INTERVIEWEE: W. D. MACLAY

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

November 19, 1968

B: This is the interview with Dr. W.D. Maclay, Director of the Research Program Development and Evaluation staff of the Department of Agriculture.

Dr. Maclay, let me start by outlining what I knew of your career and background here, subject to your correction, please. You are a Nebraskan by birth, a chemist by education, doctorate at the University of Nebraska in 1931. And after some years as a teacher and a research chemist in the 1930's, you joined the Agricultural Department in 1940 and have been with it since, and became director here in 1965. Is that about the main outline?

M: That is correct.

B: That makes it pretty clear that you're a career man in the Department of Agriculture, is that a fair enough statement?

M: That is correct.

B: May I also ask, sir, have you ever had in your background any direct political activity in the sense of campaigning for either party, or being officially affiliated with either party?

M: No, I've never been involved in the political arena.

B: Are there many, in the Department of Agriculture, career men like yourself who are?

M: I think there are some who have participated in local political matters such as school board elections and areas of that type, but from the standpoint of career people, I think very few of us have been directly involved in, say, state or national political campaigns.

B: Public service regardless of party.

M: That's right.

B: I was going to ask you about the circumstances of your appointment, but our preliminary conversation indicated that perhaps it would be best if you would outline for us the circumstances of the creation of this agency, which I understand is a relatively new development. You were telling me before the tape was on about the creation of the general directorate of science and education of which this is a part. Would you outline that for us?

M: Yes. In the early '60's a committee was appointed to take a look at the Department of Agriculture's research program--

B: May I insert here, sir, was this a departmental committee or a congressional committee?

M: This was a departmental committee. This committee recommended that there be established in the department an Assistant Secretary for Science and Education to be patterned after what some of the other departments had, and they felt that this would give the research in the department a better stature than it had had heretofore.

B: You were in the Agricultural Research Service at the time, were you not?

M: Yes, sir.

B: Did you participate in the work of this committee?

M: No, this was a separate committee--non-departmental people. Following this, the Department of Agriculture set up an Office of Science and Education, and appointed a director in the fall, or in December of 1963. The director was Dr. Nyle Brady of Cornell University. The function of this office was to coordinate and plan the research of the department, its relationship to the fifty-three

state agriculture experiment stations, the other federal agencies of the government, and industry.

B: Sir, may I ask right here the--this may come up in the future--you mentioned the fifty-three state agricultural agencies. Actually, it's fifty state agencies and where are the other three?

M: Two of the states, New York and Connecticut, each have two experiment stations, and Puerto Rico has one, and then the other fifty, which constitutes fifty-three.

Before the establishment of the Office of Science and Education, the coordination of research had been under the administrator of the Agricultural Research Service which is the largest research agency in the department. Following the establishment of the Office of Science and Education, the function of coordination and planning was turned over to the Director of Science and Education.

In the fall of 1964, the Secretary established the research program development and evaluation staff to serve in a staff capacity for the Director of Science and Education. The function of this staff was to carry out in cooperation with the research agency leaders the planning, coordination, and evaluation of the physical, biological, and social sciences, as well as the economic and forest research activities of the department, the maintenance and servicing of the Research Advisory Committee system of which the department had three national research advisory committees and some fourteen additional, commodity advisory committees, so this staff also serves as a servicing agency for these research advisory committees of the department.

It gives leadership to special groups which are set up such as

ad hoc task forces to make studies of special areas. It works closely with the administrators of the fifty-three experiment stations and their representatives. It also has charge of documentation and reporting, the documentation having to do with the research project system which we have, which covers the research of the department and also in this system are the research projects of the fifty-three States Experiment Stations.

Then in the reporting field this staff takes care of national reports, such as we get out an annual pesticide report, we report to the National Science Foundation on such-and-such areas as contracts and grants, the area of medical related research, health related research, and also inquiries from the public and the Congress and other federal agencies, which go across more than one research agency. For example, if there are inquiries in the field of what the department is doing, say, in cotton research, there are probably four or five agencies involved. We have that information; we furnish it. We also are in charge of what's known as the current research information system which documents the 24,000 independent research projects of the department agencies and the fifty-three state experiment stations. We get out an annual inventory of that research. We serve as a source of material for the agencies in the whole gamut of research activity of the department and the states.

