

INTERVIEWEE: LESTER R. BROWN

INTERVIEWER: THOMAS H. BAKER

November 4, 1968

THB: This is the interview with Lester R. Brown, the Administrator of the International Agricultural Development Service. Mr. Brown, if we may start, would you, for the record here, outline your career, private and governmental?

B: I might begin with my upbringing on a farm in southern New Jersey. I was born in 1934 in southern New Jersey, began farming there as a youngster, a future farmer and 4-H member. I developed a large commercial tomato-growing operation during my teens, and farmed until the age of twenty-four. My education consists of three degrees in three fields--agricultural science at Rutgers, economics at Maryland, and public administration at Harvard.

THB: That's an impressive record. Are any of those advanced degrees?

B: The latter two are advanced degrees, master's degrees.

THB: When did you enter government service?

B: In 1959, after completing the master's degree at Maryland in economics. I came into the Foreign Agriculture Service as an agricultural analyst. During the nine years since then, I have been continuously with the Department of Agriculture except for one year of academic leave during which I was at Harvard getting the degree in public administration.

THB: Is it fair to call you a career man in the agriculture service?

B: I think that is an accurate description of my career. I might point out that the first three years in the Department were spent doing

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agriculture research during which time I wrote a number of things including two books on the world food problem, one entitled MAN LAND AND FOOD which looked ahead at the food problem to the end of the century, to the year 2000; and another entitled Increasing World Food Production. After those first three years in research, I spent the next three years with the Secretary's office working on agricultural policy questions and serving as advisor to the Secretary on questions of foreign agriculture policy that is, agricultural development, food aid, and to some extent agricultural trade. The past two years have been spent as administrator of the International Agricultural Development Service, an agency created as I recall-about four years ago to work closely with A.I.D. and intended to mobilize the resources of the Department of Agriculture, bringing them to bear on agricultural development problems in the less-developed countries.

THB: Now, you were appointed as Administrator, then, in '66?

B: That is correct.

THB: And who makes that appointment? The Secretary, Mr. Freeman, or is it a, specifically, presidential appointment?

B: The appointment was made by Secretary Freeman.

THB: I realize that this is a fairly new development, but in the past is this traditionally a non-political appointment, that is, an up-from-the-ranks career man is usually named to this?

B: Since this is a new agency, and since I am the second administrator, there is not much in the way of precedent here. In my own case, it clearly was an up-through-the-ranks situation. Whether or not it would be in the future would be more difficult to say.

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THB: Have you any specifically political background? Have you ever been active in partisan politics?

B: I have not been active in partisan politics. That is, I came to Washington with a bi-partisan background. That is, I was not active in local or community politics in the community in which I grew up and from which I came to Washington, and as a civil servant, of course, I've not been permitted to be actively involved in partisan politics.

THB: Have you had, either before or after your appointment as administrator, any direct or indirect contact with Mr. Johnson?

B: Yes, a fair amount of contact on various occasions. One particular period during which there was a fair amount of contact either indirectly through policy memos which I wrote or on occasion through some direct contact was during the period of the Indian food crisis. This was principally beginning in the fall of '65 and continued through 1966 and 1967.

THB: Could you describe that, sir? Who initiated the presidential interest in that? Did Mr. Johnson inquire into it, or did you, as Administrator, point out to him the problem? How did it work?

B: This was actually mostly before I was Administrator and it was while I was still serving as a policy advisor to the Secretary. The President himself became much interested in our food aid programs and became particularly interested in the India situation since this was such a critical foreign policy problem. The interest of the President took many different forms. He thought and the Secretary and others of us in the Department supported him in this that we should use our food aid as leverage to encourage developing countries

to make the efforts necessary to better feed their people. We had begun to conclude that food aid was being used as a substitute for agricultural progress by a number of the developing countries. For this reason--

THB: Excuse me, I would like to get that clear. You mean, foreign food aid from us was, in some cases, being used rather than building their own agricultural production?

B: Yes, that is correct. As long as countries knew they could get all the food they wanted from us on concessional terms, there was a real tendency to postpone meaningful agricultural decisions.

THB: And the idea was to wean them away from that idea?

B: The idea was to not give them long-term assurances to this effect-- that is to say, in 1960, we signed a food aid agreement with India which we agreed to supply sixteen million tons of wheat and a million tons of rice over a four-year period. In retrospect, there are many who would say that that agreement effectively postponed any meaningful decisions by economic planners to improve Indian agriculture.

THB: Is that a valid criticism?

B: I believe both the Secretary and I would think that there is considerable merit to that argument. It is very difficult of course to prove conclusively these things one way or another, but we clearly shared that feeling. As a result of this in mid-1965 we adopted what some have come to describe as a short-tether policy on food aid where we did not provide food aid on long-term basis, but rather provided major countries such as India and Pakistan food aid in terms of one, or two, or three months at a time. We were then able to use

these negotiations which came up on food aid every few months as a means for obtaining commitments from the recipient countries that they would take the kind of actions needed to develop their own agriculture.

