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THE AGRIBUSINESS COUNCIL



The Agro-Industrial Revolution Conference
June 24 - 27, 1990
Washington, D.C.

A REVIEW OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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A REVIEW OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Agribusiness Council hosted its second international conference highlighting linkages between agricultural research/ and development and the technological acceleration affecting all phases of the food chain. The conference, entitled "The Agro-Industrial Revolution: New Technologies and Partnerships" featured a diverse range of topics and concurrent workshops aimed at evaluating key policy issues and strategic action ideas within a broad definition of the Agro-Industrial Revolution. Delegates from nineteen countries convened in Washington, D.C., June 24-27 with U.S. corporate executives from many agro-industry sectors, government officials and leading university experts to engage an agenda which focused on challenges facing agricultural research and commercialization of new technologies against a backdrop of fierce international competition and mounting pressures to cut U.S. farm subsidies. The Conference was well-timed, coming during the final mark-up period of the U.S. farm legislation - particularly in relation to the research/development funding.

The following brief outlines the major features and result highlights of the Agro-Industrial Revolution conference - emphasis is provided for those activities which have traceable origination from deliberations and programs within the conference.

The Agro-Industrial Revolution achieved considerable success by nearly all accounts - particularly as measured against its announced objectives:

Objectives

1. To convene agro-industrial executives, government officials, and leading researchers concerned with new initiatives in agro-technology and the future of American agricultural trade and development.
2. To highlight the mechanisms needed for increased private/public sector collaboration and cooperation in the development of new farm and forest products.
3. To examine the new agricultural technologies, and identify mechanisms to facilitate technology transfer, particularly between the public research and private industrial sectors.
4. To attract new agro-investment consistent with the goals of diversification in the farm sector and increased commercialization of farm and forest products.
5. To outline the institutional innovations - in addition to the technological innovations - necessary for mounting a coordinated response to the challenges facing American agriculture.

6. To establish a private/public sector consensus and renewed national commitment to agriculture which strives for U.S. leadership in the global agro-industrial revolution.

Achievements and Results

1. Ongoing Subcommittee on New Crops, Uses and Technologies

As a result of the discussions held during several sessions of the Conference, it was recommended that the Agribusiness Council form a special subcommittee within its umbrella - to pursue additional objectives which could not be realized in the conference. This recommendation was forwarded by Dr. Donald Hegwood, Dean of the College of Agricultural Economics, Texas A & I University - and received strong endorsement. The ABC staff prepared a background brief on the proposed subcommittee (see Attachment A), which was circulated after the conference and ratified at the first meeting of the subcommittee in San Antonio, Texas, September 28, 1990. (see Attachment B). A proposal seeking modest grant funding for the subcommittee has been prepared by members - and the group is attracting considerable national and international attention. The continuation and development of this cost-effective subgroup of the Council - may serve the long term interest of USDA/ARS and CSRS - as well as industry by providing a neutral platform for government and the private sector to exchange ideas and broaden the consensus for the commercialization of agriculture and stronger ag r/d linkages between universities, government, and the private sector. Overseas AER affiliated associations are also expressing interest in sharing information with the subcommittee (see Attachment C). The Council is also providing additional information on the new subcommittee through its network of state/local agribusiness councils - which it anticipates utilizing to a greater degree in generating interest for the issues surrounding agricultural research/new crops and uses in the coming years. (see Attachment D)

2. Broad International Participation

ABC's affiliation with a growing network of counterpart agro-enterprise associations overseas sparked a strong international dimension to the conference's agenda - which stimulated a dynamic interchange in many of the program sessions. Representatives from nineteen (19) countries participated, many from the affiliated Agri-Energy Roundtable network. Several organizers, including individuals from Eastern Europe and Africa, attended the conference to learn more about forming AER/ABC model associations in their countries. In at least two cases, Poland and Uganda, this has led to follow-up formation committees and visits by ABC staff as the process of indigenous agro-enterprise association development accelerates. With special focus on



the African delegates, ABC organized a breakfast discussion on June 26 for the purpose of stimulating further interest in the emerging AER affiliate networks in Africa. Delegates representing Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, and Uganda attended along with USAID officials and ABC. (see Attachment E). This meeting helped initiate two separate, quite productive missions by AER/ABC to East Africa in the latter half of 1990 - and triggered the successful launch of programs in Tanzania, Uganda and Gambia. Other counterpart groups in Africa are anticipated in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Senegal, Cameroon, Botswana, and Lesotho. (see Attachment F).

As an indicator of strong African interest in this network, AER/ABC was invited to Uganda and local agro-industry firms covered all expenses, including airfare.

In other cases, the agricultural research/development theme - which was given considerable exposure during the nearly eighteen month conference planning cycle -- generated additional international interest in participating in the ABC/AER ongoing program (see Attachment G).

