate heavily on efficient resource use, not just on production output.

Given time, and the combined effects of new developments to increase farm productivity, the problem of resource availability should not have a significant impact on overall U.S. farm production by the year 2000. Nevertheless, there may be problems and economic dislocations at some local levels where water shortages and soil erosion may be acute.

Water management will be especially important. Water conservation technologies, such as drip or trickle irrigation, will be used increasingly on high



Tomorrow's tractors will utilize computers, sensors and digital read-out systems to increase operating efficiency (graphic reproduced from "Agriculture 2000," Battelle Press).

value specialty crops.

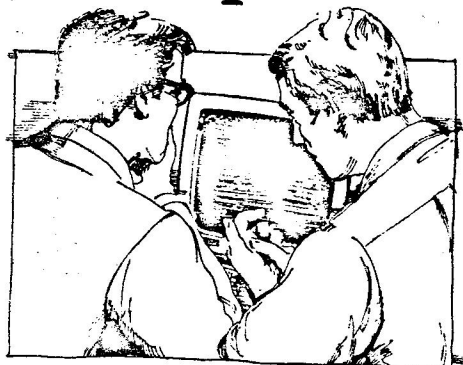
The development of more resistant varieties of tree crops, potatoes, cotton, soybeans, and grain sorghum will result in plants better able to withstand variations in temperature, water availability, and competition from weeds.

Development of crops

with improved salt water tolerance, such as wheat, will have particular impact upon arid regions. Wheat and barley appear to offer the best potential for nitrogen fixation, either by inoculating seeds with nitrogen fixing bacteria or by genetically altering the plant.

Crop farmers in the

We talk business, not computer.



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Agribusiness Analysis JUN 3 1984

future will use more plant growth regulators to enhance yields, reduce biological and environmental stress, and influence plant maturity and reproductive cycles.

Tomorrow's crop farmers will benefit from more automated tillage and harvesting systems. Such equipment will increase harvesting efficiency by making steering easier, by monitoring crop losses and by making automatic height and speed adjustments on uneven terrain.

Microcomputers could be used to determine proper operating speeds by balancing operating costs versus crop harvesting efficiency at different speeds.

If liquid fuel costs

should rise rapidly, there will be increased pressure to use agricultural crops as potential energy sources. It is technically feasible to produce alcohol from crops such as corn, sugar cane, sugar beets, sweet sorghum, grain sorghum and other starch crops.

Oilseeds such as sunflowers, peanuts and soybeans produce oil that could be used in place of diesel fuel.

Animals will grow faster, be more disease resistant, use less feed per unit of production, produce more milk, meat, and eggs at speci-

fied quality levels, and reproduce more offspring per animal, each with more desirable genetic characteristics.

Changes in agricultural marketing practices will be as important as development of new technologies for producing crops and livestock. More emphasis will be placed on developing branded differentiated products tailored to consumer tastes, as a means of stimulating product demand, increasing product value and raising farmer income.

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