B: Before this staff was set up, was its genesis in the fact that all of this was going on and it wasjust so diffuse that it was unmanageable or unretrieveable?

M: Well, I don't think probably it was so unmanageabel. I think it was unretrieveable. The Secretary felt he needed a better grasp of this

whole research complex. About that time too the Senate Appropriations Committee of Agriculture indicated a direct interest in this, and in the Senate report on appropriations of April '65 under a heading "Need for Evaluation of Agriculture Research," it stated and I quote: "It is now recommended that the Secretary of Agriculture give immediate consideration to the establishment of an appropriate research review committee comprised equally of representatives of the land grant experiment stations, departmental research activities, affected producer organizations, and with appropriate industry representation, to examine fully each and every line of agriculture research conducted by the department and the state experiment stations. The committee recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture in close cooperation with the appropriate representatives of the state experiment stations develop and submit to the committee within the next sixty days a program proposal setting forth a general outline of the content and scope of such a review of the research programs conducted by the department and by the States and financed by cooperative aiding industry contributions, which would be directed toward the general objective of making recommendations on the respective roles, responsibilities, and areas of cooperative effort that should be examined to arrive at an overall evaluation as the basis for future recommendations involving the realignment and reassignment of research responsibilities for existing programs, and also to be used as the basis for projecting agricultural research requirements for the next several years."

B: How big a staff do you have to do all of this?

M: This is a staff of roughly thirty to thirty-five people. But I think

it shows here that not only the Secretary was aware of the need of better source information, but also the Congress was aware of the need of better source information, and recommended to the Secretary to undertake such a study in order that they have a better viewpoint, understanding of this whole research complex of the department and the states.

B: What were the circumstances of your appointment to head this staff, sir?

M: I had come into the department and had been in the general field of utilization research, that is developing new products from agriculture commodities. I had been at the Western Utilization Research Laboratory for about fourteen years and had worked up there as a division director. Following that I was appointed director of the Northern Regional Research Laboratory at Peoria, Illinois, which is a laboratory of about 500 personnel. I was director of that laboratory for five years. In 1959 I was requested by Dr. [Byron T.] Shaw, at that time Agriculture Research Administrator to come into Washington as an Assistant Administrator to the Agriculture Research Service. I worked under Dr. George W. Irving who at that time was Deputy Administrator for Utilization Research in the Agriculture Research Service. My job in that capacity was to head the research programming evaluation of the four regional research laboratories. I then continued in that position from '59 to '65; at that time Dr. Brady who was Director of Science and Education asked me to come over into this particular position.

B: Then it was Dr. Brady who appointed you?

M: I was appointed by Secretary Freeman.

B: On Dr. Brady's recommendation?

M: On recommendations--that is correct.

B: Have you ever met or had any direct contact with either President Kennedy or President Johnson?

M: No, sir.

B: In the normal course of things--

M: I have attended meetings where they've spoken and the like, but at the time I have had no particular direct contact.

B: From your vantage point here in a staff which, I suppose, sees pretty much everything that's going on in the Department of Agriculture, what would you say has been in the Kennedy and Johnson years the main emphasis in the department--what areas, what projects have been particularly important?

M: Well, I haven't, of course, been closely associated with any of the department's activities with the exception of the research. I would stay from the research standpoint the so-called long-range study in which I've been directly involved since practically the first week that I came into this position, and working closely with the states. I think the support which the Secretary and the Johnson administration has provided for encouragement in this area of closer relationships with the states and more objective planning and projecting the needs for agricultureal research based on what are needs nationwide and world-wide will be.

B: By "states," you mean specifically the experiment stations and I assume therefore the land grant colleges?