Note: It is important to recognize that the Agro-Industrial Revolution conference itself was a "process" -- initiated in October 1988 at a Council conference in St. Louis, which led to nine separate planning workshop/meetings. These meetings sparked considerable attention to a range of agricultural research/technology and related environmental issues - most particularly - the commercialization of agriculture for industrial uses. The ABC planning committee had the issue - "front-runner" position during most of 1989 - and generated unprecedented interest among state/local agricultural groups. It is fair to say that the Agro-Industrial Revolution conference galvanized others and helped focus attention on some important issues both in the legislative and technology areas - in relation to budgets and priorities - and also in the more complex arena of public/private sector relations.

3. Enhanced Communication with State Agribusiness Councils

The Agro-Industrial Revolution conference succeeded in convening representatives from a number of state and local counterpart agribusiness groups and awakened a potentially enormous untapped market for agro-industry communication and consensus-building. During the conference, the Agribusiness Council organized a special session for representatives of local groups to exchange ideas on how the agribusiness councils could work more effectively together (June 24 - see minutes, Attachment G). The meeting yielded a resolution to coordinate more regularly, especially on international trade missions - (a comparative advantage of the ABC/AER network) - but also on the issue of new crops/uses, and other topics with broad general interest to agro-industry communities. This was a first convocation of the state/local agribusiness council network and the meeting has sparked renewed interest in further cooperative activities.



4. Federal Agency Cooperation

The ABC conference achieved another important result by successfully convening senior-level representatives from a number of agencies, including the White House and Congress - each with a different interest in the conference theme. Both USAID and USDA as lead conference sponsors, were well-represented - and officials indicated considerable "positives" during and after the meeting. (see Attachment H). Government delegates expressed enthusiasm for the manner in which national /international aspects of the theme had been blended in the agenda - and praised the atmosphere of "structured informality" which prevailed, particularly during the concurrent working sessions of the Conference. (see Harry Cahill letter, Attachment H). The interchange generated among federal employees, even from within the same agency, was considered a "positive" result - since the ABC represented a neutral forum - and provided certain aspects of an "in-town" retreat for beleaguered government officials - even considered useful and refreshing despite the presence of a larger "non-Washington" audience. Indeed, this non-governmental participation helped forge a collegial spirit among the Federal delegates - (a rare dynamic in Washington) which drew favorable post conference comment. Thus the ABC helped generate a new level of awareness within the participating agencies and facilitated their own internal communications.

It is anticipated that elements of this positive communication will be maintained and enhanced through the ongoing work of the New Crops/Uses subcommittee which includes representatives of different agencies, as well as the private sector.

5. Agribusiness Council and the Search for a New Voice for Agro-Industry

ABC realized important objectives by conducting the conference in Washington, including a more effective link-up between the corporate, state and local supporters, universities, and the international agro-industry representatives. The Council's role as a focal point for agribusiness program definition on a cost-effective basis within the non-profit, private association sector gained recognition. The Council's "neutral platform" concept as a non-lobbying, yet educational program, gained ground. This is particularly important to the ABC which seeks to act as a facilitative catalytic clearinghouse on broad policy issues which transcend individual agro-sectors and require a greater government-industry cooperation. ABC believes the inter-linked issues of agricultural research/development, international competition, and new technologies/uses are ideal "pilot areas" for this multi-disciplinary approach. It is anticipated that ongoing programs highlighting the educational/university linkages to these issues will spark further momentum and awareness for the Council's efforts in this arena.



6. Greater Awareness of and Interest in the "Agro-Industrial Revolution Concept"

The ABC conference - the second in less than one year - produced some new perspectives in the relationships between research/development funding, agribusiness education, and international competitiveness on a broader level - beyond the Council's basic objectives. For example, as speakers and panelists grappled to define historical, legislative, and technical aspects of the "Revolution", they found the multi-disciplinary, broad-gauged audience more than matched with the diversity of the "Revolution" itself. The successful result was stimulating discussion and lively debate on what constituted the "Revolution" - and its policy implications. Specialized workshops, which often ran concurrently with one another, produced more audience/speaker interaction and a greater sense of the inter-linked nature of the challenges facing agricultural research and development in an age of greater agro-environmental concern. (see Attachment J). The "Revolution" theme, while perhaps dramatic, sparked much debate and will trigger additional workshops at the state/local levels, including specific commodity sectors. The Council is seeking funding to produce a publication based on the conference and provide a wider distribution of the conference message.

7. Agribusiness/University Connection Highlighted

The ABC conference also produced an unusual blend of university officials, researchers, and agribusiness executives - who often speak "different languages" when explaining their different perspectives on agricultural research and commercialization of new technologies. The conference may have provided some "shock immersion" for certain individuals unfamiliar with other "cultures" within the broad category of agricultural research communities - however, this was basically a healthy development. Important communication bridges were set up on a personal level - and greater university/corporate communication can be anticipated as this educational process unfolds.

