

The Future of Agriculture as Viewed by a Pioneer

D. W. Brooks
Chairman of the Board
Gold Kist, Inc.
Atlanta, Georgia

*Introduction by Doctor Anderson
Dean, College of Veterinary Medicine
University of Georgia*



The task that was assigned to me, and it is a very pleasant experience, is that of introducing our featured speaker for the day and again, as somebody has alluded to, this gentleman really needs no introduction and for a variety of reasons. One of the biggest ones is just his personality and his contributions to agriculture over the years. The other reason is that in your AABP newsletter in October his pedigree is given on the first page which covers the whole first page, but it is a real pleasure for me to introduce Mr. D. W. Brooks. He received both a bachelor of science and a master of sciences degree in agriculture from the University of Georgia. He holds an LLD degree from Emory University. He taught at the University of Georgia for awhile and then had a distinguished career for 35 years as the general manager of the cotton producers association now known as Gold Kist. He's chairman of the board of Gold Kist. He's chairman of the board of the Cotton States Mutual Insurance Company in Atlanta, and chairman of the board of the Cotton States Life and Health Insurance Company. I just want to hit on a few of the highlights in his vitae. He has been named by Progressive Farmer as the man of the year in agriculture in Georgia, and man of the year in agriculture in the South in the past. He has been named by several Presidents to serve on a variety of advisory boards. President Truman appointed him to the National Advisory Board on Mobilization Policy. President Eisenhower had him on the National Agricultural Advisory Commission. He was appointed by President Kennedy to the National Agricultural Advisory Commission. Under President Johnson he served on several advisory commissions. He is a member of the board of governors of the Agricultural Hall of Fame in Kansas City. He is a member of the Kiwanis Club. He is a director of a number of large businesses and foundations. He is a trustee of about six universities. He is a very active lay leader in the Methodist church. He was recently elected to the Agricultural Hall of Fame by the University of Georgia. He was the first living person to be so honored. He received several cooperative statesmanship awards in 1973, and received the distinguished agribusiness award for Georgia Agribusiness Council in 1975. He is truly a pioneer and a leader in agriculture and I think it very fitting at this time to introduce Mr. D. W. Brooks and his topic, "The Future of Agriculture as Viewed by a Pioneer."

MR. BROOKS: Thank you.

One of the problems about an introduction is that you have to be rather careful that you don't inhale some of these things people say kindly about you. When I came in I went down to the exhibit hall first and I heard some strange language down there. It was sort of the English language, but had a sort of a peculiar twang to it, and I began to realize that all these people weren't from Georgia. Some of them evidently had gotten across the line and on the other side, so I thought I should at least mention that. You see many years ago—I'm a pioneer they say here—many years ago we were rather careful about how many Yankees we let into this area. One time a bunch came through here and when they got through there wasn't much left! They got so careless with fire that, brother, they just about did us in. So for a long period of time we were very careful, but we finally began to catch on. You see for a long time we had lots of Yankees coming through here going to Florida. They had to stop along these rural towns in order to get gas, etc., and we gradually found out that if we really handled the situation right we could pick them a whole lot better than we could pick cotton, so we just started picking Yankees, and we've almost gone out of the cotton business and gone into the Yankee pickin' business. Now to show you how you can tell about how a fellow talks, I think one of the funniest instances that I ever saw or heard was at an international meeting. Through the years, I've gone to a lot of these international meetings. We have operations over most of the world and we're involved in a number of places of agriculture; consequently, I've been involved in a



number of international meetings. One they had in Washington a number of years ago when Freeman was Secretary of Agriculture and John Duncan from Georgia—a number of you will know him—was Assistant Secretary. Don was a great person so we opened the meeting that morning and Freeman was supposed to come over and welcome the group from all over the world, but something happened and he couldn't come, so he sent John. John got up with his Georgia English and gave them a welcome. He got a little started and one of these clip Englishmen jumped up and said—"Sir, one moment. I have turned to all the languages that I have here and I cannot understand. Would you please tell what language you are speaking?" Well that sort of broke John up and he said, "Well, I'm speaking South Georgia English." So I want to say as you hear us say in the South, we can also hear you. It sort of varies a little bit. But it's great to have all of you here.

