

## The NAC'S 20 Years

**N**EXT WEEK in its meeting at Spring Lake, N. J., the National Agricultural Chemicals Association will be celebrating its 20th anniversary. It is not old in comparison with some trade associations, but its history, and particularly that of the industry it represents, is one of increasing speed of development which is striking in retrospect. The pesticides industry might fairly be said to have been in the doldrums in the mid-30's. That changed during the war, and today the movement of events and developments has reached an almost frenetic pace.

The NAC has accepted the responsibility for serving the industry's development. This probably is a bigger task in 1953 than even the most far-sighted of its founders had expected when they met in Atlantic City, N. J., in August 1933 to plan the Agricultural Insecticide and Fungicide Association.

The modern pesticides industry truly is a child of research, but not one which has grown in leisurely order with the occasional nourishment of a new discovery. Rather it had sudden awakening to the almost infinite possibilities which lie in knowledge of natural phenomena. There was a crying need for help and the help has tumbled so rapidly from the spouts of the research laboratories that the industry which has been accustomed to relative barrenness of ideas was perplexed as to which new invention to seize and how tightly to hold. Capital is needed for development, but investment in a new product which might be in second place, or worse, before the race is well begun, calls for courage, good judgment, and good luck.

The organic pesticides industry, as it exists today, is relatively new. It took off from the discovery of the powers of DDT, which was sensational. The rapid sequence of discovery of new and powerful products made the field look attractive. The potential and possibilities seemed infinite. The result was a tendency toward excess. At the time production was increased far more rapidly than the potentially great market was developed; surpluses resulted.

The weather, impossible to predict, exerts a great influence—on the insect population and on the farmer's mood and ability to buy. The pesticides producer must be ready to meet any situation, to flourish on the right guess, and absorb the consequences of the wrong.

The pesticides industry lives on toxic materials. It stands in the middle of the food production chain with an interest on one hand in the protection of crops and on the other in the food produced from those crops. Two sensitive objects are involved—the farmer's pocketbook and the human stomach. The pesticide producer's sleep



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is plagued by the possibility that a slip in his work or carelessness in the use of his product may damage a crop or contaminate food. He may be subject to a justifiable suit or he may fall victim to a legal opportunist. With the rise of the chemical industry to prominence, the public is highly sensitive to the use of "chemicals" in its food—in ignorance of the fact that man has eaten chemicals since time immemorial. A misstep can bring trouble which is real and retribution which is justified. But sensationalism on the part of an irresponsible journalist whose interest is in effect rather than fact can influence the public mood in such a way as seriously to retard man's progress against pests to say nothing of dealing a severe and unjust blow to an industry.

In a conscientious effort to prevent mishap, the legislators take steps. In a matter so important to the public, yet depending so heavily on complex scientific knowledge, a Congressional committee may be subject to a mixture of fact and fancy which could derange a Solomon. There are bound to be new laws. The public has a right to protection. The pesticides industry can only hope for sound and proper regulations which will not make new development prohibitively expensive.

On the other hand there is a vast market which is assured, for this is an agricultural nation. The potential is by no means developed. Estimates of pest damage are increasing rather than decreasing: only a few years ago, J. A. Hyslop estimated the loss to insects at \$1.6 billion. In 1947 George Leonard, NAC president, suggested the figure \$2 billion for insects and \$2.4 billion loss to weeds. Today the estimates generally quoted are \$5 billion to insects and about \$13 billion to all pests. Clearly, the possible markets have not been supplied.

Furthermore, the pesticides industry is important to our survival. If we are to feed a growing population, we must wrest that food from a growing insect population.

The National Agricultural Chemicals Association has assumed a demanding responsibility. The serving of an industry of such importance now struggling with a mushrooming second growth is no easy task. The success of its first 20 years is a tribute to the NAC and the people who have led it. It is noteworthy that the key executive position in the group has been occupied by one man, Lea S. Hitchner, throughout the 20-year history. We salute the association and its members and wish them good fortune in a long successful future.