

# THE INVISIBLE THREE PERCENT

POLITICIANS know that only three percent of the U.S. population is farming. Concern for farmers is often overshadowed by the more visible issues of crime, civil rights and abortion. However, the invisible three percent in agriculture provides the United States with an unparalleled standard of living.

Many people don't know what farming is today, or the role of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). A recent book asked the question, "What was the fastest growing agency in the federal budget during the 1980s?" The Pentagon? No, it was the USDA. This leads the uninformed to the assumption that the farmer is feeding at the public trough and is a big contributor to the deficit.

I asked 10 reputable economists, "If you were in Congress, would you vote for farm subsidies or not?" Not one gave a direct answer. One said, "Farm programs take income from the middle class and give it to wealthy farmers."

I asked 20 college professors, "What government agency handles food stamps?" Only three out of 20 knew food stamps to be the largest part of USDA's budget—and one of its most controversial.

Evidently, we have done a poor job of educating the public about modern farm complexities, farm economics, the risk involved, the environmental importance and the world picture. The tremendous role of agriculture in today's world demands more education at all levels. The agricultural society must develop an awareness to the issues of global farming and food production, not just for the future farmer, but for the future consumer as well.

We could begin by providing the tools of learning at an early age. Educational materials such as PPI's *Fun with the Plant Nutrient Team* would be a positive step in making the invisible finally visible.

*J. Fiddling Reed*

**BETTER  
CROPS**  
WITH PLANT FOOD

Potash & Phosphate Institute  
Suite 110, 655 Engineering Drive, Norcross, Georgia 30092