Now my assignment today is to talk about the future of agriculture from the viewpoint of a pioneer. I think if you are going to talk about the future you'll have to take at least one look backwards and see where we were a few years ago, and in that way we can plot to some extent the direction in which we are going. I want to describe to you some of the situations that we had in this area. As I mentioned, I went to the College of Agriculture. It looked rather foolish in a way. When all of my brothers, who were reared on a farm in northeast Georgia, went to the university, all they wanted to do was to take some studies to get off the farm. The last thing they wanted to do was to get back. They had already had all they needed from then on. I was younger and foolish so I took agriculture. I got over there and I began to study economics. The first thing that I learned was that we were the lowest of all the economic groups of the nation. Agriculture in this area was the bottom. Our income was the lowest. I began to worry about how smart my father was to try to get up some money to send me and how smart I was to go to an agricultural college in order to get to the bottom of the economic ladder. It looked like I was going backward instead of forward. So, consequently, it gave me great concern, and I began to study agricultural economics along with agricultural science. Our per capita income in this state went down in 1932 to \$72 for income on farms in the state of Georgia and that included the food that was eaten off of the farm and the rent on the houses, such as they had, that they lived in. Now you've got to visualize that. It's almost impossible unless you lived in the middle of it. So, consequently, it was that year I decided to leave the university in order to organize. First, I used the name "cotton" because that was a big name down here, but the whole idea was that we were going to try to turn agriculture back up because of the fact that we were in a tremendous poverty situation. We were the number one economic problem of the nation, and, of course, agriculture was the cause of it. I got an economist to make some studies for me out in the

rural areas where we had our numbers. He came back and walked into my office and he said, "Mr. Brooks, you've got the greatest group of scientists in the world." I said, "How's that?" He said, "They can just sit in their houses and study geology through the floor in the daytime, and astronomy through the roof at night." So that was about the kind of living conditions that we had with the per capita income of \$72. We had just as much poverty as we have in many parts of the world today. For 40 years I've been over most of this world rather regularly. I have gone over, in fact, all of it. I've seen all the good and all the bad in many of these countries. Consequently, sometimes when I have been in Asia or Africa or South America where the situations are rather desperate, people say looks like we'll make it. Well, I said I lived in an area where we had this situation and I have seen poverty largely eliminated, not altogether, off the farms, but have come so far that we have another world as far as agriculture in concerned. What happened is that we had research which you have been talking about and we finally got this research through to the farmers. Frankly, that was one of my ambitions and one of my desires in setting up what is now Gold Kist, which is a farmers' cooperative and covers a wide variety of operations. We pretty well cover the field.

Consequently, the whole idea was to attack poverty and low income in agriculture because that was the greatest need that we had in this part of the world. Now, if we were going to do that, we had to use the colleges and the experiment station. We had to use research and so we began to take this research and this new knowledge that we had in agricultural science and it's not as old as you might think. Agricultural science has been developed largely in the last 50 years and so, consequently, we had to move that through to the farmer immediately. Our farmers were 20 to 30 years behind in putting into actual operation the knowledge that we had. When you think back into that kind of a situation from where we came and then you look where you are today, you have to realize that it is unbelievable, it is another world. **If I could have put on the screens this morning the living conditions that we had in Georgia 50 years ago, and then I could put up what we have today, you would say it was not even the same country—it was an entirely different country, yet it is the same country because agriculture has made that kind of progress. It is almost unbelievable.** In order to take a look at the future of agriculture, you've got to take a look at where we are in the world now, and the needs of the world. As I said, we had to sell our products, we wanted to sell them all over the world. I've spent 40 years traveling all over the world and developing markets for our products throughout the world. In doing that I have had a chance to study agriculture and look at all these countries of the world and see what is happening to them. Then I come back and see what we have done and I realize that the hopes for the world are right here in this country with the farmers. That is the hope to keep them from star-

ving to death. I had to make a talk not long ago to the international meeting of the Kiwanis group. I talked to them on world hunger because that is the thing that's been disturbing lots of people. I tried to go back and develop with them, just trying to emphasize the importance that agriculture had to play in this country. For example, all the time in the history of mankind we never did increase population on this earth more than 3/10 of 1% for thousands of years. Consequently, it took us until 1830 to have a billion people on this earth. But suddenly we began to learn something about medicine. We began to learn something about disease and, consequently, we began to save lives, just like you've saved lives of livestock here. We began to save lives and the population suddenly began to move up. In 95 years we produced the next billion. From 1925 to 1960, or 35 years, we produced the third billion, and somewhere on this earth, this year, we're going to have the fourth billion living human person. That's in the last 15 years. If you take that and project it and look through, I tried to work trying to project it on out, and I began to realize that it is unbelievable what has happened now because medicine has come into this world to save people.