THB: Now, sir, in the adoption of a policy like that to use that one as a specific case how, if at all, did Mr. Johnson get involved in it? That is, where is the decision made to adopt such a policy?

B: There are many things involved here, I am sure. I can refer to some specific things which I believe influence this policy. There was, for instance, a report written by another department economist-Martin Abel-and myself which was in effect an evaluation of India's fourth five-year plan which was to cover the period 1966-71, while this plan was still in its formative stages. We were invited to India by John [P.] Lewis, the A.I.D. mission director, for the specific purpose of assessing the agriculture part of India's fourth five-year plan during April of 1965. In analyzing the agricultural program included in that plan we concluded that whereas India had been requiring roughly one-fifth of the U. S. wheat crop during the early and mid-1960's to fill its food grain deficit, it could require close to one-half by say 1971 when the first five-year plan ended.

THB: Sir, those percentages--does that mean one-half of our production of wheat, total production, or our exports, or what?

B: Of our total crop. It had been one-fifth or somewhat higher during the mid-1960's and we estimated that that could easily go to one-half by the early 1970's. The results of this report, in the form of a brief memo of two or three pages, as I recall, were forwarded

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to the President by the Secretary. I mention this as one factor which might have influenced the President's thinking in this area. I'm sure there were many others.

THB: At that stage presumably the Secretary in forwarding the report put some kind of endorsement on it?

B: I don't recall the specific details on that, but I am reasonably confident that there was a covering memo which did support the analysis and call it to the President's attention.

THB: Then, after the report went to the President, did you hear from the President or the Administration about what was to be done about this situation?

B: There were, from time to time during the months of the summer and fall, early fall of 1965, exchanges between the President and the Secretary and the Undersecretary. I recall specifically during the summer of 1965--perhaps it was the month of June or July--the President calling the Undersecretary and asking for some additional information on why India was not performing well. As I recall we responded to that in a memo describing the fertilizer situation where fertilizer plans were being built in the public sector and required from five to nine years to bring into production once it was decided to build them. The average number of years required to bring them onstream as I recall being 7.6 years. We also pointed out that the fertilizer industry in India being largely government-run was operating, at that time, in 1965 at about 62 percent of capacity.

The next specific exchange that took place in this area, as I recall, occurred as a result of a cable which I sent from New Delhi

to the Secretary in November--early November of 1965--in which I pointed out that I thought India had had a very poor monsoon and was facing a food crisis in the very near future and suggesting that we begin inventorying our stocks of wheat and other grains such as grain sorghum which might be used to respond to a situation which I then felt could become quite critical.

THB: You were back in India then on just a routine inspection trip or, specifically, because of this problem?

B: Not specifically because of this problem, but again as a result of requests from John Lewis, the A.I.D. mission director, for some consulting on the agricultural development program in India.

THB: What was the ultimate outcome of this?

B: The series of events which I have described beginning with the evaluation report by Martin Abel and myself in April, the failure of the monsoon, and the very large deficit in prospect as a result of the monsoon failure led the President to consult with the Secretary sometime during mid-November to suggest that something needed to be done. It was decided between the President and the Secretary that the Secretary should go to the [UN]FAO Conference to be held in Rome during the latter part of November.

Present at this conference are most of the world's agriculture ministers, including the Indian minister of agriculture, Minister Subramaniam. Minister Subramaniam was at Rome as intended and the first thing--The Secretary cabled me late one Friday during mid-November asking that I join him the next Saturday morning in Rome for the purpose of initiating discussions with Subramaniam on the food situation in India and on exactly what India might

or might not be prepared to do in exchange for continuing food aid from the United States.

THB: Was the implication here that to get what amounted to emergency food aid, India was going to have to launch a program to improve its own production?

B: Precisely. We opened the discussions with Minister Subramaniam. These discussions, incidentally, were held at Ambassador [G. Frederick] Reinhardt's residence in Rome away from the meetings and the press so that we could have detailed private discussions. Present at these sessions which were held, as I recall, every day for a week each morning from early morning to roughly mid-day were the Secretary, Minister Subramaniam, and myself. Also attending on some occasion were the Indian agricultural attache in Rome and Mrs. Dorothy Jacobson who was our assistant secretary of agriculture for international affairs who was in Rome as head of the U.S. delegation to the FAO Conference and also, of course, interested in this particular problem.

We began our discussions with Minister Subramaniam by asking some very specific questions, the basic question being, "Is the government of India prepared to assume the responsibility for feeding its people?" The implication being that if the government of India was not prepared to do this, then there was little reason for the U.S. government to assume the responsibility because clearly, in the long run, the problem would become too large even for the United States to handle.

THB: What kind of an answer do you get from a fairly blunt question like that?

B: The initial reaction was one of surprise, and Minister Subramaniam was clearly taken back a bit by this. But we pursued the question

very vigorously and as supporting evidence for justification for raising the question we cited some of the things that I mentioned earlier, such as the very sad performance of the Indian fertilizer industry and pointed out that if India was in fact going to solve its food problem, there was no substitute for much greater production of fertilizer and that India would clearly have to confront this situation and do something about it.

THB: Mr. Brown, may I ask here, was the Minister's surprise justified--that is from his point of view? Is this a whole new radical departure that is being offered or have there been hints before?

B: There may have been some hints before but no real unfolding of Washington thinking--that of the President and certainly the Department of Agriculture--before that time.

THB: Another question, sir--in this kind of thing, you must work very closely with the State Department, not only with the A.I.D. missions in the fields, but with the officials here. Does there develop any difference of opinion or emphasis?

B: We clearly do work closely with the State Department and A.I.D., in particular, in these sort of questions. The reason, you may recall from my earlier comment, that I was in India both in April and again in November was at the request of John Lewis to review and evaluate and make recommendations on the agricultural development program in India. He was very much aware of my going to India, of my going to Rome, and of the discussions which took place there. I might say that the Department of Agriculture is perhaps somewhat more aggressive than other government agencies in insisting that countries which receive our food aid should undertake adequate self-help efforts

on their part. This seemed to be very consistent with the thinking of the President and was, I believe, the reason for his asking Secretary Freeman to go to Rome and meet with his counterpart in the Indian government.

THB: The Department of Agriculture is more insistent than say the State Department in this type of thing?

B: Very often, though not always, one would clearly get this impression. I expect, in part, because the Department is much more willing than the professional diplomats, who have to maintain reasonably good relations with countries, to take a more vigorous stance--

THB: That's really what I was wondering. State's point of view, at least at the higher levels, would emphasize maintaining good relations whereas what you are doing could be taken with some umbrage by certain foreign countries.

B: Let me elaborate if I might on what happened at Rome. We negotiated for some days, the better part of a week, on this situation, and in the process of the discussions began to identify specific things which were indispensable to efforts which the Government of India would have to make if, in fact, it was serious about assuming responsibility for feeding its own people.

There were a number of steps referred to here. Several of the important ones referred to actions that would have to be taken in

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the fertilizer area. The government of India agreed to import or to make available to their farmers, certain amounts of fertilizer of increasing magnitude for each of the next five years. These numbers were spelled out very specifically. The government of India also agreed to open up the fertilizer industry to private investors, both foreign and domestic, in order to get the increases in fertilizer production, the capital, and the management, et cetera, that the situation required.

THB: Excuse me, at this point, I hate to keep interrupting you, but did this agreement involve where exported-imported fertilizer would come from?

B: It did not mention this specifically. It mentioned numbers specifically for the amount that would be made available to farmers in each of the next five years with the understanding that, to the extent that this could not be produced within India, that it would be imported.

Upon returning to India, Minister Subramaniam then took the points discussed in Rome, incorporated them into an agricultural development program for India, and submitted it to the Indian Cabinet as his new program for India's agricultural development.

He was at this point very much aware that India had to make a greater effort. He himself very much wanted to make this effort,

and he began to use the impending food crisis as a means of support for launching a much more vigorous effort. His program for India's agricultural development was agreed to almost in every point by the Indian government. At least one of the reasons why this was the case was that Minister Subramaniam insisted that this much more vigorous program be adopted if he were to continue as Minister of Food and Agriculture. Given the crisis that India was facing then, there were not many people interested in assuming that responsibility.

THB: I realize that there probably hasn't been enough time, but do you feel this new Indian agricultural program will be effective?

B: There has been enough time to evaluate much of this program. It has been surprisingly effective and is one of the reasons why India last year harvested a grain crop, some 12 percent above the previous record. India has, during the three years since the fall of 1965, taken a number of actions to strengthen its agricultural program. To cite a few, there are fertilizer plants being built in India in the private sector today--in fact several of them and many of them very large and modern, some built by U. S. firms, some by Indian firms, some by British firms, and Japanese and Italian firms are also involved in some joint efforts. We did see the Indian budget for agriculture increased some 40 percent during the year immediately following the discussions

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in Rome. We've seen agricultural price policy greatly improved with minimum price supports set up at a level which would make the use of modern agriculture technology profitable in India and which, in fact, have been in good measure responsible for the rather rapid gains in Indian agriculture in the past two years.

THB: Would it be correct to say that this kind of activity, insisting upon local development in return for aid, is a standard policy of the current administration in other areas, too?

B: It is a policy of current administration, and in fact during the year following these very vigorous negotiations with India, the Congress incorporated much of this thinking into the Public Law 480 legislation which was passed in late 1966 and signed by the President, to become effective on January 1, 1967. Since that time, we now routinely insist on self-help efforts by food aid recipient countries and, in fact, with each food aid agreement we now negotiate specific actions to be taken by each country in exchange for the commodities that we provide. And I might say that this has had a very positive effect on a world-wide basis, contributing to many of the advances that have been made in the past two years in agricultural development.

THB: Sir, do you deal often directly with Congress in the matter of the legislation you just mentioned?

