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# Agriculture marketing study would be useful

EDITORIAL

Backers of the idea of a specialized agricultural industrial park for Sampson county didn't receive a lot of encouragement from the preliminary report of consultants who had been researching the project.

The idea, if it were feasible, would be good for Sampson County. If we could locate the canning factories or the freezer plants right next door to the vegetable fields, certainly there could be some savings in the manufacturing process and it would provide our farmers with a steady market for their products.

Unfortunately, however, food processors operate more or less on a regional basis. Unless they are firms specializing in a particular fruit or vegetable, they tend to require so many different types of products that they have to ship some of them in from a distance.

While the idea of turning Sampson into a center for food processing plants should not be abandoned, it might be a better idea to follow the suggestion of the consultants who recommended a marketing study to find out exactly what markets do exist for local farm products and what new markets might be opened up.

As anyone who has observed truck farming in operation knows, the marketing system under which our farmers sell their produce is not exactly the smoothest one in the world, nor does it afford the farmer any protection whatsoever as far as saleability and pricing of his product.

California farmers have been very successful in marketing their products though the development of co-ops. While the co-ops do not regulate the amount of a certain crop; that may be grown or the prices that are received for the crop, they do help maintain a standard of excellence for the products grown, and through advertising and careful labeling they create buyer awareness of the product.

Farmers are the most independent people in the world and it is hard to get them to agree on anything other than the fact that farming is a tough way to make a living. To organize them into a co-op would take a major effort on the behalf of many people. The first step, of course, would be in determining that there are

potential markets for their products.

There isn't any doubt that Sampson County can produce many more types of produce than it now produces. The question is not whether it can produce additional items, but whether they can be produced at the proper cost and whether there are sufficient markets for them.

It is becoming painfully obvious to many farmers that tobacco cannot maintain its present position as the top money crop in North Carolina. It is just a matter of time before enemies of smoking and tobacco use force Congress to terminate the present tobacco program, including acreage and poundage controls. Once this happens, and it may come sooner than we think, the tobacco program as we know it will be gone forever and what has been an orderly marketing process will degenerate into chaos.

We need to take a very careful look at all of the alternatives to tobacco. Certainly for Sampson County, further development of the produce business would be in order — if some means could be found to provide a better marketing system and a larger demand for our products than now exists.

The farm leaders who are spearheading the investigation into the Ag-Ind park may or may not get their project off the ground. But whether we develop a sizeable new food processing industry or not, we certainly need to look at every possibility to increase our markets and our income from the agricultural products that we can grow so well.

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