

# Tough tomato to swallow

*Agribusiness vs. farmers vs. consumers in Land Grant Colleges*



Land Grant colleges have made great advances in technical agriculture, most will agree. But in recent years some critics have speculated that agribusinesses—large farming and food preparation corporations—have benefitted more than the average, small-acreage farmer.

And in Nebraska, whose economy depends primarily on the small farmer, that can be important.

A Land Grant college is an institution of higher learning set up by a state charter.

In the preliminary report of the federal Task Force on the Land Grant College Complex, Jim Hightower maintains that the complex has allowed its manpower, facilities and tax dollars to work almost solely to the benefit and profit of large agribusiness corporations.

Hightower, who wrote the report also heads the Agribusiness Accountability Project, which commissioned the report.

With extensive agricultural research in mechanical, genetic and chemical areas, each year land grant colleges spend an estimated three quarters of a billion tax dollars. These funds are appropriated by national, state and county governments, the report said.

Although the cost of the complex is staggering, it is easy to pass this by when talking to anyone in the college complex. It has made advances in almost every area of agriculture.

The report said that agribusiness has worked on production line efficiency.

Machines have taken a prominent place in all phases of farming, from planting to harvesting, as a means of improving efficiency. A tomato-picking machine was recently developed. But scientists found that they had to breed a tomato which can survive the grip of the mechanical fingers, the report said.

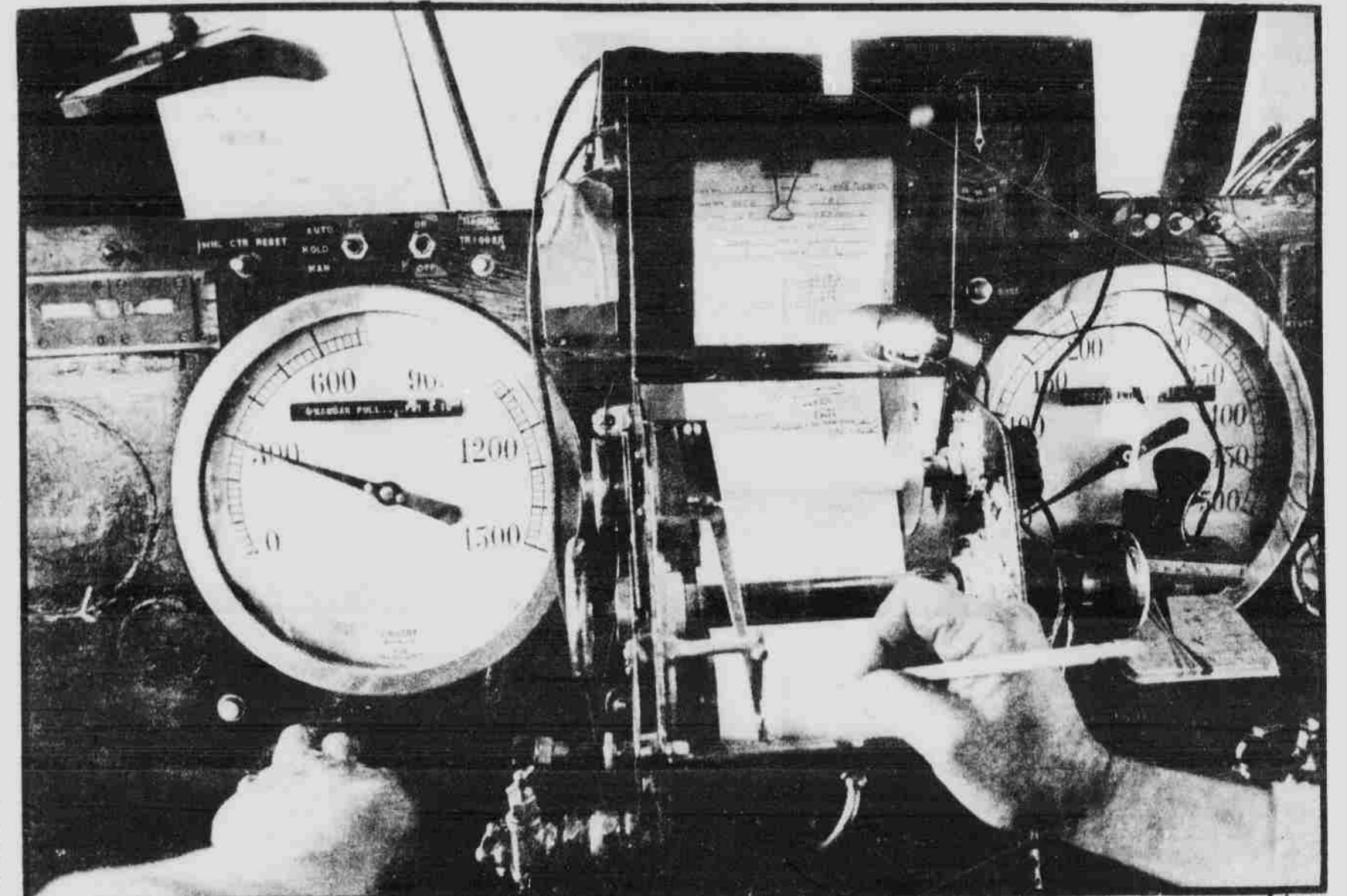
Michigan State University reported that MSU scientists were working on changing the physical aspects of broccoli, tomatoes, cauliflower, lima beans, cucumbers, carrots and asparagus, the task force said.

In addition to genetic research, drugs and chemicals can help protect animals from disease and crops from insects and blights.

A couple of months ago, UNL developed a new vaccine for calf scours, an intestinal disease which has been a major problem to breeders.

To aid research, land grant institutions often call on farm machinery and processing companies to help plan, research and develop improvements, the task force report said.

It said that companies like John Deere, International Harvester, Heinz and Del Monte often engage in cooperative research efforts at land grant colleges. Although they may contribute funds and personnel, the corporations benefit most from tax paid research.



According to Bert Evans, former cooperative extension specialist at UNL, this picture of agribusiness doesn't fit Nebraska entirely. States like California and Florida, have a much closer link with commercial interests, he said.

Owners of large farms also benefit from land grant research. Since the farms hire most of the nation's farm labor, the farmers have built-in incentive to take advantage of the technological advances.

Secondly, large tracts of land that farms operate on warrant an investment in the large machinery.

On the other side of the fence are farm workers, independent and family farmers and consumers, the report said.

The farm laborer was probably affected first by

mechanization. According to the report, the number of farm workers in America dropped from 4.3 million in 1950 to 3.5 million in 1970. In 1970 the average yearly wage earned by farm laborers was \$1,083, which made the farm worker one of the poorest working groups of Americans.

The needs of the independent or family farmer have been ignored by the land grant research. This group represents 87 per cent of all U.S. farms, the report explained.

"Mechanization research by land grant colleges either is irrelevant or only incidentally adaptable to the needs of some 87 to 99 per cent of America's farmers," it said.

If the farmer were given a chance to help set priorities for research at the land grant colleges, he would be likely to add

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