B: The department deals directly with Congress. My own direct involvement has been limited to briefings and replying to information, for the most part. Others in the Department, including principally our Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, were heavily involved in helping to shape the food aid legislation during 1966.

THB: That's Mrs. Jacobson?

B: That is correct.

THB: Do you find Congress sympathetic to this concept of insisting upon indigenous development?

B: I think one would have to say more than sympathetic--insistent in fact, that the United States assume this posture in its relationships with the developing countries. We have found this very helpful in our dealings with these countries because if these countries know that Congress supports this it makes our negotiating much easier.

THB: All of this must mean an increased emphasis on your Department's function as assisting development in other countries. Does that mean that your Department in recent years has gotten larger?

B: The agency which I head is a relatively new agency created some four years ago, as I recall, as a result of a joint agreement between Secretary Freeman and David Bell who was then the Administrator of A.I.D. They agreed that the Department's resources, including 29,000 professional agriculturalists in the wide range of fields, should be used more effectively in the A.I.D. program overseas. As a result A.I.D. has increasingly, since that time, looked to the Department for assistance in both agricultural policy and program questions on an overall basis and, also, in providing technical assistance of a specific nature such as irrigation, agricultural research, improving marketing facilities, agricultural price policies, pest control, and any of many other areas.

THB: How well do you work with A.I.D. and the State Department?

B: We work quite well together. It is in our mutual interest to do so.

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THB: Do difficulties ever arise over difference in emphasis, or methods or goals?

B: There are, from time to time, differences between any large agency in which large numbers of people are involved, but our relationship has been a very useful one, a very fruitful one, and I think one which has permitted the United States to accomplish a great deal in the field of agricultural development that would not have been accomplished otherwise.

THB: What kind of difficulty would arise between your agency and A.I.D.?

B: There might be instances of differences in emphasis of priority. Agricultural development encompasses a very large number of different activities and we might have different ideas as to what the exact ranking of priorities ought to be, but these were not serious problems and matters that professionals could work out very satisfactorily.

THB: At what level is this kind of thing worked out? Does it have to go to the Secretary level, or is it generally worked out between you and your counterpart in A.I.D.?

B: These things are almost always worked out at the working level between ourselves and our counterparts at A.I.D. I think it is important to emphasize here that we came into existence at A.I.D.'s request and our increasing participation is quite obviously their desire since they fund the activities of my agency, and the other seventeen agencies of the Department whose resources we draw upon in our overseas programs. I should point out that all of the technical assistance which the Department provides in some forty countries overseas is funded entirely by A.I.D.

THB: I didn't realize that. Then you, in effect, operate under the State Department's budget.

B: That is correct. Our funding comes through the Foreign Affairs committee, through the A.I.D. budget rather than the Agricultural Appropriations Committee.

THB: Does your agency have its own permanent men overseas? I know A.I.D. does, but is there with each A.I.D. man a direct agriculture man?

B: Yes, this varies a great deal by countries. The overall agriculture effort overseas involves direct hire personnel of A.I.D.; it involves our universities particularly in teaching, extension and research areas; it involves private groups, consultant groups of various kinds, and also, of course, the Department itself. We have people overseas on both a long-term basis--what you refer to as permanent, that is, two-year assignments, and also a large number of department professionals going out on short-term consultancies to deal with specific problems arise. This latter could be an outbreak of crop disease, an insect problem in a developing country or a need to adjust agricultural policy within the country.

THB: Have you found in the last few years that there is any distinct regional emphasis in your work? That is, has the Vietnam War, for example, caused a great deal of emphasis on Southeast Asia as opposed to, and perhaps at the expense of, South America, for example?

B: I wouldn't say that anything has been at the expense of anything else insofar as our involvement is concerned. And I suppose that reflects the fact that our involvement as a department has been steadily increasing throughout the past three or four years. There has been some regional emphasis in that the situation in

India and our involvement there and our involvement in Vietnam have resulted in much of our growth, or much of the increase in our involvement are occurring in these areas.

THB: Are you involved directly in the effort to improve Vietnamese agriculture?

B: We are very directly involved in that. I would say that, of the agriculturalists working in Vietnam--U.S. agriculturalists--that roughly half of these are a direct hire, and roughly half are U.S.D.A. and we have entirely integrated our people in Vietnam as we have in India and elsewhere. That is, we often have A.I.D. people reporting to U.S.D.A. people and U.S.D.A. people reporting to A.I.D. people. And we jointly attempt to staff the key positions with the best people available on a professional basis, irrespective of which agency they might be from.

THB: Do you feel that satisfactory progress in this area has been made in Vietnam?

B: I think we've made more than satisfactory progress in Vietnam. During the past year we have helped the Vietnamese put together an accelerated rice production program. We did this in December and January of 1967-68. And this program, which we and the Vietnamese have strongly supported, has moved ahead on schedule in spite of all of the other problems of operating in a wartime situation. This I think has been one of the outstanding accomplishments of U.S. agricultural programs overseas.