The Council was privileged to have representatives from nine universities, nearly 25% of the conference registration (117), including fifteen from Texas A & M alone. Other U.S. universities represented included: University of Nebraska, University of Illinois, Mississippi State University, and Arizona State University.

A key discussion theme echoed in various university-led sessions dealt with "agribusiness management education" - and the role universities could forge with agro-industry executives to more effectively educate the public on the complexities of the modern food system. A number of speakers, including USDA/CSRS Administrator Patrick Jordan, emphasized the need for more effective agribusiness education systems within the U.S. institutions of higher learning. Dr. Jordan welcomed the exchange and described various cooperative



programs which would be tailored to invigorate the agribusiness education nexus with the private sector. A key challenge here will be to integrate agriculture and business administration curricula within the universities - which was studied extensively between 1987-1988 by a National Commission on Agribusiness Education founded by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

As a result of discussions within the Council's conference, the Council is better positioned to facilitate positive-follow-through utilizing its newly developed, non-threatening university support. Universities also see the cost-effective value of working with the AER/ABC network overseas - which includes contact with key institutions of higher learning abroad.¹

8. Emerging Democracies and Agribusiness

The ABC program also generated some impressive momentum with Eastern Europe and interests shared with other emerging democracies in the value of agro-food systems organization (symbolized with the formation of Agro-industry counterpart associations). Delegates from Poland and Romania participated actively in the conference and invited ABC to organize follow-up missions. These missions were conducted with considerable success (September 9-19) and resulted in a formation committee meeting in Warsaw, Poland (September 10) of local organizers interested in establishing a Polish Agro-industry association counterpart (see Attachment K) - and a special workshop in Moscow, September 17, at the Hotel Spros - in which representatives from seven Soviet republics expressed considerable interest in establishing an ABC counterpart association. Communications from Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic Republics (see Attached) reveal effective action is underway as a direct result of these contacts - initiated by the Agro-Industrial Revolution conference. It is anticipated that additional positives will emerge as a result of the continuity of the program and communications which can be back-stopped and energized by the Agribusiness Council. Technologies in agriculture, and general agro-food systems organization are in desperate demand in the emerging democracies. Indeed, the stability of regimes and the entire political revolution's success in Eastern Europe and the USSR to a great degree depends on effective rationalization, privatization, and management of the national food systems - starting with land ownership - throughout the entire food chain. The premium will be on communication within these countries, initially, as they struggle to work out bottlenecks in distribution and educate themselves on the dynamics of the free market, as well as the free ballot box. As this is dangerous and uncharted

¹Organizers for a different and untested "agribusiness management" approach actively participated in the Council's conference and utilized its neutral platform to promote their ideas for creating a new mechanism for educational linkages development



water for previously-controlled economic systems - the potential for neutral, intermediary groups , composed of representatives from different parts of the food chain, would make sense. Certainly, all persons interacting with the ABC/AER from within the emerging democracies understand this network's potential for providing outside contacts, information, and marketing opportunities. They may also come to realize the utility of such a model mechanism for their agro-food system conversion. During follow-up meetings in Eastern Europe, ABC/AER representatives received considerable expressions of interest from academicians and researchers hopeful of establishing links and exchange programs with U.S. institutions of higher learning. ABC is exploring the prospect of collaborating with several universities and leading foundations in facilitating placement of Eastern Europeans in U.S. agribusiness corporations for short internships. These activities are considered important results of the Agro-Industrial Revolution.



Listing of Attachments

- A Background Proposal for New Crops, Uses, and Technologies
- B Minutes New Crops/Uses/Technologies Subcommittee meeting, San Antonio, Texas, September 26, 1990 (Fountain Plaza Hotel)
- C Letters from Kenya Agricultural Research Institute and Ministry of Agriculture - Canada
- D Letter from D. Jules Janick, Purdue University, concerning cooperation with Agribusiness Council
- E African breakfast Meeting Minutes, June 27 (Washington Court Hotel)
- F FAO Uganda Report on Follow-up mission, (August 7-13, 1990)
- G Minutes, state/local Agribusiness council meeting, (June 24, 1990, Washington Court Hotel)
- H Letters from USDA/OICD Peggy Hart and Mr. Henry A. Cahill, former Foreign Services Officer, State Department
- I Letters from Wisconsin Agribusiness Council - Executive Director Russ Weisensal, and Arizona Agribusiness Council, Executive Vice President, Grant Ward
- J Agenda - Agro-Industrial Revolution Conference
- K Minutes. Polish Agribusiness Council Formation Meeting (September 10 - Warsaw). Letter from Estonia/USSR Deputy Minister of Agriculture
- L Trip Report - Agribusiness Council Mission to Eastern Europe
- M Trip Report - Sri Lanka Agricultural Development Authority (note recommendation to form Sri Lankan affiliate)

