

Mrs. Clusen

"A QUALITY ENVIRONMENT -- WHAT IS IT AND FOR WHOM?"

by

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at

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Back in the days when I was a college debater, we used to spend quite a bit of time doing what we called "defining the terms." Sometimes this proved to be one of the most controversial parts of the discussion. I rather suspect that is my role here today -- not to provoke controversy -- but to attempt to define the phrase "in a quality environment."

Nevertheless this can be a controversial phrase because, like beauty, or truth, it tends to be in the eye of the beholder. We do not all seek the same level of quality nor do we all agree with the means to achieve it or with its ingredients.

To the ghetto dweller, concerned with sheer survival it may well mean adequate food, clothing, and shelter. To the dedicated conservationist it means restoration and preservation of clean air and water as well for wildlife as well as human life -- the whole eco-system.

To those who live on the land, and thus are closer to the subject than most of us, it may well mean the need to use their natural resources to earn a living for they have a daily stake in the quality of their environment.

Since the work "environment" became a part of our daily vocabulary, we Americans have learned a great many things -- most of them unpleasant. We have learned, for instance, that

- * vegetation, livestock and humans all suffer when an industry fails to clean up its discharges
- * water supplies of nearby towns as well as those downstream, may be drastically altered by agricultural run-off
- * inadequately treated sewage from towns can ruin streams for farm and livestock use
- * we all lose when pollutants in the water kill fish, because they are a barometer of quality.

In examining a subject as broad as agriculture in a quality environment, it is important that we view it within the context of the total human needs of our four state area.

There is no way to separate natural resource management from the problems of employment and the economy and the issues raised by a growing technology. We must put our resources to work for us without destroying them -- or us.

But the pressures of change are upon us all. What might have been considered wise management of resources a decade ago does not necessarily hold true today. This principle has significance as our discussions begin here. In the next few hours we will be talking about man's changing needs in terms of life support from his environment. We will study changes in the environment which affect agricultural policies and production.

There were times when we could -- or thought we could -- use resources freely without planning and design. Today we know that we can still use our resources -- but not without good planning, good management, and shared responsibility.

We have become so accustomed to the philosophy that technology can solve anything in the U.S. This leads us to think that there must be an easy, quick, convenient solution to the problems of environmental quality. Only reluctantly have we come to understand that the only approach is that of multi-use of our resources, but that this means some constraints, and considerable expense upon each of us.

The question of a quality environment for all in a stable economy then seems to become a question of costs -- and give rise to hard questions. Who pays? How much quality can we afford? What are we willing to buy? How can costs be allocated fairly to all segments of society? In your examination of agriculture in a quality environment, these are questions which you cannot avoid.

The other part of the definition relates to -- for whom we are planning. The answer is really redundant because obviously we are talking about both ourselves and others; the individual and society as a whole. But the needs individually and collectively are not the same.

People need the essentials of life -- food, clothing and shelter -- but they prefer to have these things in a physical environment which is beneficial for human life.

Society as a whole needs a stable economy which produces enough goods for all but it prefers to have this take place in a physical environment which offers sustenance for the body and spirit as well.

Are these goals in conflict? What priority do we give to each? Must one sometimes give way to the other? Who decides our preferences for us?

These are the kinds of basic questions which will underlay your activities here.

You will not find solutions to them in this short time together, but if together we succeed in moving toward a new understanding of the way in which our decisions are interrelated; and if together we achieve a new determination to remedy the errors and omissions of the past, this will have been a significant conference.