THB: In Vietnam, particularly, do you get involved with the military?

B: We work with the military insofar as they provide security which

enables us to undertake many of our field operations, and in agriculture much of the work has to be in the countryside of course away from large cities. They also assist us from time to time with logistical problems of moving say-seed or fertilizer or these things. The military has been very helpful to us.

THB: I was wondering if you found any conflicting interests there. For example, in the use of chemical defoliants?

B: This is an area in which I have not been very much involved personally. The use of defoliants does have effects on agriculture as well as security. It provides a much greater security for men, of course. It also can effect water retention and runoff and things which have a direct bearing upon agriculture.

THB: Is most of your work in this agency with underdeveloped countries, or do you also deal with the more advanced agriculture in western Europe?

B: In this agency we deal only with the developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

THB: To get out of specifics into generalities, where in your opinion is the biggest problem in underdeveloped countries? What is your biggest obstacle in trying to improve their agriculture? Is it the resistance of the farmer to change, or is it at the governmental level, or can you generalize?

B: It clearly seems not to be at the farmer level. Once policies and programs are developed which make the use of agricultural technology profitable, we find that farmers respond very rapidly. This is spelled out in some detail in a recent article which I did for Foreign Affairs entitled the "Agriculture Revolution in Asia" which records some of the very exciting advances made in Asia

during the past two years. The biggest obstacle to rapid agricultural development, I think, is the inability of leaders in finance ministries, economic planning commissions, in the developing countries to understand what it takes to get agriculture moving, so to speak. Once we--

THB: May I ask sir, do you mean in that respect that understanding technology or understanding the concept of overall planning?

B: It involves both. One of the principal policies that is not well understood by leaders in developing countries is the role of agricultural price policy in providing minimum prices which are such as to encourage farmers to use modern technology. Most developing countries traditionally have price policies which are consumer-oriented--that is, designed to hold prices down in the large cities. Their thinking in the price policy area is more in terms of ceiling prices rather than the floor prices which one must have in order to get farmers to use new technology.

THB: Do you attempt to generally inculcate a price support system similar to ours?

B: Usually similar to ours in that we recognize clearly the need for a minimum price which will make the use of fertilizer and other inputs profitable, but different in the sense that because of administrative weaknesses and others, the price support programs which we recommend and help to institute in developing countries are much simpler than the ones we have here.

THB: Of course, many of our programs are predicated upon our incredible ability to produce which I suppose is not necessarily true in other areas.

B: That's right. There are differences here. We are concerned, for instance, with diverting some resources from agriculture production to avoid overproduction. The price support systems in developing countries usually are fairly simple. They consist of an announced minimum price and the stated willingness on the part of the government to move into the market and purchase when prices threaten to drop below that level.

THB: How do you find the caliber of people that you deal with in these foreign countries?

B: The caliber of people both the agricultural people and the economic planners with whom we deal varies a great deal. It is very uneven from country to country and within countries. In some countries one might cite West Pakistan for instance. There is a real interest in agriculture from the top leadership of the country, from President Ayub down through the economic planning people. A real understanding of what is needed and a willingness to undertake these steps. This was also true of former Minister of Food and Agriculture in India, Minister Subramaniam. He was very much aware of both the technological and the policy aspects of agricultural development, and was therefore a very fruitful person with whom to work.

THB: Do you or can you try to exert any influence in these countries over their selection of agricultural personnel?

B: We do not consider it our responsibility to select officials within the developing countries. I suppose the area in which we do try to insure that competent people are brought into agriculture is in the selection of people from the developing countries who are brought to this country for training in various aspects of agriculture.

THB: I was going to ask you about your training program which your agency

conducts.

B: We work closely with A.I.D. and the land-grant universities in the training of agriculturalists from the developing countries. The training of these agriculturalists is funded for the most part by A.I.D., but also by FAO, and some other agencies, including the foundations in this country.

THB: Does the United States have pretty much a free hand in selecting candidates for that kind of training?

B: Not a free hand, but we do participate with the governments of the developing countries to select the people.

THB: I was wondering if you got involved in political pressures from the other country itself.

B: I'm sure that there are political pressures of various kinds which enter into the selection of the agriculturalists from the developing countries, but for the most part by the time we work these things out mutually we have pretty high caliber people.

THB: I know you have been quite successful in using the colleges for both training here and for consulting work overseas. Have you had similar success or has it been advisable for you to use private industry?

B: Let me just elaborate on this with particular reference to training. The role of my agency in the department is to develop the programs for the agriculturalists once they are selected and brought here. We work closely with both A.I.D. and the land-grant universities in this. We utilize primarily three sources of training for these people. The most important, of course, is the land-grant universities.

A second source of training is department agencies themselves. If someone comes here in farm credit, for instance, we may assign him to the Farmers and Home Administration which administers the agriculture credit program in this country and they may in turn assign him to work with one of their county people in Missouri, say, to get an idea as to how a farm program operates all the way from the Washington level down to the grassroots. Now, the third source of training which we use is that of private groups, and these may be agribusiness firms in, say, farm equipment or farm organizations, very often farmer associations of various kinds including commodity groups, farm cooperatives, and such. We attempt to use the entire array of resources available in this country--public, private, academic and non-academic--in order to give these agricultural participants, as they are called, the kind of training which will best qualify them to under take the job that they will be called upon to do back home.

THB: Do you generally find the people here whom you deal with cooperative in this?

B: Exceedingly so. The universities are always asking for more participants than we can fund and provide. And interestingly, private groups very often--in fact as a general rule--provide training, and often transportation and, other things free of charge. They are sufficiently interested in helping with the overseas program that they will use their resources and staff time to organize these programs and work with us fairly closely. This is one of the really encouraging things about this kind of work.

THB: Are you also involved in encouraging American investment in factories

producing agricultural equipment overseas?

B: We are very much involved in this, again, working closely with A.I.D. A.I.D. offers a number of incentives including such things as investment guarantees to U.S. firms working overseas. We, in the Department, offer technical advice either on investment prospects or on particular technical questions dealing with agriculture with which people in the Department are familiar. We have worked jointly with A.I.D. and the agribusiness in the United States to form, to organize the agribusiness council which is an organization whose membership consists of most firms, most agribusiness firms in the United States, and whose purpose is to more closely coordinate efforts between the U.S. agribusiness community, the U.S. government, and the governments of the developing countries. At present this is headed by George Mehren, who was until a few months ago Assistant Secretary for Consumer Affairs and Science and Education in the Department.

THB: Sir, in this matter of technology in underdeveloped countries, do you try deliberately to sort of begin at a less sophisticated level--that is, does India, for example, need tractor factories, or does it first need steel plow factories?

B: There is a tendency on the part of developing countries to be more attracted to the more glamorous projects. Our own feeling is that as countries come to appreciate agricultural development more and more, as they have in the past two or three years, that this preoccupation with the more glamorous projects is clearly diminishing.

THB: I was wondering if you also, in the area of technology, got involved in the manpower problem--that is, what the problem of advanced

technology requiring less labor and therefore moving people off the farm into the cities--

B: This can often be a problem. The tendency seems to be, for most of the countries that we are working with which are densely populated countries, to follow more nearly the Japanese path of development, if you will, because there is relatively little additional land. It requires more intensive cultivation of land already under cultivation. And almost invariably, at least in the early stages of development, this involves using more and more labor rather than less. This has clearly been the Japanese experience where the Japanese may use up to 100 man-days per acre of rice whereas in the United States we may use only two man-days per acre.

THB: Do you also get involved in what is also a social problem of land ownership, redistribution of ownership?

B: This is a critical problem in some parts of the world, particularly in Latin America, where the distribution of land holdings is very skewed or uneven--that is, a small proportion of the population owns a very large proportion of the land. This is much less a problem in Africa where tribal systems prevail; or in Asia, where land reform programs that have been undertaken at some point in recent history such as in Taiwan and Japan, and India, Pakistan, and other countries.

THB: What is your policy in this? Do you try to change the land ownership pattern to make it more democratic?

B: We are very much interested in getting a more reasonable distribution of land among the people who live on the land and work it. One

of the constraints to accelerating agriculture production in a number of countries is large landowners who have interests other than agriculture specifically, and who are, therefore, often absent from their farms and are absentee landowners. We think that this is not a situation very conducive to rapid agricultural development.

THB: What about in an area like Africa where as you said the tribal pattern is more common? Do you attempt to break up the system of communal ownership or do you accept it and work within it?

B: We think it is very desirable if individual members in the tribe can establish clear titles to a piece of land which is their own rather than simply some of the land which is owned by the tribe as a whole. The reason for this being that land improvements in the form of land levelling, or terracing, or irrigation, or what have you, are often more effective if people in the tribe identify with a particular piece of land. They are then willing to make improvements on that land because they can expect to be the primary beneficiaries.

THB: Has it worked out that way?

B: We are making some progress in this area but this is one of the most difficult areas in which we work in agricultural development.

THB: Sir, in addition to the incident involving India that you described, are there any other major accomplishments in this agency within, say, the period in which you have been head of it?

B: During the period in which I have been head of the agency we have, with the Secretary's encouragement and with the requests from A.I.D., attempted to become much more involved in agricultural policy and agriculture programs as such. We do now regularly participate in reviews of agricultural development programs for

each of the countries in which we have A.I.D. programs.

THB: This would be some sort of joint review with agriculture and state?

B: That's right. A.I.D. each year conducts an annual review of the development program, the overall development program submitted by the mission, the A.I.D. mission is each of the countries in which we have A.I.D. programs. These are then reviewed in Washington and, as part of that review, we--the Department--are invited to participate in reviewing specifically the agricultural portions of the program.

THB: Does the President or the White House staff participate in this kind of review, too?

