

NEWS AND VIEWS

BASIC RESEARCH IN THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

In the report of the Secretary of Agriculture of the United States for 1935 there are some thought promoting remarks made on the subject of scientific research in agriculture. On June 29th, 1935, the United States Congress passed an act which made special provision for basic research in the Department of Agriculture and in the Agricultural Experiment Stations and Landgrant Colleges. The measure, now known as the Bankhead-Jones Act, also provides for the further development of agricultural extension work. The act authorizes and directs the Secretary to "conduct scientific, technical, economic, and other research into laws and principles underlying basic problems of agriculture in its broadest aspects,—." In his report the Secretary points out that "Heretofore, the endowed scientific institutions such as the great foundations and some of the universities have been freer to conduct research of this character than have public agencies. Increased fundamental research in the Federal and State agencies is timely and in full accord with the principle that these public institutions should be prepared to keep our basic knowledge abreast of our need in meeting definite human problems."

"Entomologists, under the pressure of emergency demands, may try to discover the insecticide that will kill a particular moth and save a particular crop, and the effort may be worth while. It may be still more important, however, to reveal the habits and physiology of insects in general, so that the control problem can be dealt with broadly as it applies to many insect pests. Fundamental chemical research on the properties of insecticides may solve many insect-control problems simultaneously. Research for limited, so-called practical objects often fails, until scientists widen the scope of their inquiry to include the basic elements involved and so reveal the governing laws."

"The principle function of this Department is scientific research. All its other activities, such as weather and crop reporting, the eradication or control of plant and animal diseases and pests, the administration of regulatory laws, highway construction, and economic guidance, are practical expression of research results. Research is the primary thing, the keystone of the entire structure of the Department's functions and services. Naturally the Department does not rely exclusively on the findings of its own investigators; on the contrary, it draws upon the general fund of scientific knowledge as it increases throughout the world. But this is one of the tests of its scientific efficiency and value. Were the Department not engaged itself in creative scientific work, it could not use creatively the findings of other institutions. Only science can assimilate science."

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