M: That is correct. I think it might be of interest to give you a little background of what we've been doing in this area. President Johnson

two years ago in his budget report to the Congress referred to this particular study. Following the Senate subcommittee's recommendation to the Secretary to carry out such a study, this was done jointly by the Secretary and the land grant college group through the executive committee of the Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges. They in turn then each appointed six individuals to represent the two groups. I was appointed as co-chairman representing the Department of Agriculture. Dr. George M. Browning, who at that time was associate director of the Iowa State Experiment Station, was the co-chairman representing the state people. This group of twelve individuals then carried out this so-called long-range study which then was published in 1966 as a national program of research for agriculture. This was accepted by the department and by the states and has become sort of the recognized guildeline for future research for the next decade by the department and the states.

B: Does that set out the areas in which research will be conducted?

M: That is right. This did a number of things. This set out the goals of agricultural research which were some nine in number. We then took an inventory of research, which inventoried the department's research, the states research and through the National Academy of Science, industry research in the agricultural area.

B: Do you get involved in such things as preventing or trying to avoid duplication of research?

M: That is correct, and this is why we need an inventory of research so that we know what is going on. And with the current research information system which is an automated system, starting the first of January we can quiz this system and can provide information for

all research in the states and the department in the agricultural field. For example, if a corn breeder at the Iowa Experiment Station or an industrial company, say a hybrid seed company, wants to know what research is being done on corn breeding, we can quiz this system for corn breeding and the system will automatically print out the information such as the individual projects, the location, the senior scientific leaders, the title of the research project, the objective of the research project, the plan of work, an annual report of the research, and the publications coming out of this. So, from this we have an annual inventory. This is brought up to date on an annual basis, and we for the first time now have this type of information which was not readily available heretofore.

B: Is this information available to anyone, say, for example a private citizen?

M: It will be. We haven't worked out as of now just how we will carry this out from the standpoint of charges, because of course it costs money to do this. But after it's on stream, this will be made available some way or other.

B: Then I assume this is designed to be a permanent and continuing project?

M: That is correct. And this so-called system is a part of the research planning development and evaluation staff function in the documentation and reporting field.

B: Is it being used effectively?

M: It's being used very effectively. In the follow-up of this long-range study, one of the recommendations was to go into depth into these

various areas. What we have done--we took the ninety-one research problem areas which were decided that they were the areas of importance in the future. These were divided into thirty-two areas, and task forces were appointed by the department and the states, [with] cooperation [of] industry. These thirty-two task forces now will complete their work by the end of this year. There will be then reports from each of these. They are on some seventeen commodities such as task force on beef, swine, poultry, dairy, soybeans, corn and grain sorghums, wheat and other small grains; and in such areas as farm labor and management, marketing, pollution, remote sensing, weather modification. There are thirty-two of these, and each has been worked up by experts in these fields.

B: One of those--remote sensing, I think, probably needs some explanation.

M: Well, remote sensing is taking a look at areas of our environment, say, from afar. Now, from afar can mean from, say, an airplane--for example, taking a look at, say, what are crops, or a soil survey. This is helpful, of course, in our crop reporting service, in our soil surveys, in our forest fire detection work, such things as snow packs in the mountains. And of course this is now being used extensively in our satellite program. And so this is an area which we think has great possibilities and potential for getting not only more detailed information, but also more timely information because this can be tied back to computers and get a more timely [report]. For example, where we have our present reporting system, it's pretty much dependent on individual farmer's reporting.

B: Do these research projects include sociological projects, along the line of the Secretary's emphasis on rural-urban--?

M: That is correct. And in this long-range study the recommendations are for great emphasis in the areas of what we call "people oriented," such as consumer health, nutrition and well-being, to raise the level of living of rural people, improvement of community services, and environment. And in the past three or four years where our research programs have not increased appreciably, particularly in light of increased costs of operation, these are the areas which have received the greatest support and this has been through the Secretary's great interest in these particular areas which, heretofore, of course, have not received the emphasis that have the production areas which has historically been the responsibility of the department.

B: Is it correct to say that that's clearly one of the emphasis of Secretary Freeman's?

