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## Head of Smith-Douglass believes chemistry is working a revolution in farming—No. 1 U. S. industry

IN JUNE 1954, Ralph Douglass joined leaders of the National Fertilizer Association in a conference to plan action toward the consolidation of the NFA and American Plant Food Council. There was conflict in the background of his meeting with NFA officials, for the split of the APFC from the NFA had been produced by some strong differences of opinion and it generated more. Douglass had been among the leaders in the founding of the new organization in 1945, because he was convinced that it was in the interest of the fertilizer industry. He clung to his conviction despite opposition that arose and through the following period of strong feelings. Now, in 1954, he felt that progress had resulted from having separate associations, but the time had come to consolidate the products of earlier schism in the best interest of the industry.

The quiet meeting at the Greenbrier was effective. It was the concrete beginning of steps that led to the formation of the National Plant Food Institute which became an official body in July 1955. Douglass, with characteristic absence of flourish, had taken a very active part throughout this development.

In his full-time job as president of Smith-Douglass Co., Ralph Douglass heads one of the country's largest corporations devoted primarily to the manufacture of fertilizer and related agricultural products. His strong part in the growth and development of the trade association of the fertilizer industry is only one of the significant roles he has played in addition to his major pursuit. Frequently he has been called upon to assist the Government in one way or another and many times he has contributed his services, not only to give information and advice, but also to stand firmly for his strong belief in free enterprise and limited participation of Government in business. Members of the Fertilizer Industry Advisory Committee of the USDA recall with obvious admiration the work he did with that committee during World War II.

His breadth of interest is supported by depth of experience. His father was merchant, small manufacturer, and farmer, and in his Alabama childhood, Ralph Douglass became acquainted with cotton gins and fertilizer plants, having worked in one of the latter at the age of

14. After attending business college in Birmingham, he continued his interest in fertilizers and cotton gins, working as a bookkeeper. He soon became assistant manager of a cotton oil mill in Opelika, Ala., and by 1919 was associated with the Eastern Cotton Oil Co., which took him to Norfolk, Va., in 1920.

In Norfolk, he became well acquainted with Oscar F. Smith of the fertilizer industry, an acquaintance that developed into mutual admiration and respect. The relationship led to the former's becoming affiliated in 1927 with the company that Smith headed, The Smith Reduction Company. Douglass bought an interest in the firm and joined it as a vice president, bringing to it experience and sales ability that were put to good use.

### Expanding and Integrating

The strong belief in Smith-Douglass about the future of fertilizers was as obvious then as it is today. In 1929-30, despite the depression, the company was actively expanding, building new plants in Virginia and North Carolina. In 1935, a sulfuric acid plant at Norfolk began the program of integration.

The organization continued to grow and prosper. In 1950, Smith died and Douglass became president. From that time, Douglass' ideas and philosophy were even more strongly felt and observed in the company's activities.

In 1952, Coronet Phosphate Co. was acquired, giving the organization phosphate rock reserves in Florida. The next year, San Jacinto Chemical Co. was merged into Smith-Douglass, providing a position in nitrogen fertilizers. Another major development was the establishment of a research department, something in which Douglass has shown a particularly strong interest.

In practice, Douglass holds to his belief that change is just as sure as death and taxes and he looks ahead to keep his company in step. S-D took action as soon as possible to be ready for the post-war surge of the Midwest awakening to the value of fertilizers. A brick plant was taken over at Streator, Ill., in the materials shortage days of 1945 and converted to a dry mixing plant. This was followed by sulfuric acid and then phosphoric acid to fill out an integrated plan. Granulation and pelletizing equipment



**Ralph B. Douglass**

President, Smith-Douglass Co., Inc. Born May 6, 1891, Alexander City, Ala.; vice president, Eastern Cotton Oil Co., 1920-27; vice president, Smith-Douglass Co., 1927-50; wartime consultant, Chemicals Division, War Production Board; chairman, organizing committee and first chairman, Exec. Comm., APFC; director and president, Plant Food Institute of North Carolina and Virginia; member, Fertilizer Industry Advisory Committee, USDA; vice president, National Tax Equality Association; director, Exec. Comm., of Virginia Manufacturers Association; director, VPI Educational Foundation; director, Agricultural Foundation of N. C. State College; Exec. Comm., Norfolk General Hospital

were installed in Smith-Douglass plants some time ago and the company has kept in step with higher analysis trends. In leading the development and rounding out of his company, Douglass has also developed a group of executives who have brought to him a reputation for astute selection and management of men.

Douglass' interest in family, civic, and business affairs outside his company, shows in many activities. A combination of social responsibility and impatience with unsound business management stands out in a report of the State Capital Outlay Study Commission of Virginia to which he was appointed by the Governor. He agreed with the majority report but presented a supplemental report in which he said: "The state-supported colleges maintain a costly system of competing with each other for students to take the same undergraduate and professional courses. This costly system of duplication runs all through higher education in Virginia and will not be ended until there is a unified board of control set up to administer all the state-supported colleges."

More directly to his life's work and his belief in change, he has summed his view of the situation: "The application of the resources of chemistry to the problems of plant food and soil fertility is working a revolution in the nation's No. 1 industry—farming."