To give you an example, since Mexico is close by, I made a study of it. If Mexico increases its population as fast right on through to 2020 as it is going now, they'll have 800 million people. Mexico is mostly mountainous country and they don't have too much land really to cultivate; and when you look at it, it is an impossible situation.

I began to study what was happening to the people of the world regarding food. I found, for example, in 1973 and 1974, we fed some American food to more than 900 million people on this earth. In other words, except for the exports of food out of this country, one fourth of the people of the world would have gone hungry or died. One out of every four people on this earth in the last two years has had American food in their diet. Consequently, when I looked at those figures, I looked back from where we came, I look where we are, I look where we're going from the population viewpoint, then I begin to realize that we might be closer to a very crisis situation than we ever dreamed we could possibly be. I think we have enough momentum for 10 more years; we might make it in 2000. But something has got to give. I plotted this curve on to 2100 and found we would have one square yard per person on earth. Something has got to give on down the road. We've got a problem of saving everything that we can eat. Our research and our development has been greater in poultry than it has been in cattle, but on the other hand, we started a few years ago in cattle. We are in the middle of it now. We are doing everything we can to take the work of the colleges of agriculture and the experiment stations and move it forward as fast as possible.

We have a whole room full of veterinarians at Gold Kist, and we realize we could not make it if we did not have veterinarians. We would be dead if we did not

have them. So we began to hire them out of the colleges. When we started in poultry, in broilers for example, it took 4½ to 6 lbs. of feed to make one pound of meat. With research and control of diseases today, if it takes more than two pounds of feed to produce a pound of meat, we have a bad operation. It has to be two pounds or under or we do not have a good operation. That's all happened in 20 years.

It used to take us at least 14 to 16 weeks to produce a three-pound bird. We can produce a three-pound bird in about six weeks. We can produce a four-pound bird in about seven to eight weeks. In a 20-year period it is almost unbelievable. It is one of the most fabulous stories in agriculture. I served on the War Mobilization Board during the war and we would have lots of problems to come to that board. Among other problems we had was the labor group, who felt they were mistreated and wanted to strike every once in awhile but we could not let them strike during the war.

I've been agricultural advisor to four Presidents. I started back with Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson. I sat in on all these meetings where we were trying to determine which direction we ought to go in agriculture.

Some of the crises that we get into are government crises and the manner in which the government handles them determines whether we come out of them quickly or without too much damage. I'm saying that to lead up to the next one. I think that one was handled right because we pulled out of it. We didn't build up lots and we didn't do the wrong thing.

When I was advisor to Phase 2 at the White House when Richard Nixon was President, he did not come into the meeting. He sent the word out he had gotten tied up and could not come in. Well, I had been on the War Mobilization Board and on the board during the Korean conflict when we tried to put a ceiling price on all farm commodities. Consequently, when we sat down in this meeting at the White House this time I said, "I'm here to represent agriculture as I understand it. I just want to ask one question and I'll get out of the way." (They had somebody representing bankers, oil, manufacturing and all the different groups.) I said, "I'll get out if you'll just give one answer to one question." "All right, what is it?" I said, "I want to know if there is anybody in this administration who thinks he can successfully put a ceiling price on raw farm commodities? I would like to know it now because, if so, I would like to have the rest of this day and most of tomorrow to explain just a few of the problems involved—not all of them, just a few of them." Some of the them began to grin. The Secretary of the Treasury was sitting at the end of the table and he said, "No, Mr. Brooks, I think we understand the economics of this and we understand there are some problems involved." The Secretary of Agriculture and the Chief Economic Advisor agreed. I said, "Do I understand that I have a commitment here that this administration is not going to make the same mistake that many administrations in the past

have made, thinking you can put a ceiling on all farm commodities?" They said that was right. I had said all I wanted to say and let the bankers and all the other economic groups have their say. So we went on through the day of the meeting.

