European Fertilizer Up

CONSUMPTION OF FERTILIZERS in Europe, where per acre application rates are much greater than in U. S., has been steadily increasing since the war, according to latest report from OEEC. Estimates for 1953–54 indicate consumption of plant nutrients will be up about 6.3%. Breakdown of increases: nitrogen 5.7%, phosphate 9.1%, and potash 3.9%. U. S. averages about 30 pounds of plant nutrients per acre. European countries fertilize much more intensively typical application rates in pounds of nutrients per acre: Belgium 157, Holland 158, France 100, and United Kingdom 45. For discussion of U. S. fertilizer situation see page 1058.

More Sulfur for Mexico

PAN AMERICAN SULFUR has now started production by the Frasch process at its new $5 million plant on the Isthmus of Tehauntepec. Two wells were recently brought on stream and are producing at the rate of 600 tons per day. Eight other wells are scheduled for operation almost immediately, according to Harry C. Webb, president of the company. Output from the plant could contribute toward easing Mexico's acute shortage of sulfuric acid, now imported at the rate of about 500 tons a day to meet fertilizer and industrial demands.

Rice Crisis

U. S. RICE INDUSTRY with more than 60 million sack crop, may be facing an international crisis, says George Mehren, University of California. Increasing world supplies and sagging world prices put the industry in a tough position for it must export two thirds of this year's crop to hold present prices and avoid surpluses. With average support price for 1954–55 pegged at $4.92 only about 30 million sacks can be sold in the domestic market; a large part of remaining 30 million sacks could be forced into price support storage. If large support becomes necessary and growers vote for marketing quotas, California growers would face substantial acreage reductions. Impact would be felt on western agricultural chemicals all down the line—fertilizers, insecticides, weedicides. Only other solution is for rice farmers to drop prices, reducing their income somewhat but permitting them to hold onto foreign outlets.

Fertilizer Seed Treatment

RICE INDUSTRY IN CALIFORNIA meanwhile is watching experiments by University of California agronomists which indicate that presoaking rice seed in fertilizer solutions before planting results in faster emergence of seedlings, better anchorage of plants and longer roots. Tests thus far have been on laboratory scale and have yet to be duplicated in fields. Soaking seed in fertilizer solutions would not require drastic changes in present practice. Rice is already soaked in water prior to planting to speed germination, and to make seed sink as it is sown from planes over flooded fields.

More Intensive Farming

THREE CROPS IN TWO YEARS is goal of experimental farming project now under way in California, already one of nation's most intensely farmed states. Experiment started last fall with planting of winter barley, which was harvested this June, followed by 100-day corn planted in July and soon to be harvested. Another crop of barley will be planted as soon as corn is cleared. Farming project is being sponsored by Agriform, one of nation's largest mixers of liquid fertilizers and farmer Marvin Neuman. In addition to the three crop program Agriform is also plugging a balanced fertilizer program for California farmers, who have traditionally been strong on nitrogen alone. Liquid ammonium phosphate is being pushed as an ingredient of starter N-P fertilizer on part of field to highlight difference over incomplete program.

More Basic Research

LOOK FOR THE USDA to do more basic research in the coming year. Farm needs are rapidly outstripping current research programs in several fields, USDA spokesmen believe. One bright spot: Congress increased USDA's research budget by $12 million for fiscal 1955. State experiment stations will get a sizable chunk of $71 million total for research. Another big item: $1.9 million for hoof and mouth studies at the new lab in Plum Island, N. Y.