M: Yes. That has been indicated many times. I might indicate to you here in the President's budget presentation of January 1967, in referring to the planning, programming, budgeting system which was initiated federal-wide. They used several examples here, about five examples, of progress in this area. And for agriculture, in his budget message he stated, and I quote, "On the basis of a long-range study conducted by the Department of Agriculture and the land grant universities, a new set of priorities for agricultural research has been established. Increasing emphasis is being given to research on improvement of nutrition and health, efficient low-cost housing, improved community services, and other means which can help directly in raising the level of rural living."

B: Does your staff here also get involved in coordination among departments of the government, or do you stay strictly within the Department of

Agriculture?

M: No. We coordinate between. This is done, of course, at different levels through the Office of Science and Technology; the Director of Science and Education is a member of the Federal Council of Science and Technology. And of course as a staff, we furnish him backstop material for his participation in that area. We also serve as members on many of the committees set up by the Federal Council on Science and Technology. We also participate in such areas as pollution programs which are federal-wide.

B: Do you find free and easy cooperation among the several departments?

M: Yes. I think this has been improved over the last several years because mechanisms are there to do it. For example, in the remote sensing area we work very closely with NASA and the Department of Interior.

B: What sort of mechanisms exist, sir?

M: There are generally committees that come down from, say, through the Federal Council, and then subcommittee structures where you get down to the working level.

B: Are you also involved in any activity with other nations?

M: Yes, through the OECD, the Organization of Economic Cooperative Development. There is an interest, by the way, by OECD in this currect research information system. As a matter of fact, Mr. [James] Turnbull on my staff who directs that, spent [some time] at their request at one of their meetings last year on this, looking forward to possibly an international information retrieval system.

B: Do you find that recently, that is, within the last four or five years our involvement overseas, particularly in Viet Nam, has caused

increasing interest in this kind of thing?

M: I believe so. We have, of course, research organizations here in the department that have been directly involved in furnishing scientists to aid in the South Viet Nam agricultural situation, so we have given much thought to what research can do in the self-help field particularly in these countries. And I think the record, for example, such as in Kenya--improving their corn and their grain sorghum production in recent years has paid off handsomely. Of course, we've been involved with the research foundations such as Rockefeller and Ford, and with the AID organization in the development of better rice varieties and wheat varieties which are currently having a very considerable impact in the food situation of these developing countries.

B: In your activity in coordinating research, particularly on the domestic level, how do you keep people from duplicating research? Say, for example, two different experiment stations or colleges are working on identically the same project and the department believes it would be more efficient for only one to be doing it--exactly how do you manage that situation?

M: I don't think we can say that any two experiment stations are working on identical projects. Sometimes it may look as if they are, but we're quite certain that they're not. There may be some that are fairly close to each other. But we have developed recently, I think, quite good ways of doing this.

In the first place, these thirty-two task forces that I have referred to--we have made available to each of these task forces in their particular areas all of the research being done at the

fifty-three stations and the department agencies in these fields.

Secondly, during the last year the state experiment stations have appointed full-time regional directors to coordinate research within their regions and also that with the department. There are four of these individuals representing the North Central experiment stations, the Northeast experiment stations, the Southern, and the Western. These are full-time directors who were formerly in key positions. The North Central director is Dr. George M. Browing, who was formerly associate director of the Iowa station and co-chaired this long-range study with me. Representing the West is Dr. Mark Buchanan, who was formerly director of the Washington State experiment station. Representing the South, Dr. Louis Hawkins, formerly director of the Oklahoma experiment station. Representing the Northeast, Dr. Henry Fortman, formerly assistant director of the Pennsylvania State experiment station, and also a member of this long-range study committee. These four regional directors are full-time individuals coordinating their respective regional state experimental station researches. They are very familiar with it; they meet with them all the time; they are in here working with my organization practically on a weekly basis.

Also, following this long-range study, there is a subcommittee of the Agriculture Research Planning Committee which is one of the national advisory committees for the department, which is called the Subcommittee of Research Operations,and Facilities. This subcommittee is composed of the four regional research directors of the state experiment stations, the research administrators of the department, and myself, as well as representatives of the experiment station

Committee on Organization and Policy. We are working on the coordination of the state and department research, taking a look at not only what the long-range study has proposed, but what these thirty-two task forces have proposed. And going back through the individual state experiment station directors and our research administrators, we are now coming up with projections which will really amount to an updated, long-range study, much more in detail, and looking at possible places where there may be duplication and recommending areas that need increased effort, but not only where the effort is needed but where it should carried out. Who can do it best? Whether the department can do it better than the states, or the states can do it better than the department, or an individual state within a region can do it best.