Well, what happened? The Russians bought the wheat, and I want to say to you that was not the whole cause of the jump in the price at all. One of the main reasons was that the bottom fell out of the value of the dollar. Any of you who understand agricultural economics worldwide, and we have to deal every minute selling all over the world, will know that the dollar is nothing but a commodity like wheat, or corn, or soybeans. If the value of that dollar goes down, it will buy less soybeans, less wheat, and less corn and their price will have to go up in relation to the dollar. The price went way up. So what happened? Everybody started screaming and, of course, I knew the crisis was on. I called Mr. Earl Butz three or four times asking whether we were going to hold the line. He thought so. But they all screamed. What happened is WHAM—the President slapped a ceiling on beef, pork, and chicken and stopped the exports to Japan. Then everything made terrible economic problems. I have made a careful study and I can show you, for 600 years governments have been trying to control the price of food. They've never been able to do it successfully with all farm commodities, never in the history of mankind. But they slapped it on. It was not very long until it was apparent that that was wrong. The farmers started grinding the chickens, they took their bred sows to the packing plants, and I can show you hundreds of farmers in this area that have never gone back in. That is one of your problems now. They did not put them back in. They took them and sold them, and then immediately realized they were not winning that way. You're not getting more meat produced, you are getting less. They called us back to the White House. They said it's beginning to look like this is not going to work. I noticed all of them looking at me; they thought I was going to blow the roof off of the White House, but I did not say anything because I had had a firm commitment that they would not do it. They said, "We're going to take the ceiling off of pork and chickens now." "What about beef?" I said. They thought it might go on up. I said "who thinks that?" They did. I knew who was thinking but I could not get them to say it. I indicated I didn't think anybody who understands economics of beef could make such a statement. We have got plenty of beef really, and the only shortage of beef was caused by the White House. I said you can't buy a freezer anywhere in this country today because every housewife that could get one, has bought it and has it full of beef. You created the crisis, and now you are making the farmer believe that he has something that is valuable, and he is going to hold cattle. When he starts holding them, he is going to add to this thing and we are going to get into worse shape. That is not the economics of beef. The economics of beef is that we would have enough beef if the government would

get out of the way and quit messing with it. You're going to mess up the beef cattleman the way you're going to break him. I soon found out I was talking to the wind because, evidently, Nixon had told them that's what they had to do, although all the top people were sitting there. The January 1st estimate will begin to pull down. If it does we're beginning to get the cycle on the downbeat again and we'll get some pull back in beef. At least the beef cattleman will have a chance to maybe pay some of his debts. It was a terrible economic blow. So I'm saying to you we've got to keep somebody sitting in Washington always who can have some understanding of what agricultural economics is all about because, if we don't, we are going to keep making terrible blunders. I don't think we can keep making blunders. But I'm beginning to see now that this situation of population is becoming so serious that we do not have the margin of error anymore. In other words, we passed through 12 months of a very close situation. For a hundred years now we have had a 100 to 125-day surplus of food; that is, we have that much above what we had to have in the world. We saw 12 months in which it went down to about 25 days. You cannot run it that close and have any feeling at all that you are going to survive. In other words, it won't take but one or two bobbles to eat up that 25-day period. We don't have the leeway now to make these terrible economic mistakes in government. We just cannot feel privileged any longer because, if we do, we are going to starve some people to death in this world.

I know a good many of you work with milk and milk cattle. Milk, of course, has been a very touchy thing during this whole deal. It is very touchy. I noticed the newspapers are so sensitive (and I guess consumers too are sensitive to milk prices) that every time the price of milk goes up a penny a quart in this area, you would think every man, woman, and child was going to starve to death the next day. It is just unbelievable. It got so bad here one time, I called them up and I said why don't you fellows come up here and let's go talk with the newspapers, because they have no understanding of this problem and they are giving us fits. We did. We went to talk with the managing editor of a paper and I took with me all of the figures showing the cost of milk in relation to income of people who make it. The cost of milk has not gone up even half as fast as income, so that from the viewpoint of out-of-pocket cost, milk was getting cheaper as far as income was concerned. But that did not make any impression. But they at least said this is the first time we've ever seen anything like that and we're going to calm this thing. We're going to quit this deal. I say to you that we've had all sorts of other problems. This cholesterol problem, if you eat eggs or drink milk, you're doomed. My son, who is a doctor, thinks the whole problem from his viewpoint is lack of exercise. He said if you look at it, high living and low working is the trouble. But when this thing all started 10 to 12 years ago, I was in a meeting at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We had a fellow from this

state, Harry Brown, who had been Assistant Secretary of Agriculture at one time, who at that time was the president of the Farm Bureau here in Georgia. Well, some of us went up there to a meeting, so this problem came up in the Department of Agriculture. Harry at that time was 76 and, after meeting awhile, Harry jumped up and said he would like to be used as Exhibit A. He said he had eaten four eggs every day since he was a youngster and he'd been drinking from half a gallon to a gallon of milk a day and he was 76, and he thought he was in pretty good shape. Now Harry is 88 and still going strong! I talked with him a week or so ago, and he is still eating four eggs and drinking a half a gallon to a gallon of milk every day. But he is out on the farm doing physical work and staying busy. So you fellows are working in some of these fields where we have problems in dealing with the public and we have got to get it over.

