THE SCENARIO FOR FERTILISER USAGE
B. C. Kearney

PRACTICAL ASPECTS
OF FERTILISER USE
J. McCullen

THE ROLE OF FERTILISER
IN MAXIMISING OUTPUT
ON SMALL FARMS
J. O'Mahony

CO-OPERATION FOR AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT
T. Walsh

SPRING MEETING—FEBRUARY 28th, 1983

Publication No. 23
CO–OPERATION FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

T. Walsh
Former Director, ACOT and An Foras Taluntaís

INTRODUCTION

Further development of our agriculture is more essential than ever because economic growth is ebbing at home and abroad, many conventional industries are in commercial difficulties and the queues of the unemployed are everlengthening. While the Government has recognised agriculture’s core role in the economy, it has indicated to farmers and others concerned, that they themselves must provide more of the resources for the development of their enterprises. This is the message to an industry which has experienced a deep recession with real income having more than halved over recent years. To achieve the required efficiency and productivity in the whole agricultural system, i.e., from the soil to the table, it is necessary to analyse how the resources of the various agencies, be they State, Semi-State or Private, can be used in the most effective manner. The important role of fertilisers has been highlighted at this seminar. When properly used, along with other inputs, fertilisers have opened up new production horizons for both animals and crops. A broader view of efficiency and productivity is necessary, however. It is only by assessment of the complete agricultural system, i.e., production, processing, marketing and general development, that efficiency achieved at farm level can be realised in the overall management results.

AGRICULTURAL EXPANSION

Reasonable opportunities exist for agricultural expansion. They can only be realised if key issues like land-use policy, farm structure, farming systems, conservation, calibre of manpower involved, investment, marketing and the organisational structures are adequately developed. There is now available more knowledge and capacity to tackle these issues than ever before.

Research, advisory, education, promotion and marketing agencies have all played a key role in this connection. They can only continue to be effective if they are properly supported and organised so as to face future demands. Pruning of budgets to the intellectual investment services, i.e. research, advice and education has already bitten deeply and dangerously in these organisations. To the detriment of the overall economy, the financial controllers seem to have ignored the capacity of the advisor, working with farmer groups, to generate almost immediate economic returns.

The best use must now be made of all the resources available and where necessary the amalgamation of agencies in securing better and more cost effective servicing of the sector. There is substantial scope for this and obvious instances where it can be achieved almost immediately. The State must now take action in this matter.

MORE CO–ORDINATION NEEDED

More effective co-ordination can be achieved in other cases, e.g., fragmentation of effort within the food industry has stymied progress. In such cases, the Agricultural Development Advisory Group (ADAG) approach, used in the difficult days of the Seventies, has much to recommend it. It’s view was to deal with food from the soil to the table. There is little point in discussing interminably the food industry unless positive action is taken to achieve progress. The facts are known.
Establishment of an Agricultural Development Authority along similar lines to the Industrial Development Authority (DA) has much to recommend it. A great amount of the re-organisation could be resource conserving while creating an environment for more dynamic action. Due to the greater responsibility being thrust on farmers for greater financial backing of their own industry and the general demand on resources, the agricultural sector of the economy now needs an immediate and major overhaul.

How the Co-operative process, which is controlled by farmers, is availed of is highly important. It must be nurtured and encouraged. Servicing by business interests, particularly financial agencies, must also be efficient and non-exploitative. They must remember that the efficiency of the farm is largely determined by the activity outside its gate. A deep commitment from the people vitally involved in agriculture is essential above all else. This can only happen through a grass roots organisational system, e.g., the district approach of ACOT, with its committees, comprised of the agricultural interests plus the devolution of autonomy from the present over-centralised State System to the local level. Development must not be by dictate from above but through programmes initiated and nurtured at grass roots. The Government responsibility should mainly be the provision of overall policy instruments which have been decided after real and meaningful consultation with the various interests involved. In future, agricultural progress will need to be seen and appraised in the overall rural development. The multi-purpose scene involving agriculture, amenity development, conservation, fishing, forestry, industrial development and tourism will be catered for. This will require many agencies working together in an environment of real involvement and progress.

**CONCLUSION**

Finally, in the pessimistic situation, projected in the 1983 budget, of no economic growth, the capacity of agriculture to expand is the only bright spot on the horizon, and consequently, it merits priority support. The resources to do so are available if creatively and objectively mobilised. For success to be achieved, all agencies and people concerned should lay aside their organisational and personal allegiances and work in harmony and co-operation for the general good. It is time for the people concerned with the development of our agriculture to close ranks.