

Origins of the Committee for Agricultural Development at Iowa State University

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Introduction

In 2018, the Committee for Agricultural Development (CAD), an affiliate organization of ISU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, celebrated its 75th anniversary. As part of the anniversary, a history of CAD was written and organized into four articles. The articles cover CAD's origins, objectives and leadership, foundation seed, and farmland. One of the articles follows.

Origins. In the 1940s, several forces converged to help form the Committee for Agricultural Development (CAD). First, agricultural science was generating products that directly benefitted farmers. In Iowa, Iowa State College had achieved prominence as a center of agricultural science. The Iowa and USDA plant breeders had developed a "number of outstandingly superior new varieties of corn, soybeans, oats, and other crops." But "these new varieties had value only as they got into the hands of farmer growers and came to be planted extensively..." (Robinson and Hughes, 1946).

Also, farming was rapidly being mechanized due in part to the labor shortages in rural areas from widespread enlistment of young men in the U.S. military. And as World War II wore on, there were widespread shortages of various products. These shortages stimulated innovation and substitution of agricultural products and crops.

The distribution of new crop varieties fell to the Farm Crops Subsection (Agronomy Department) of the Iowa Experiment Station (the research arm of the College of Agriculture). The Farm Crops Subsection had been handling distribution of seed corn as far back as 1912. "A new crop or crop variety resulting from the work of the Experiment Station is released only after all the facts relative to the characteristics and promise of superiority are carefully considered by the Experiment Station Committee on Seed and Plant Distribution" (Robinson and Hughes, 1946).

The demand for improved seed grew as did the number of varieties and the number of crops. Again, Robinson and Hughes (1946) explain "there was need for an organization, which could muster the necessary funds for a rapid and extensive seed increase program without in any way interfering with research of the Experiment Station." The resulting organization was the Committee for Agricultural Development.

"A new plan covering the release and distribution of superior new crop varieties was worked out by the Committee (for Agricultural Development) in cooperation with the Seed and Plant Distribution Committee of the Station. This plan was first applied to the Lincoln soybean. There were thousands of requests for the rather limited amount of seed available. In the past, announcements had been made relative to the availability of seed of a new variety and it was distributed on a 'first come, first served' basis. In order to obtain a more uniform distribution over the state and to help insure as rapid an increase of high quality seed as possible, county committees were organized to select

the men in each county to whom seed of the new material would be supplied. The number per county was determined on the basis of the previous acreage of that crop in each county and the amount of seed available in the hands of the Committee (for Agricultural Development). The success of this method is indicated by the rapidity with which seed became available to anyone who wanted it.” (Robinson and Hughes, 1946).

Wallace (1960), in reflecting on the early years of turmoil surrounding seed distribution prior to the formation of CAD recounted, “It is impossible to mathematically measure the extent this objective has been accomplished. Memories are short. Those who were connected with CAD in the first years will remember distinctly the flood of complaints directed to the President of Iowa State College (Friley), the Dean (of Agriculture, Kildee), and the Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station (Buchanan) concerning the previous system of (seed) distribution.” He explained that the only ones happy were the few who were able to access improved seed and take “full advantage of any potential monopoly.”

An example of the situation is described in the introduction of Lincoln variety soybean (Robinson and Hughes, 1946). “In 1942, the Farm Crops Subsection had 27 pounds of seed (about ½ bushel) of the new soybean selection named Lincoln. This was planted on two acres, which produced at the rate of 35.5 bushels/acre. In 1943, the Committee for Agricultural Development increased the seed of this variety to 1,000 bushels for the initial introduction. In 1944, approximately 6,000 bushels were produced for a further distribution. By the spring of 1946, there apparently was sufficient seed of this superior variety to supply the demand of the entire state.” By 1960, Wallace reported “complaints from the public have been extremely few.”

The author believes that distributions of seed like this helped start family seed operations across Iowa. Many began with seed cleaning operations and later began increasing public varieties from foundation seed from CAD. Some transitioned to major seed companies of today, for example Latham Seeds of Alexander, Iowa. In any case, these seedsmen became a strong network that directly understood the value and implementation of agricultural research.

This author also believes the organizational name “Committee for Agricultural Development” is derived from the county committees organized to facilitate the distribution of seed. CAD was the statewide coordinating group of these committees or, in effect, the statewide committee for agricultural development dedicated to increasing and distributing improved crop varieties.

A non-profit corporation was organized as the Committee for Agricultural Development (CAD) in 1943. The original board of trustees included Charles E. Friley, president of Iowa State, who served as president of CAD; R.E. Buchanan, director of the Ag Experiment Station; H.H. Kildee, dean of agriculture; and Henry Eichling, Iowa Extension Service. Also on the board were George Godfrey and James J. Wallace of the ag college staff, plus Fred Bruene, a farmer from Gladbrook. Joe Robinson, agronomy department, was seed production manager. CAD was organized as an affiliate of Iowa State University College of Agriculture with a business model that operated closely to the college, but separately.

Again, according to Robinson and Hughes (1946), “one of the first undertaking of the new organization (CAD) was to produce, as an emergency war effort, 7,500 bushels of ‘waxy corn’ seed (1943). Prior to the war, large quantities of tapioca starch had been

imported from the Orient. This had important industrial uses as well as uses for food purposes. The war shut off this supply. Cooperative research between several sections of the Experiment Station and the Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture, had shown the starch from certain inbred strains of corn had the characteristics of tapioca starch, and in fact, for certain industrial uses, was superior to tapioca.” The new lines of corn were called ‘waxy corn’. Other war-time efforts by CAD included development of ‘vegetable soybeans’ (food-grade) to use as a meat replacement and sumac as a replacement source for chemicals and dyes (Wallace, 1960).

Conclusion

CAD was formed to meet a need to distribute widely improved seed to Iowa farmers. That need created an affiliate corporation of ISU College of Agriculture, which was run as a business. This model was original and served the college well by increasing and marketing seed, developing and marketing other products of ag research, awarding grants, and stepping into a major role of land owner, manager, and trader for the college.

Note: For the purposes of this article the terms experiment station, college, station, college of agriculture and IAHEES are used interchangeably and refer to the Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences including its research arm, the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station.

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References

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