

Ag and Food NEWSLETTER

Lettuce Cooling

CALIFORNIA'S LETTUCE GROWERS, who account for about 60% of the commercial crop, are enthusiastic about vacuum cooling, call it one of the most significant processing advances in 30 years. Imperial Valley packers are processing over 80% of current crop by the method, in contrast to a mere 5% two years ago. In vacuum cooling process the lettuce is packed dry in the fields, in cardboard cartons, then half-carload lots are cooled to 33° F. in vacuum chambers. Method eliminates heavy wooden crates and slow icing process, reduces handling costs, and improves handling at receiving end. Vacuum Cooling Co., San Francisco, expects similar rapid growth in application of method to processing such crops as spinach, cabbage, artichokes, and strawberries.

Nitrogen by Plane

AT THE OTHER CORNER of the country, the nitrogen solution producers are in action to extend the use of their products. Nitrogen Division of Allied very recently demonstrated spray application of ammonium nitrate solutions by airplanes on Florida cattle farm. Ten acres of pasture land were sprayed in 5 minutes.

Research Needed

ANOTHER PROBLEM of increasing interest to herbicide researchers is aquatic weeds. In the West, weeds are a big problem in irrigation ditches. So far 2,4-D, sodium arsenite, chlorinated hydrocarbons, and phenols have been used as control agents. Aromatic petroleum distillates have been used in western irrigation ditches for 6 or 7 years; these compounds volatilize after doing job, thus do not enter fields to do crop damage. A potential market which merits more active attention certainly exists, in the opinion of a number of those attending the recent weed control conferences.

Cotton Herbicides

TWO NEW HERBICIDES intended for cotton were unveiled last week. Both are still unavailable for general commercial sale but test results reported at the Southern Weed Control Conference are encouraging. Karmex, a formulation by Du Pont of 3-(3,4-dichlorophenyl)-1,1-dimethyl-urea, will be available in limited quantities in cotton areas this year. The other herbicide, Silvex, is being field tested by Dow. Both materials, according to claims by their producers, are supposed to be less harmful to cotton than 2,4-D.

Equipment Inventories Up?

FARM MACHINERY MANUFACTURERS and wholesalers who took a drop of 10 to 25% in total sales last year are going into the spring selling season with generally high inventories and possible production cuts. Some California distributors report that the western situation generally seems about normal. In the Southwest, on the other hand, wholesalers report highest inventories in the past 10 years. From Chicago, the manufacturing center of farm equipment, predictions are that employment will be down sharply from last year's peak, with lowest production schedules in the past 10 years.

Ammonia for Northwest

THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST is rapidly developing as a strong anhydrous ammonia market. Bonneville Power Administration economists have estimated that the area could consume the entire production of a 300-ton-per-day plant. Only producing plant in the area is Hooker Electrochemical, with 15,000 tons per year to supply industrial ammonia. To overcome permanent storage facility problem, Shell is expanding facilities to handle 50,000 tons a year in the Northwest; having first shipped by rail in 1949, Shell will now use barge transport from its Pittsburg, Calif., plant. McCall Chemical, Portland, now entering its second year, is expanding permanent storage with a 44,000-gallon anhydrous and 60,000-gallon aqueous installations at Walla Walla for ammonia from Phillips Chemical of Texas.

Cotton Defoliation Up

CHEMICAL DEFOLIATION HAS shown a rapid growth throughout the cotton growing areas. In California the first big jump was in 1950, by last year over 50% of the cotton acreage was treated with chemical defoliant. This figure, higher than in other cotton growing states, might be still higher percentagewise this year. Although forced to reduce their total cotton acreage growers will be selective, put best acreage into cotton and strive for highest quality yields. Chlorate-borate mixtures have outgrown longer used cyanamides in the West. The former requires no free moisture on plants and can be sprayed on.