

Ag and Food NEWSLETTER

Liability Insurance

LOYDS UNDERWRITERS IN TEXAS are tightening up on liability insurance for aircraft applicators who want protection while using hormone-type weed killers. Although no single underwriter can speak for the Lloyds group, some say no policies will be approved on hormone-type weed killers because of large risks involved. Insurance is especially difficult for small operators. Insurance syndicates have not clamped down completely, rather seem extremely reluctant to underwrite. Applicators say that without insurance it would be impossible for them to continue operations. Difficulties seem to be confined to Texas. In California insurance is generally available for crop dusters, although premiums are the highest in the nation.

Antibiotic Resistance

AS YET LITTLE WORK has been reported on the development of strains of plant disease bacteria resistant to antibiotics. Beltsville researchers have isolated a strain of common bean blight resistant to streptomycin. Laboratory studies with the causative agent of fire blight of peaches and apples resulted in isolation of a streptomycin resistant strain after 11 transfers. However, following addition of 10% chlortetracycline (Terramycin) to the streptomycin, 29 transfers were necessary to get significant resistance.

Farmers Independent

A RECENT POLL of farmers in Iowa and northern Illinois indicates low—not over 40%—participation in the corn acreage reduction program planned by the USDA. Forty per cent expressed willingness to go along if acreage cuts were set at 15%, but only 36% of growers would support 20% acreage reduction. (USDA announced on January 20 it would request 17.4% reduction in corn acreage.) Survey revealed that 36% support of the reduction program would cut total acreage by 7.2%; corn output would be cut only 5.3%, since growers would take steps to improve yields from acreage planned. Iowa State agricultural economist Don Kaldor tells us program will have this effect: Participating farmers expect to boost their average yield from 62.9 bushels per acre to 66.6; including this increase net result on entire area would be increased in per acre average yield from 64.6 bushels to 65.9 bushels.

More Nitrogen

THE NITROGEN INDUSTRY could produce nearly 16 per cent more ammonia than present rated capacity in the event of a national emergency, a Department of Commerce production survey reveals. Existing plants plus new facilities now under construction could produce more nitrogen by 1957 than specified in the Office of Defense Mobilization's revised expansion goal of 3.5 million short tons. The survey also indicates that when production is available from plants which have certificates of necessity but are not yet under construction, the potential nitrogen supply in 1957 will be more than 3.8 million short tons. These estimates disregard costs and efficiencies and assume certain minor modifications in present processes. Ability to achieve this higher production is confirmed by plants operating at 5 to 18% above rated capacities at times during past two years.

L-13/59

ANOTHER ORGANIC PHOSPHATE from Bayer. This compound identified only as L-13/59 has high oral toxicity for insects, low for mammals. LD₅₀ for rats is about 500 milligrams per kilogram, about 100 times that of parathion. The compound will probably be offered in commercial quantities in the U. S. in a few weeks. L-13/59 is effective as a bait poison, with high stability; baits have been used to control flies in dairy barns.

Irrigation

SPRINKLER IRRIGATION FOR COTTON to supplement rainfall is getting increasing attention in Texas. Last year experiments were conducted in a relatively wet region (50 inches of rainfall). Increased moisture from sprinklers produced more cotton per acre. Future tests are scheduled to see if similar results can be obtained in seasons of low rainfall. Sprinkler irrigation has been used on possibly 20,000 to 30,000 acres during past five years in California cotton fields, mainly where row irrigation is impractical. Sprinkler irrigation could be a significant water-saving technique in water scarce areas.

Insect Menace

“MOST SERIOUS GRASSHOPPER THREAT in the past five years” is outlook for 1954, say Federal Grasshopper Control Project officials. It is increasing on Middle West crop lands as a result of persistent drought. About 4.75 million acres of western range land will probably require control programs. In the South, a spider mite has been collected from cotton in Mississippi, the first record of this insect in that state. A severe infestation of the false chinch bug has developed in the Rio Grande Valley. Texans say the bugs are migrating in swarms into the vegetable fields. Chinch bug is also attacking forage crops. Control facilities are hampered by the sudden heavy migration.