

Sound Information Can Be a Valuable Asset

G. F. LEONARD, Richmond, Va.

Agricultural chemicals industry has much to gain through careful cooperation with writers, federal and state worker, and dealers

HUNDREDS OF SALESMEN for the pesticide industry are working to further pest control without being on any of our industrial payrolls. This may seem like a far-fetched thought, but the truth is that scientists, editors, writers, radio broadcasters, extension people, and other farm leaders are talking and writing about pesticides in a growing number of instances each year. What is being said and written reflects the basic information and emphasis supplied by the source—scientific research and the industry. Much of the responsibility for the accuracy and import of this information lies with the industry. An examination of the situation may serve to point up the present status of information in the field of agricultural chemicals.



G. F. Leonard

A perusal of any of the major farm magazines issued in the United States will reveal that there is more information on the pesticide industry and its products than on any other industry relating to agriculture. There is an increasing amount of publication space and radio time being devoted to the control of insects, plant diseases, and weeds—information that keeps the farmer informed of the progress in this field. There is no other period in the history of agriculture and the industry which compares with the present status. The pesticide industry should be highly appreciative of this favored position.

Clarify Status

Actually, some editors print information about new products and their uses even before the registration of the products with the United States Department of Agriculture. Such a practice often gives rise to misunderstandings when the products are not yet commercially available. The problem can be very simply overcome by pointing out in

our information that the material is only in the experimental stage and not yet available in quantity. This sound approach will certainly be followed by writers.

Emphasize Results

Another thing—the industry's old attitude of selling control rather than price is being displaced by a new philosophy which does not offer the best opportunities for the industry from the standpoint of a healthy economic condition. Naturally, if we emphasize price over results, writers will give corresponding emphasis in their treatment of pesticides. The farmer is interested only in obtaining a reasonable return on his investment in pest control chemicals and when the initial cost of the product is related to the over-all operation a few cents' difference between items has little real significance.

It occurs to me also that some of the information in farm magazines does not place enough emphasis on careful use of these products. Editors and writers are as anxious as we are to prevent accidents and improper use. The industry can help get the right story across. We have reached the stage in our industrial development where accidents and improper use of pesticides should no longer be tolerated. Each company, scientist, and farm leader should take it upon himself to make certain that the progress in the control of agricultural pests is not retarded through undue legislative restriction stimulated by public reaction. This can be done by emphasizing through our information channels the importance of following label directions and precautions.

State and Federal Cooperation

Through their bulletins and spraying and dusting schedules federal and state workers distribute information on the industry's products also. I have watched over the past few years the growing interrelation and cooperation of state and federal agricultural scientists with in-

dustrialists. Growing out of this cooperation are a mutual confidence and a respect which have accelerated progress with pest control. Much more can be done with this relationship, especially with agronomists and plant pathologists. We need to reach a common ground with these workers so that we all tell the user of pesticides a story that fits together and does not conflict in essentialities. Many of these federal and state institutions have training programs for young technologists who will eventually serve in various capacities with industry or with agriculture. It is essential from this standpoint that these budding scientists have a broad outlook as a part of their training.

Don't Overlook Dealers

In the examination of these associates we have a tendency to overlook the dealer. Some independent surveys have pointed up the importance of the dealer in the entire picture of disseminating information on pesticides both in the agricultural market and in the garden market.

In agriculture, the dealer often finances the purchase of control materials and his recommendations greatly influence the buyer. Yet in many cases the dealer is the least prepared to pass on the necessary technical information for the proper use of products. In my estimation the dealer is the weakest link in this entire chain for the dissemination of information.

The business of controlling agricultural and home garden pests is becoming so complex and the margin for error so narrow that our industry can no longer afford to use an agency with inadequate knowledge for dealing directly with the proper use of pesticides. It appears to me the industry has an obligation to use every method available to train dealers so that they can do a better job in telling the farmer what and how to use pesticides. A reflection of this inadequate information can be found in the number of liability cases which arise through improper use and by the number of failures to control the pests involved. By directing our own information in a conservative vein to point up the importance of safe use of pesticides through these three media we can do much to produce a healthier situation in the marketing of agricultural chemicals.

(Mr. Leonard, recently retired vice president of Tobacco By-Products & Chemical Corp., was president of the National Agricultural Chemicals Association 1946-49.)