In addition, twenty-five percent of the research funds furnished by the department to the state experiment stations go into what's known as regional research projects. These again are areas of research where two or more states feel that they can do a better job by pooling not only these regional research funds provided by the department, but by using state funds also, and our department people working in these regions are keyed in to these regional projects in joint planning and carrying out the research of a regional nature.

B: Is the use of regional projects as opposed to those strictly within state lines a fairly new development?

M: I think it's relatively new. I believe it has been probably eight or ten years--I don't know just when this came into being. It came about, of course, through the responsibility of the states--has been

first for their state and local problems. It's recognized, however, that there are regional problems such as, for example, swine-breeding. Well, in swine-breeding you have problems, say, in Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, and Nebraska, but they are comparable and somewhat similar so they have a regional swine-breeding project which is to coordinate and make the best use of the funds, both federal and department, in the field of swine-breeding.

B: Plus those things that involve geography--watersheds, pollution, that sort of thing.

M: That is right.

B: Do you and the people with whom you work at the state level feel that the financing for this kind of research activity is adequate?

M: We have indicated here and have proposed a projected increase over our '66 base, which would be an increase of about--in ten years, which we think would be to the public's advantage--an increase of roughly 76-percent of what we call "scientist man-years". In this long-range study, we have projected this under these nine goals, and it varies in emphasis, with greater emphasis in the so-called sociological fields. We believe that agricultural research has paid off handsomely in the hundred years of its activity in the department and the states, [and] that it continues to pay off. For example, today less than 18-percent of disposable income goes into the purchase of foods as against even in the 1950's, this was roughly 25-percent. So we probably are fed the best with wholesome food and varieties in amounts and quality, than any country in the world. And we believe though that you have to maintain research to even keep even with the board, that our increased productivity in recent years has not been

too great, and to continue to provide the food for not only this nation, but also for our export markets and for the developing countries we need to keep a real viable agricultural research organization.

B: I was wondering if those people involved in agriculture ever kind of got the feeling that they were being left behind by the national concern with urban affairs?

M: I think we have felt this to some extent. Well, to give you an example: In 1940 the department's research represented 40-percent of the federal research appropriations. At the time the Department received about $75,000,000. At the present time the research and development of the United States is roughly $16,000,000,000. The Department's part of that today runs about one and six-tenths percent, although it again has increased several-fold. It currently is roughly, say--the Department's research itself and what we furnish the states roughly is $225,000,000.

B: An increase in absolute monetary terms, but a distinct decrease in percentage of the total?

M: Oh, yes, by far. As I say, in 1940 this was 40 percent of the total whereas now it's in the order of one and six to one and seven-tenths percent. However, we are real proud of what we've done, and this study here was an attempt to lay out what we see as the goals, what it will take to reach those goals research-wise in the next decade.

B: Does your staff ever get involved in legislative drafting?

M: Yes, that is one of the functions of the staff. On research bills that are before Congress, that deal with research, they are referred here of course to the department, and they in turn are referred to

the Director of Science and Education for response to those.

B: Do you also get involved in other bills that pertain to agriculture but not specifically to research--for example, the Agricultural Act of '65, say, or a major bill like that?

M: My staff is such that it would not be directly involved. Of course, the Director of Science and Education, as a member of the Secretary's top staff, is involved just like the other assistant secretaries.

B: Do you get many calls for research help from congressional committees?

M: Research help in what respect?

B: If a congressional committee is dealing with an agricultural problem and wants information on it, do they come to you?

M: Oh, yes. This comes either direct or through the department, and we serve as a staff to provide that information. For example, if a congressman wants to know what research is being done on cotton or soybeans, we furnish that to him, not only on a national basis but if he wants it on a state basis and broken down in, say, production research, marketing research, processing research.

