

# THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION NETWORK



SINCE JOINING THE EEC, CATALONIA'S AGRICULTURE HAS HAD TO COMPETE WITH THE HIGHLY TECHNIFIED AGRICULTURE OF THE REST OF EUROPE. THIS HAS MADE IT NECESSARY TO ESTABLISH AN ADVICE AND TRAINING NETWORK FOR THE FARMER SO AS TO INCREASE THE PROFITABILITY OF OUR AGRICULTURE AND MAKE IT MORE COMPETITIVE.



JOSEP SANTACANA DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT



**S**cattered around the regions of Catalonia there are 80,000 farms that have to compete with the highly technified agriculture of the rest of the EEC.

A few decades ago, the isolationist Catalan agriculture of the time had to make a constant effort to reach ever higher levels of productivity. Nowadays, with the surplus in European food production, our farmers' prime objective is to reduce production costs as much as possible and achieve a higher added value, as well as to produce crops of a recognizably higher quality. And it is now becoming clearer every day that our priorities must in future include an agricultural development compatible with ecological demands. In any case, from now on, as in the past, what is needed is a decentralized network providing the farmer with advice and training in the technical and financial aspects he needs to understand if his business is to be profitable.

As regards training, the "Departament d'Agricultura, Ramaderia i Pesca" has fourteen Professional Agricultural Training Colleges in different parts of Catalonia, ensuring an adequate preparation of the young farmers who will have to take over responsibility in the fields

from the previous generation. Some of these schools offer general training while others specialize in intensive horticulture or fruit-growing, stock-farming, forestry or complementary activities. While the Professional Training Colleges guarantee the level of education at present needed by the new generations of farmers in all its technical and commercial aspects, this is not enough to help those farmers already in business, nor will it be able to keep today's students abreast of the endless technical developments they can expect to meet with in the future.

For this reason, the "Departament d'Agricultura, Ramaderia i Pesca" has opened a network of regional offices, with experts whose job it is to organize regular short courses for farmers and to advise the farmers of their region on specific points, either on the spot or in the office. This advice could refer to a range of aspects including what kind of irrigation to install, suitable machinery to buy, the best species or varieties to grow, the most suitable type of farmers' association to join, or the cheapest way to get financial backing.

The range of the subject matter covered by the sector's technical and financial assessment calls for increasing special-

ization of the staff responsible for providing it. It also makes it almost impossible to have real specialists in every branch at all the Regional Offices. The solution adopted has consisted in dividing the service into two sections. The Regional Offices are manned by a suitable number of general advisers, who have some specialized knowledge of those aspects of agriculture which are most relevant to their particular region. This is favoured by Catalonia's extraordinary range of soil and weather conditions, which over the years has led to the concentration of products which are well differentiated from one region to another. Secondly, a team of selected experts, highly specialized in specific technical or commercial aspects, is based at each of the four Territorial Services, and covers the regions which comprise that area. The Study Centre at Reus, the short courses organized at prestigious centres around the world, and the study visits to countries that stand out in their specialist subject, all form part of the continuous preparation and training of these officials, whose job it is to gradually shape one of the instruments of the technological and economic development of the entire agrarian sector of Catalonia. ●