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## Market Influences

**T**HE TIME LAG between development of some new product or practice that increases farming efficiency and its general acceptance by farmers is often discouraging to research people and the companies who make the product involved. Perhaps this lag is longer in the matters that have to do with farming than in other areas depending on consumer acceptance. Compare, for instance, the speed of public acceptance of the new antibiotic drugs with that for new organic insecticides, both of which were developed at about the same time. Undoubtedly important was the fact that antibiotics deal directly, immediately, and often dramatically with the problem of life and death, whereas the insecticides deal with it only indirectly.

Theories on the cause of the lag and how to shorten it are almost as numerous as the groups concerned. It is evident that companies in the fertilizer and pesticide field are looking at these theories closely, testing them, looking for the best, because it is opinions on these matters that become the basis for their marketing policies. Some admit to operating in the dark, or at least a haze—they are not concretely sure what influences a farmer to buy this or that fertilizer or this or that pesticide.

Some rank the dealer most important; some think they must sell their products through the mass media; some prefer to depend on their own salesman in the field selling to the farmer; some rely on an exclusive dealer franchise; some prefer to retain the identity of their product through all the channels from factory to field.

Such a multiplicity of ideas about how to market an agricultural chemical is to be expected in a competitive economy. Perhaps such a diversity of opinion is laudable, but it is also indicative of a restlessness on the part of manufacturers, a discontent with the old systems, and of a desire to develop new and more effective marketing procedures.

As they reexamine their marketing philosophies, manufacturers will probably find the results of an Iowa State College study very helpful (see page 557 this issue). By interviews with a cross section of 532 farmers in Iowa, that study produced some quantitative data on what influenced farmers to use fertilizer and to what groups farmers will turn for information on a new fertilizer. By far the greatest number of Iowa farmers (69%) go to public agencies (the state college, the extension service, the county agent) for information about a new product. By contrast, only 12% said they go to a fertilizer dealer or salesman.

Probably no one in this field is surprised that a farmer will choose a public agency over a fertilizer dealer—but the extent to which this is true is surprising. There is

little dispute over the county agent's and the state college's influence in the scheme of things agricultural, and every man in the industry applauds accomplishments of the public agricultural agencies in putting science and technology to work on the farm. However, sometimes one gets the impression that such protestations are little more than lip service. In view of the agricultural public servant's standing among Iowa farmers (and this is probably just as true in other areas), manufacturers of pesticides, as well as fertilizer, might profit by a review of their relationships with public agencies. Are their public relations and selling policies devised with this important man in mind? Do companies keep this man informed, as much and as well as they might, about new products, research programs, statistics on sales and inventories?

## NPFI—Mark of Progress

**B**Y THE TIME this is read the National Plant Food Institute will be a legal entity. It is a consolidation of the National Fertilizer Association and the American Plant Food Council brought about through dedicated efforts of the industry's leaders. The NPFI is a product evolved from nearly 75 years of trade association experience in the fertilizer industry.

The welding of the two recently existing organizations comes appropriately at a time when the fertilizer industry is at a peak of expansion and technical progress. Even the name of the new organization connotes an increasing appreciation of the scientific approach to better crop production. With the services of Paul Truitt and Russell Coleman, one schooled and experienced in business and legislative matter and the other with a specialized background in research and education, as executive vice presidents in the top full-time administrative positions, the organization can expect broad and balanced leadership of the consolidated professional staffs of the two former groups.

The formation of the new association is one more in a series of forward steps by the plant food industry to hold and strengthen its position of importance in the service of American agriculture. Agriculture needs the best possible service and assistance from technical industries in its rapid movement to higher scientific levels.