



'Speak Out For Agriculture'

It's not unusual for a husband and wife to be deeply involved in agriculture. But Woody and Kathy Yerxa, Colusa, Calif., have taken a different approach from most farm couples.

While Woody manages 2,200 acres of wheat and row crops on the farm his father started in 1946, Kathy works as a licensed pest control advisor for the Butte County Rice Growers Association.

Though Kathy's PCA duties take her away from the traditional role of most farm wives, the Yexas (Woody, 31 and Kathy, 27) represent a new generation of agriculturists. Both attended California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, where they received B.S. degrees in agricultural business management.

Together, they're continually working to promote agriculture by

taking an active part of a variety of organizations and causes. They share a deep concern about issues that affect agriculture and the image farmers have in the urban community.

Leadership Role

Last year Woody testified at the pesticide hearings in Sacramento to oppose new regulations that govern application of pesticides designated as restricted materials. The regulations went into effect January 1, 1981, and are one example of government controls he fears may ultimately decrease farm productivity.

A point Yerxa emphasized in his testimony is the cost-benefit ratio. He stresses that increasing production costs put a premium on the judicious use of chemicals and other farm inputs. The new rules add to the already severe

regulations imposed by the state by requiring additional documentation prior to application, he says.

The recently enacted measures are an extra burden, but they can turn into a positive benefit, Yerxa believes. They add proof to the argument that the agricultural industry is adhering to strict guidelines to protect the public interests.

Both Woody and Kathy agree that the pesticide issue is the most important matter in which agriculture as a whole has failed to communicate adequately with the urban community.

According to Woody, advances in chemical technology are one of the few areas that have given growers a chance to keep pace with inflation by boosting production. The introduction of new seed varieties is the other area that he cites as being responsible for recent yield increases.

When it comes to selecting crop production chemicals and farming practices, Woody Yerxa relies on several sources. His father, Charles, is active in the farming operation and also serves as board chairman for the Sunsweet Division of Sun-Diamond Growers of California, a cooperative marketing association headquartered in Stockton.

Woody and Kathy Yerxa believe that the American people are highly objective and will support agricultural issues if given the facts.

Woody also checks with other growers in the area and follows University of California research results. He also consults with his local chemical supplier, Delta Industries, and with a private pest management consultant. And, of course, he draws on the experience that his wife, Kathy, has gained during her six years as a full-time pest control advisor.

Until two years ago, Kathy was employed by an agricultural chemical distributor and worked with a variety of crops. Now that she works for a rice growers association, that crop occupies most of her time. But, she is also called on to make fertilizer and pesticide recommendations for wheat, walnuts and prunes. To Kathy's knowledge, there are only two other women in northern California who are licensed pest control advisors.

Being a woman PCA has been a positive experience, says Kathy. "As with any profession in which you make recommendations, the most important thing is to know the subject," she points out. "Though growers may show some initial skepticism, it quickly disappears when you demonstrate that you're knowledgeable and can make the right decisions."

Optimistic Future

Three years ago Kathy and Woody purchased a 60-acre walnut orchard. They share management responsibilities. They would like to buy more land, but they feel that escalating prices may put a damper on plans for further expansion. However, they're still optimistic about the future of agriculture, and, despite their busy schedules, both are active in a number of organizations.

Kathy belongs to the Chico chapter of California Women for Agriculture and has established a Colusa chapter. Woody is a member of several organizations and serves as director of such groups as the California Tomato Growers Association and Agricultural Leadership Associates. He also takes time to speak out for agriculture whenever the opportunity arises. For example, he has been interviewed on television and has addressed a group of San Francisco Bay Area businessmen.

The Yerxa's efforts on behalf of agriculture have not gone unnoticed. They were recently selected for membership in American Cyanamid's 65 Club™, and were honored at a recognition ceremony in the office of California's Lieutenant Governor, Mike Curb. Established to



Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block (left) chats with Woody and Kathy Yerxa of Colusa, Calif., during festivities celebrating National Agriculture Day in Washington, D.C. The Yexas were among a group of members of the 65 Club Outstanding Farmer Program.

recognize the value and productivity of American agriculture, the 56 Club derives its name from

USDA statistics which show that the average American farmer

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