Now, of course, beef is a great food. Fortunately, a few years ago some of our research indicated that if youngsters did not have protein, they were not going to develop properly, and for the first time began to put some real emphasis on that. They said if you don't get protein in the early part of your life, you are not only physically handicapped, but you are mentally handicapped. I think that emphasizes the problem that we have with diets. So milk and beef still are necessary things. I know this: to have large beef consumption, you've got to have high incomes and one thing I have observed many times in going from one individual to another has been the fact that, as the economy moves up in the country, the diet moves up also. I know a few of the crises we had about beef, and the price of beef when it was so high. I was in Tokyo and they were selling steaks at \$12 or \$14 apiece and I tell you the Japanese were eating all of them. They had plenty of money. They had just found it; they had been eating fish all their life, and they got some good steaks and they could not stand it. So they were really eating steaks. I have been in Russia working over there with the Minister of Agriculture. Their system is such that you're dead in agriculture. I remember one time having a terrible argument with the Minister of Agriculture in Moscow in which I said to him that if you don't change your system where you take farmers and put them in communes and march them out, and let them work, and march them back—farmers won't farm. Human nature is the same the world over. If you don't let this farmer have something on his own, that he owns and controls and uses his abilities, and uses his labor to produce more and he gets more, the Communist world is going to starve to death. It's the only way you can get production out of agriculture. Well, the Minister argued with me very vehemently in his office where he had his aides, but finally I said I had to leave. He found out we were involved in several phases of agriculture and so walked out of the building with me. When we got outside he said, "I've been arguing with you, Mr. Brooks, very vehemently on systems of agriculture.

But I have to admit there is a whole lot to what you have to say." One thing I pointed out to him was the peculiar things that I saw on the farms of Russia now. You've let these farmers have one cow for their own. I've looked at these cows, and the herd cows that the government owns and I have seen Russian women leading their cows from one blade of grass to another keeping them fat, and I look at those cows and the production of those cows and compared them with ones you tried to put on the commune system. They are about to starve to death! I said you ought to learn something out of that. Furthermore, you are giving these farmers one little plot that they own themselves or that they have control of and isn't it peculiar to you that 53% of all the fruits and vegetables produced in Russia is produced on that one little plot that the farmer has himself. Sooner or later you're going to learn that lesson in economics or you are dead. We have seen that happen. I am saying that we not only need good research and good agriculture, but we need good government throughout the world if we are going to prevent hunger.

It is hard to explain that farmers are supposed to have decent prices. I told one unusual experience that I had several years ago when the price of eggs went up fairly high. My wife was not feeling too well, and so she asked me to go to the grocery store. I went down there and bought them and I got to the checkout counter and then the lady right in front of me was just blowing the roof off about the price of eggs. I just walked up to her and I said, "Lady, I just want to say to you that this is the first time that we poultry producers ever had anything like a fair price for our eggs." That really turned her loose. She started really working me over. To end it all up, she finally stood back and looked me up and down and said, "You don't look like any chicken farmer to me." That was true, but I was representing lots of chicken farmers and I was trying to represent them as best I could.

What I'm saying to you is, if we do not get a better understanding of agriculture in this nation and throughout the world, then we are in grave danger. Two doctors from medical school were having lunch with me and they told some stories that had happened at Emory College. I thought one of them was pretty good. They said that they had a fellow who was quite seriously ill and they had given him sedation. He was nearly out, but not quite, and as they rolled him into the operating room, he heard two of the doctors discussing his case. One of them was saying to the other that he disagreed on the diagnosis of the case. He said this and the patient nearly got up off the operating table, but didn't quite. They rolled him on in and in about another minute this same doctor said to the other one that he was confident that the autopsy was going to prove him correct! Now, you can't make it any worse than that, but that is the shape we're in on some of these problems in agriculture. We have got to deal with them wisely or we are going to be in that shape.