B: Well, let me put it this way, the Bureau of the Budget, representing the White House, does participate in these reviews along with--in some of the major countries--representatives of the National Security Council. The results of this review are also then forwarded to the Bureau of the Budget, and the White House for their consideration and review. I might also say that we in the Department have been very conscious of the role which the agricultural business community in the United States has played in the agricultural development of this country. And, as a result, we have been particularly anxious to see the U.S. agrobusiness community involved more in our overseas development programs. This has clearly been the feeling of the Secretary and of myself and so in working with A.I.D. we have strongly supported them in their efforts to do this.

THB: Is this cooperation generally coordinated through the Agrobusiness Council you mentioned a while back?

B: The Agrobusiness Council which is new at this point is more a result of our

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joint efforts--A.I.D., U.S.D.A. and the agrobusiness community. If it succeeds and develops as we hope it will, then it will more and more become the coordinating point for total U.S. involvement in this area.

THB: Have you received any indication of any other direct or indirect presidential interest in any other specific area in addition to the episode involving India you mentioned? Or do you generally get the impression that the President is just interested in agriculture?

B: I get the impression that the President is much involved in agricultural development overseas, particularly as it relates to providing people with a more adequate supply of food, in reducing malnutrition, and so forth. It has been very clear in a number of his messages since he has been in office that he feels that the food-population problem is one of the major problems confronting the world over the next few decades. He has often stated that he considers it on the par with the threat of war, nuclear war in particular, as one of the dominant problems of this period in history.

This is reflected in the areas of emphasis which he has encouraged for A.I.D. and our overall assistance programs overseas--that is, agriculture, education, and health--which he has consistently, again and again, emphasized in recent years.

THB: Do you or any of the members of your agency ever get any kind of formal or informal encouragement from the President--that is, invitations to social occasions in the White House, that kind of thing?

B: There are a number of occasions of this sort from time to time,

including an invitation several months back to attend a reception at the White House with the President and Mrs. Johnson along with a large number of officials from other agencies. In my specific case, I have, on occasion, accompanied the Secretary to sessions at the White House either with staff and on one or two occasions with the President. I also recall that in January of 1967, when there were four government employees included in the Ten Outstanding Young Men in America elected by the U.S. Jaycees, that the President made a point of inviting us over to the White House to meet with him and then to conduct a press conference afterwards in which he pointed out to the press that four of the ten outstanding young men in this country were in the employment of the federal service.

THB: You were one of those?

B: I was one of those along with Joe Califano, Bill Carpenter, who was with the Army in Vietnam, and [Sandy] Sanford Greenburg, who was a White House Fellow that year.

THB: This may be a weird question, but do you suppose that the President saw you on the street he would know you by name and what you did?

B: No, I don't think he would.

THB: The question isn't that unusual. The question arises as to how far down in the government the President can possibly know people.

B: Right. He could conceivably, although I doubt it, recognize the name because there have been from time to time in memos which I have written the Secretary which have then been forwarded with a covering note to the President. This was particularly true during the years of the Indian food crisis.

THB: In the staff meetings you have attended with the President, what

is your impression of his handling of those meetings? Does he talk more than he listens, or vice versa? Does he seem to be knowledgeable on the subjects at hand?

B: In the area in which I have been involved, that of the world food problem, he seems to be exceedingly knowledgeable, perhaps much more so than any President in recent decades. The reason, I think, for this is fairly clear. One is that he himself comes from an agricultural background, an agricultural environment. He knows the kinds of things that it takes to convert an underdeveloped area, which his area of Texas once was, within his lifetime, into a more modern level of agriculture with much higher standings. We can discuss fertilizer with the President, for instance, various kinds and effects, and he knows what we are talking about. One can be fairly technical with him in a way in which one cannot with, I'm sure, many of his predecessors or in fact many members of his staff.

THB: Is that down to detailed knowledge? For example, if you mentioned 2, 4-D to him?

B: I have an idea if you mentioned 2, 4-D to him, he would know what you were talking about and I think some of the memos that the Secretary has sent the President reflects the assumption that the President does understand these things. For instance, we talk about phosphate fertilizer with the full knowledge that the President knows what phosphate fertilizer is, and the kinds of conditions under which you do or do not use phosphate fertilizer and the kind of response you can expect when you use it. I recall a specific instance in which this understanding was used on an international level very effectively, and that was in response to a letter from President Ayub

about a year ago. It was a year ago this past August or September, in which he [Ayub] specifically requested U.S. assistance in dealing with problems of erosion, silting of some of the large new irrigation projects in Pakistan. When he specifically requested assistance in this area the President responded with a very warm and understanding letter indicating that we were prepared to help them in this area with technical assistance and pointing out his own experience with the development of the river which either flows through, or is near, his ranch and the role that the development of water resources had played in the development of Texas going back to the New Deal days of the 1930's.

THB: Did you or anyone else in the Department have a hand in the preparation of that letter?

B: I did not, and in reading the response of President Johnson to President Ayub, I clearly had the feeling that he himself was personally involved in preparing the response.

