

June 12, 1967

Mr. Gerard Piel
Scientific American
415 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Piel:

The National Academy has just issued the proceedings of its symposium on "Prospects of the World Food Supply".

It occurred to me that the Scientific American could perform an even more effective public service by dedicating some future issue to this subject, and doing an even better job of the systematic analysis of the fundamental problems. I have in mind a consideration of the planning for resource allocation over the next 50 to 100 years. ^{The} ~~Our~~ projection should then take into account such fundamental questions as the utility of agriculture compared to industrial techniques for conversion of raw materials into edibles; the fascinating economic issues that were raised by Schultz in the Academy symposium; what kind of agricultural product would reflect the optimum use of planetary resources, given some imaginative exploitation of primary fixed carbon by industrial processes.

There are of course many equally cogent issues that belong to the behavioral rather than the natural sciences.

My own perplexity stems from the consideration that it is obviously inefficient to devote human labor to an agriculture primarily devoted to carbon fixation. We already have ample energy resources in the form of fossil fuels, and nuclear energy to accomplish this task in ways that must be more efficient than the current emphasis on cereals. And there is no doubt that we will develop the technology to solve the practical issues of converting cheap carbon into calories, and protein too. What then are the crops that will still be in urgent demand for their special organic content and texture some fifty years hence?

This is probably the most fundamental technological decision that we face in the world today, since we are under such severe stress to solve the world food problem. I can think of few vehicles that would be more effective in outlining the more fundamental issues to the scientifically competent public than the use of a special number of your magazine for this purpose.

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I am vehemently not volunteering to be a special editor for such a publication, and I am sure you will have no difficulty in thinking of a number of names who would do an excellent job of it. The one that comes to my mind most readily is Harrison Brown.

Cordially,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics