

Ag and Food Interprets . . .

- ▶ **Food growers and processors recognize bond of mutual goals**
- ▶ **Stiff price competition does not dampen urea expansion**
- ▶ **Over a million pounds of chelates sold to agriculture this year**
- ▶ **Stilbestrol's advantages as feed supplement undisputed, but side effects in doubt**
- ▶ **Two Oriental crops, interesting agricultural specialties**

Grower-Processor Interest

Mutual recognition of common goals is bringing food crop processors and growers closer together

WE MUST all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately," said Ben Franklin. Ben was talking politics but the sentiment describes very accurately the relationship between food crop growers and processors. In the past, there has been a good deal of friction between these two in spite of the fact that in the long run neither can hurt the other without hurting himself. Friction can still be found, but during the past two decades it has been moving nearer and nearer to a reasonable level (there will probably always be some points of contention), chiefly because of the realization by both growers and processors that they are on the same side. In the end, they both serve the consumer. Since World War II this meeting of the minds has been accelerated by problems that came with technological progress, problems like pesticide residues, pesticide induced flavor changes, and the like, which bring grower and processor ever more closely together.

Contracts are the formal evidence of this grower-processor bond. They vary with the nature of the crop and other factors, but their basic purpose is to assure as completely as possible a firm raw material supply for the processor, a firm market for the grower, and thus a consistent, reasonably priced supply



Field man and agricultural researcher, both from food processor, check soil temperature and hydrothermograph readings in California grower's field. Heat unit studies like these allow estimation of date crop will be ready for harvesting

for the consumer. Contracts on annual vegetables, for example, state in general that the grower will plant a specific acreage and that the processor will buy the entire crop. The latter often reserves the right to supply or specify the seed. It is wise, says one large processor, to get such contracts settled well before planting time so that the grower will have enough time to plan his crops carefully. Contracts on perennial crops such as tree fruits usually are not signed until just before harvest, but here again it is mutually helpful to get them out of the way as soon as possible.

Processors as a rule deal year after year with the same growers, and mutual understanding can develop to a point at which contracts become almost a formality. Still, there are points which can

always breed friction and which should be covered by contract. Foremost among these is price. If the contract specifies a definite price and the market has dropped by harvest time, the processor gets hurt. If the market has risen, the grower gets hurt. A common way around this problem is to specify that the price will be that being paid at harvest time by the five largest processors in the area, which should be in effect the prevailing market price.

Contracts may refer specifically to the grower's agricultural practices, his use of fertilizer, pesticides, irrigation, and so forth. The intent is to guarantee high quality crops to the processor, but such contracts often become unwieldy, full of complicated detail. And according to Hamilton Carothers of the Na-

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tional Canners Association “. . . some are inclined to question whether you can litigate your way into high quality crop production . . .” There is in fact a trend toward short contracts. Some have shrunk from many pages, not so long ago, to less than one page written in plain, nonlegal English.

Agricultural Research

Besides their development work in food technology, most large processors feel they must also maintain a very active program of agricultural research and development. Witness a Western processor who some years ago was having trouble with the local variety of sweet potato. Starch content was inconsistent and there were storage and processing problems. The processor's agricultural staff went to work and eventually decided upon and introduced a new variety from the Eastern U. S. Yields were doubled, processing became much simpler, and both grower and processor benefited.

Large scale use of fertilizers and pesticides, particularly the latter, raises problems that processors are helping to solve. Off-flavors such as that caused by BHC in canned ripe olives are getting much attention; NCA, nine experiment stations, and MIT are seeking causes and cures. Pesticide residues are an obvious problem on which growers and processors work closely together. The effect of fertilizers on nutritional value and other properties of crops is getting a good deal of attention and as more is learned about it will quite probably become of considerable interest to both growers and processors.

Besides their own agricultural develop-

ment work, food processors stimulate and sponsor through their associations research designed to improve consistently production of processing crops. The technical advisory committee to NCA's raw products committee suggested recently that the rapid progress made in pesticides during the past few years has not been accompanied by similar progress in methods of application, which in fact have not changed basically in the past 50 years. Stimulated by the NCA, groups in New York, Ohio, and Florida are working on development of improved application equipment, and a number of others are investigating the basic relationship between spray coverage and disease and insect control.

At the state level the Canners League of California, for example, works very closely with the extension service on agricultural problems peculiar to canning crops. Information developed is made available to growers via the county agents.

Processor's Man, Real Link to Grower

The processor's field man is the real link between grower and processor. Besides procuring his company's raw materials, the field man must be a walking storehouse of information, able upon request to answer the grower's questions on fertilizers, pesticides, and any number of related subjects. Most large processors today want field men with a college level background in agriculture and prefer also a practical background in agriculture. Besides this, says one field man, a background in psychology can be very handy. He recalls one of his first experiences in which upon approaching a grower (in not quite the correct manner)

about the aphids in his peas, he was invited to leave the farm before he had gotten well started. Field men can often help their growers with problems on crops they aren't buying, such as hay. The farmer in turn can help the field man, one way being by steering him to the right growers when he is having procurement trouble with a particular crop.

While it would not be strictly true to say that growers and processors are universally one big happy family, the relationship has improved steadily, particularly during the last 10 years. Such progress is very helpful to an agricultural economy in which just 10 leading vegetable states produced in 1954 a total of 4,607,000 tons of vegetables alone for processors. Also in 1954, processors took 95% of the peas grown in the U. S. 83% of the lima beans, 78% of the beets, 74% of the tomatoes, and so on. In the light of such facts, good grower-processor relations are more than helpful—they are necessary.

Urea Outlook

Urea expansion continues at rapid pace this year in face of stiff price competition

UREA, with fertilizer use taking two thirds of its output, will be in good supply through 1957. Even though current productive capacity exceeds demand by almost 50%, plant expansions will add another 25% by the end of 1956.

Because of urea's several advantages to farmers, its demand as a fertilizer is expected to increase 10% during 1956. Urea supplies more nitrogen than ammonium nitrate—its nearest rival in total available nitrogen per unit weight of dry material. This means lighter applications with fewer refillings of the applicator.

Less hygroscopic, urea is easier for farmers to handle. Urea finds more and more use in high analysis materials by fertilizer formulators faced with granulation problems.

Although some authorities debate the point, urea is claimed to cause less “burning” than ammonium nitrate when used in heavy applications. Finally, foliar feeding can be done more easily using urea.

Fertilizer application of urea is mostly as solutions. New and future producers plan to make solutions a large part of their production, feeling that this trend will continue to expand. A few large producers having facilities to make both are marketing urea-ammonium nitrate

Drop changes hands at pea buying station on grower's farm near Patterson, Calif. Pea viners are owned by processor. After vining, peas will be graded