THB: To go, Mr. Brown, into a slightly different area, as an administrator in this agency, do you have any difficulty in getting and keeping good men?

B: We have been very fortunate in this area. My own feeling is that the first rule of good management is to gather talented people around one and so when my deputy, Dr. Lyle Schertz, and I took over--or assumed responsibility for operating this agency just about two years ago--we made a real effort to gather talented people and young people in this country in doing something about the world food problem, we have been very successful in gathering talent in this agency.

THB: Do you have pretty much of a free hand in choosing people?

B: We have a very free hand within, of course, the regulations imposed by the Civil Service System under which the government operates. That is, there are time when we would like to offer higher salaries in attracting people, but, by and large, we have not found this to be major problem. And when we find someone that we think can do the kind of job that we offer, who will respond to the challenges that exist in this area, we are usually quite successful in bringing him into the agency.

THB: Where do you recruit--agricultural colleges, or agribusiness, or where?

B: We recruit very broadly from agricultural colleges, from nonagricultural colleges. We often bring people aboard say from the Graduate School of Public Administration at Harvard or the Woodrow Wilson School of Public Affairs at Princeton. That is to say we are not confined to land-grant institutions although we do recruit a great deal from them. We recruit from elsewhere in the Department, from elsewhere in government, from private industry. There is a surprising number of people in private industry who are interested in government and in agricultural problems overseas who come to us and request employment.

THB: Do you require a personal agricultural background such as your own and, if so, are you having any difficulty nowadays finding people who have been farmers?

B: An agricultural background is often very helpful in the kind of work we do, but it is by no means a requirement. In the area of agricultural price policy, which is mostly an economics problem, we find that one can start with good economists and they can very

quickly pick up the agricultural knowledge needed to function effectively. We are much more concerned about the abilities of the people we hire than specific backgrounds. I might also add that one of the areas which had been developed very fully within this agency has been the area of working in the field of nutrition, in giving it a very modern and scientific emphasis, and involving the agrobusiness community. We are making a real effort under the leadership of Dr. Aaron Altschul, who is an outstanding scientist, formerly with one of our research laboratories in New Orleans, to expand U.S. participation in this area bringing to bear on the problem of malnutrition in the developing countries some of our most modern technologies such as the use of synthetic amino acids for protein fortification, the use of and the development of high-protein foods by U.S. agrobusiness firms, and the development of improved marketing and distribution systems to see that the delivery systems in the developing countries are able to deliver more of the right kind of food to more people.

THB: Is this nutrition program overseas conducted at the governmental level or it is largely an educational program for the consumer?

B: It is conducted largely at a governmental level for the simple reason that we don't have the resources to reach large numbers of people ourselves. We work with governments and with private firms--jointly, of course, with A.I.D. in any event. We have seen some countries, most specifically India, adopt as a result of our work with them and with the strong support of the A.I.D. mission in New Delhi a national nutrition policy. Mrs. [Indira] Gandhi in recent months has referred to this very specifically a number of times. We think

this is a very desirable thing and we are working toward a fuller understanding on the part of development planners in developing countries on the role of nutrition in developing human resources.

THB: This is the area, I suppose, where you have run into human resistance to change diet. Isn't this the area that is involved in the fish meal controversy and so on?

B: There have been some problems in this area in the past, and we have concluded that one of the reasons has been that many of the various high-protein foods have been designed almost entirely by nutritionists. We feel that if we can bring private industry into the high-protein food area in a major way that they will be much more sensitive to consumer taste and attitudes and will, therefore, develop foods which are not only very nutritious and desirable; but, also are very appealing to consumers, and we think this a a major gain.

THB: Have you had any specific success in this area so far?

B: We have had. There are now some eight to ten contracts that we have signed with A.I.D. and with agrobusiness firms such as Monsanto or Swift or Pillsbury to develop foods for commercial marketing in the less developed countries. We have worked with them on many of the technological questions such as using cottonseed oil meal for foods, using soybeans, using peanut oil meal, which is very common in a number of developing countries, and trying to get these high quality proteins which are not now used very much in many countries for human food to be consumed by humans in the form of these high-protein foods. We believe that we may be able to develop a high-protein food industry very comparable to the low-calorie

food industry that develops in the United States. In both instances, we see a technology evolving to meet a need. In the case of the low-calorie food industry the need was for Americans to consume less calories and we have seen the technology evolve to meet that need in the marketplace resulting in a \$750 million a year food industry, a new food industry. We see a parallel in the less developed countries in that the problem is not too many calories, but too little protein and we are seeing this need for more protein meet with an evolving technology in the marketplace to create what we believe will become a high-protein food industry in the less developed world.

THB: Sir, is there anything else that we have not covered that we should about the work of your agency?

B: I think we've probably covered most of the more important aspects of our work which would be of interest to you.

THB: All right, sir. We certainly appreciate your time.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Lester R. Brown

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Lester R. Brown, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape ~~and transcript~~ of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Date 8-27-71

Accepted Harry J. Michelson for
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Date September 10, 1974