

enough volunteers had been obtained the first two years. Written responses from teachers who had taken the short course were especially helpful in course planning.

Respondents were asked to provide information such as the following: items not included in the short course which should be included the following year, other comments or suggestions for improvement they might have, and anything else which they might care to mention. Most of the teachers took advantage of the opportunity to offer suggestions and make

comments concerning the short course. As might be expected, comments about the first year's effort were somewhat less favorable than for each of the succeeding years. Even the first year, however, a number of the teachers thought the program was well organized and conducted for the length of time available.

The short course was highly successful largely because of the outstanding cooperation of the teachers attending, their searching questions, and specific suggestions for improvement.

A "TEXTBOOK GAP" IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

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Much has been written and said about gaps which we find in our society. Some which come to mind are the "generation gap" and the "credibility gap" which are still with us but not discussed very often these days. I would like to point out that a "textbook gap" exists, even though the number of books per capita is probably higher today than any time since the invention of the printing press.

At a time when most academic disciplines are literally flooded with textbooks and instructors have a real challenge to select the texts best suited to their course orientation, it seems paradoxical that certain disciplines are extremely limited in textbook alternatives. I am referring to agricultural economics, generally, and agricultural price analysis, specifically.

Some instructors contend that the few textbooks available in agricultural economics are excellent and therefore we have no need for additional texts from which to choose. I do not question the quality of available texts, but I do contend that one good text will not fulfill the needs of a given course in all departments. The type of course and text needed depends to a large extent on the background of the students and their future plans relative to additional courses in the field and occupational goals. These factors vary considerably between a highly developed department of agricultural economics and a general agricultural department striving to develop the agribusiness phase of its curricula.

Although the variety is limited, I am relatively satisfied with the textbooks available in most areas of agricultural economics, with the exception of agricultural price analysis. A survey of current publication summaries¹ indicated that only two textbooks are available in this field of study. These texts are AGRICULTURAL PRICES by Thomsen and Foote and AGRICULTURAL PRICE ANALYSIS by Shepherd. Neither of these texts meets the needs of our students, and I suspect this is true for many other departments around the country.

The Thomsen and Foote text is extremely outdated. The latest edition was published in 1952 and the latest statistics quoted are 1950. In a field of study as dynamic as agricultural price analysis, a text this old is extremely limited in its usefulness. This means that the text by Shepherd is the only up-to-date text available for undergraduate and graduate courses taught in agricultural price analysis throughout the United States.

Again, I am not questioning the content or the quality of Professor Shepherd's book. However, I am questioning its adaptability to the needs of all students, undergraduate and graduate, in agricultural price courses. I am especially questioning the suitability of this text for undergraduate

students needing a general knowledge about agricultural price analysis beyond what they learn in an introductory agricultural economics course but who are not planning to specialize in this area.

The text by Shepherd is oriented more toward graduate level study and students who have a strong background in mathematics, statistics and economics, especially intermediate price theory. The emphasis of the whole book is very well expressed in the following quote from Chapter 15: "It is assumed here that the reader has an introductory knowledge of speculation and hedging on the commodity exchanges. The purpose of this chapter is to explore further some of the more advanced and technical problems in these operations."²

In what course are students expected to get an "introductory knowledge" of the commodity exchange? It is not normally taught in an introductory course in agricultural economics nor the principles courses in economics and statistics. Neither are many other important concepts which Professor Shepherd assumes that the students already know.

I submit that the basic assumptions of Professor Shepherd's text are unrealistic for the majority of students taking agricultural price analysis for undergraduate credit, especially for developing departments of Agriculture. I further submit that Professor Shepherd has a "monopoly" on textbooks in this area of study.

I, therefore, challenge agricultural economists, especially agricultural price specialists, to shift your writing efforts from experiment station publications to textbooks in order to reduce, if not eliminate, the "textbook gap" in agricultural economics. Students, teachers and the discipline in general will benefit from your efforts.

¹Books in Print, 1969 and Subject Guide to Books in Print, 1969, (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1970).

²Geoffrey S. Shepherd, *Agriculture Price Analysis*, (Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1968). p. 226.

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