

23 June 1945

--55822

Dear Fryer,

Thanks for your letter. I am sorry that you feel bothered with proposals that you may think premature. Perhaps a word of explanation may yet help. Yates's memo, and the conference we had to consider it, did, I believe, intend to consider quite generally the needs of agricultural research, and centres where it is carried on, for technically competent statisticians. This discussion was not at all limited to an item, which I think Yates had scarcely in mind, namely the statistical needs of the A.R.C. work on animal health. Of course the fact that ^{Topley} had got me to make a start with this work and to build up a computing unit at least as foundation for its needs, was an entirely relevant fact in the situation, and I certainly looked forward to handing over this business to an Institute of Agricultural Statistics, or of Statistics generally, if the A.R.C. proposed to organize one in Cambridge. Surely, however, we were asked to consider the matter more generally, without of course excluding any such specialisation or allocation of

spheres of work as might be convenient between the central laboratories under discussion.

You may recall that I had in the previous year very particularly stressed, in a memorandum which I suppose reached the A.E.C., the need of animal improvement programs for a technically competent statistical unit, such as I proposed specific and limited task. That such a Unit, if formed, should be within the central Institute seems obviously convenient, but if there are objections it is certainly not essential to the development of such a Centre as seems to be desired at Cambridge. Equally, it may be that the statistical work which will arise from any serious reconstruction of a programme in agricultural meteorology should be done somewhere else, though in view of the nature of both these two branches of work, of which I have some knowledge and experience, such a division would seem to multiply the need for fully equipped central units with first-class statisticians to a degree which the available personnel would not easily satisfy. An Institute with an personnel even half the size of Yates's

Department at Rothamsted should be, I believe, charged with a good many special lines of work, each having one man particularly responsible for it, but with stimulating opportunities for mutual discussion and assistance, and for transferring people to work in which they are particularly interested or successful.

Of one thing I feel very sure, and that is that the particularly mathematical and statistical problems arising in each of these three fields would not be successfully grappled with by second-rate people working in isolation, and I had supposed that this was in mind when the proposal was made for a central Institute capable of undertaking fundamental researches, and of giving aid and working out methods for the use of others attached to particular centres.

It was, ~~therefore~~ of this that I urged some caution and, was because of sufficiently
if necessary, delay in staffing the central Institute, because it may be some time before a ~~statistically~~ able and versatile director with full mathematical qualifications could be obtained.

Yours sincerely,