



Research Can Be Applied to Market Problems, Too

TWO WEEKS AGO we attended a showing of the impressive new agricultural chemicals laboratory at Stamford, Conn., of American Cyanamid Co., a company which was founded, as its name implies, on an agricultural chemical. Not only was the laboratory impressive, but the philosophy expressed as a basis for its operation was interesting to contemplate.

The approach to practical chemical research, as, for example, that directed toward finding new agricultural chemicals, must be broad, according to Frank Stark, of Cyanamid's agricultural research department. Rather than to test many chemicals with the aim of finding one with the properties needed to combat a specific condition or pest, the approach should be directed toward studying the properties of the compounds tested with the aim of detecting anything which might be valuable against any known pest.

In an industry where already there are some 500 different chemicals being used in more than 40,000 formulations, the continuing search for new and better products must be conducted effectively if it is to pay off. Every operation in research must be made to yield the maximum of information. Large sums of money are needed to support a research institution of the kind Cyanamid has dedicated. To provide this, it is necessary not only to develop highly effective products, but they must be sold in quantity at a profit. Cyanamid's action is an expression of confidence in the future of an important industry.

From another source comes an additional note on the need for effective research, but at the same time a definite suggestion that the chemical fight against pests is only getting well under way. George McNew, before the recent meeting of the National Agricultural Chemicals Association (page 877), urged strong attention to basic research to learn more about the why and how of activity of pesticides. Progress in the development of fundamental knowledge must lay the foundation for increasingly effective development in practical or applied research and, eventually, better products. McNew points out that the surface has only been scratched, that a good research program might lead to a revolution in our attack, for example, on plant diseases. But the research necessary must be supported, to a considerable degree, by industry. The rate and extent of progress, then, will depend on the maintenance of a healthy industry—this means an industry making a profit.

During the same week as these two speeches were made, A. W. Mohr, president of the NAC Association presented a report on the state of the agricultural chemicals industry (p. 872) which painted a gloomy picture—overproduction and poor profits.

WALTER J. MURPHY, Editor

The total of the ideas in September's meetings can present a disturbing picture: A strong need for products to combat pests, with the industry producing the materials in a state of despondency. What is the cause of despondency? Low selling prices are a big factor and according to Mohr, "the price war of 1953" has been a cause of this.

Certainly there are two areas where research is needed: (1) the search for new knowledge and better products and (2) research on means of selling the materials produced. As in any industry there is a need to develop the potential market in the areas where the products are needed and to market in the most economical fashion. Possibly some additional emphasis on the second type of research would yield dividends. A sound job will not be inexpensive, but it should be profitable in the end.

Should price wars be necessary in an area where the loss of billions of dollars could be prevented by use of the products that aren't being sold? If markets can be expanded, then the causes of price wars can be mostly eliminated by bringing into better balance production and demand. Is the consumer, the farmer, resisting sales or has he not been interested in something he doesn't understand? It has been said many times within our pages that farmers are sound business men. But sound business men need sound information on which to operate. A logical place for the farmer to get sound information is from the dealer from whom he buys.

Recently a fertilizer meeting round table on problems of the industry yielded the conclusion that one of the industry's missed opportunities lay in its neglect of information to its dealers. Has this been given serious consideration by the pesticides industry? Obviously the development of the agricultural chemicals industry is a long range basic matter. Our chemical industry is highly developed technically and also in its marketing system. The agricultural branch of that industry has some problems much different from the primary chemicals manufacturing group in being closer to the consumer. The development of potential markets presents a real problem, but a healthy industry apparently depends on its solution. Effort by individual companies and cooperative action both should find a place. An agricultural pesticides program needs to be brought to the door of the farmer, the food producer, and even the home gardener. The pesticides industry seems certain to profit from effort invested in dealer and consumer education. The dealer cannot be expected to take the initiative or to carry most of the burden of such a program of education. If it is to be done and done effectively, the initiative must come from the pesticides industry.