B: Do you ever get involved in what I guess amounts to pure politics? For example, a congressman wanting to know why the experiment station of his state isn't getting as many research grants as the experiment station in a neighboring state?

M: Not directly in that. We furnish information. We furnish on a quarterly basis to both the House and the Senate a report on all contracts and grants in research that have been let for that quarter. It provides not only the amount, but the receiving agency, the additional information on the basis on which that contract or grant was let.

B: To move into the area of administration and personnel, do you find it

difficult or easy to get adequate personnel for your staff?

M: It depends, I think, in what areas. Just to give you an example, I don't think we've had too much difficulty in getting good people in our top positions. In the current research information service group, we have--this is an automated system where we have several typists and people of that type. We have some difficulty in keeping those because there's a very considerable turnover, as there are in all agencies, I'm sure. But getting good personnel is always a problem, but we still maintain high standards here, and I don't think you gain anything by hiring people that can't do the job.

B: Are the salary levels a problem? Is that the reason why you can get good top people and have a turnover?

M: No, I think in the past several years here our salaries have gone up. And that's especially true in the lower echelons. I think we have more of a problem in the real top echelons, in the super grades where we have a ceiling today, but of course most of these people in those jobs in research have been career people and they are, I think, as much or more interested in the work they're doing than probably they are their salaries, although they're still interested in the salaries.

B: Is the morale in the Department of Agriculture good these days?

M: In the research phase I think it's excellent, and that's the only phase I'm really closely associated with. You see, I am only indirectly associated to the bench scientists. I'm sure that as you come up with retrenchments, so-called, as we have in the present situation, it's bound to have some effect on morale. I don't think it has been serious, from where I see it.

B: Retrenchment--this means the cut-back in--?

M: That's right. Such as you get cut back in your personnel ceilings, you have cut-backs such as the 1969 cut-back. This does not allow you to replace certain vacancies that occur, and that's bound, I think, to have some effect on morale.

B: This may be an almost unanswerable question, sir. You've been in the Department of Agriculture since Roosevelt was President and through several Presidents now. The question is--does it really make much difference who is the President? That is, does the Department of Agriculture sort of go along in its own path regardless of changes in administration, or can or does the President really make a difference?

M: I'm sure it makes a difference from the overall standpoint. The so-called "action" programs. It probably has lesser effect on the research, which is I think not as closely politically oriented as the department's action programs. But the general backstopping that you get from the administration has very considerable to do with the research appropriations, because that's reflected through the Bureau of the Budget which you work closely with in developing research budgets.

B: Support from the administration, I suppose, would depend mostly upon the caliber and the strength of the Secretary?

M: I would think that is the case. I think also in this new planning, programming, budgeting system which is federal-wide, research is being evaluated and considered along with the other programs in a particular area, and being looked at much more closely during the last two or three years than it has heretofore. And I think this is good. I think research has to stand on its own merits just like the Extension Service or an action program that has to do with, oh, such as housing

or soil and water conservation--any of these programs.

B: In that sort of thing, do you find the people who control budgets, including Congress, making a distinction between basic research and applied research and being less favorable to basic research?

M: I don't see too much of that. My general observation has been that the Congress is interested in results, and how you go about to get those results are pretty well left up to the research organizations. And that is true at the department level. The department here is very much interested in basic research to see that the department carries its full share of providing the basic knowledge which is needed in the scientific field, and Secretary Freeman has done that. But when it comes down to where we take a look at priorities for funding then we think in terms of, say, such as diets and nutrition, health related research, pollution, areas such as those, then we assume that the research administrators know how much basic research is necessary to provide the applied research with the proper backstop. For the information to make this an effective research program.

B: Sir, we're close to your next appointment. Is there anything that we have not covered that we should have?

M: I don't think of anything. I would say that I think it's recognized in the department, in the Bureau of the Budget, by the state agriculture experiment station organization, that there has been more coordination, more cooperative planning and looking ahead to the future with a wholehearted cooperative attitude during this past few years than I've seen heretofore. I think we are getting set up to do a better job, a more effective job, than we've been doing.

B: Thank you very much, sir.

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By W. D. Maclay

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