

UPDATE: THE PURPOSE OF CAST

by

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On this pleasant June afternoon when you are all getting ready for committee meetings or a tour of the Animal Science facilities, the purpose of CAST is a pretty dull-sounding topic. But, believe me, the purpose of CAST was not at all a dull topic when the original discussions were going on about what the scientific community could do to meet its responsibilities in the public arena, and, how these responsibilities should be met. At the time these discussions were taking place back in 1969, 1970, and 1971, the participants were sitting on the edge of their chairs. In those days, the country was in the grip of the great environmental frenzy. The environmentalists were having their heyday. The newspapers thought it was great, and they came out with a new horror story almost every day—a modicum of truth in most, but liberally plastered with scientific garbage.

For the most part, members of the scientific community were sitting quietly on the side, knowing full well that the truth was not being told, that science was being misused, but still doing nothing. Now, no one can correct such problems single handedly, and that is one of the reasons most scientists were sitting on the side, doing nothing individually, and leaving it to someone else.

The only way to be effective in such circumstances is to join hands and work at the problem collectively. CAST was established to make this possible. CAST is now an association of twenty-six food and agricultural science societies. It is really the scientific community in food and agriculture.

Three Points of View on CAST

The purpose of CAST is to make known the scientific background that is relevant to current food and

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agricultural issues of national concern. We try to get this information to the key people in the government and public so they will have a sound basis for understanding and decision-making. I look at CAST as a new kind of extension service that is pointed in the direction of decision-makers in the government and the non-agricultural public.

I will say a few words about the purpose of CAST from three points of view: the news media, the scientific societies, and the individual scientist.

The News Media

When we try to explain the purpose of CAST to people outside the scientific community, our principal contact is with the news media. Agricultural journalists seem to find it easy to understand, but many in the consumer press find it more difficult. One of the first things they usually ask is "From where does your money come?" We explain that CAST's financial support comes from its six classes of members, two of which are industry-related—our supporting and sustaining members. But, we go on to explain that CAST is controlled by the scientific societies. The scientific society members have appointed all but four of the more than fifty members of the board of directors, and the individual members have elected the remaining four. No industry-related member has the privilege of placing a representative on the board of directors. No single source of financial support provides as much as 2% of the budget. No work has been done on a contract basis. Membership fees are paid on an unrestricted basis, and the board of directors decides what is done with the money. Task force members are reimbursed for official travel and subsistence expenses on request but receive no honorarium. They contribute their time and talents as a public service. All task force expenses are paid from a general fund made up of all membership fees. No industry scientists are included on task forces when conflict of interest might be charged.

Members of the nonagricultural press seem to find it extraordinarily difficult to understand that, despite the financial support from industrial sources, CAST is not an industry organization. For example, when Eliot Marshall—a journalist who writes for *Science* magazine—was preparing a rather nasty story about CAST early this year, he called me on the telephone

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and asked the usual questions about financial support, and I gave him the usual answers. Then he asked who the individual members are. I said they are almost all scientists. He asked if he could become an individual member, and I said, yes, he could, if he paid his \$10. Then he asked if a farmer could become an individual member, and I said, yes, he could, if he paid his \$10. Marshall's ears must have been tuned to a different frequency than my voice because when his story came out it said that CAST is "an association of industrialists, farmers, and agricultural scientists."

Marshall's difficulty in understanding is surprising because he writes for a magazine sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which one would expect to be accurate and straightforward. His problems are fairly characteristic of journalists who write for the consumer press. They remind me of an experiment one of my graduate students did many years ago when he was trying to reproduce some findings reported in the Russian literature. He treated wheat seed in the way a Russian author had found would make it produce a higher yield. To evaluate the effect, he planted the treated wheat in soil he brought into the greenhouse from the field. A crop came up, but when it headed out my student found he had a crop of oats, not wheat. The oat seed was already present in the soil. The wheat was dead!

In our view, an important reason for the difficulty some of the journalists in the consumer press have in understanding CAST is that they recognize CAST as a source of facts that are being heard—facts they do not like. They, therefore, use their journalistic arts and position in an attempt to discredit CAST, and, in this way, to discredit the scientific information in

CAST publications. Even some of our harshest critics, however, sometimes admit in print that CAST documents are highly regarded in Congress. For example, we have received unintended compliments of this kind in derogatory articles from the Center for Science in the Public Interest, with which most of you are familiar, and from Marian Burros, who writes about food-related matters in "The Washington Post."

Scientific Societies

The scientific societies have a special stake in the purpose of CAST because the scientific societies *are* CAST, and they have decided its purpose. They also decide who participates in CAST task forces. Recommendations for participants are obtained through the scientific societies, whether they are members or not. When a society is a member, though, it puts one or more representatives on the board of directors, and, becomes a partner in developing the operating policies, and, in guiding the activities. Dr. Kemp is your representative for the American Meat Science Association.

Individual Scientists

Individual scientists have a stake in the purpose of CAST because the information that comes out through CAST is developed by individual scientists. Most individual scientists, though, must participate in CAST's activities indirectly—through their \$10 annual individual membership fees, which help to support what CAST does. All of us have a personal moral responsibility to make known to the non-agricultural public the knowledge of our discipline that bears on current issues of public concern.