

# Letters . . .

## Too Many Grades?

DEAR SIR:

Without attempting to be critical of the article, "Too Many Grades?" in the November issue of *AG AND FOOD*, I might say it is my feeling that it must have been written by someone who is not in intimate contact with farmers. I have a few comments which I would like to add to the subject.

In the first place, most fertilizer manufacturers are merchants and not scientific missionaries. We are torn two ways—between having something which we think the farmer ought to buy and filling the orders for what the farmer says he wants. If a farmer, year after year, has been growing good commercial crops on what we consider an illogical ratio or a low analysis mixture, how can the fertilizer manufacturer refuse to fill his order? It is true that you can persuade and reason within limits, but the farmer who has a grade that he knows how to handle and which gives him satisfactory results cannot be denied that grade if in the last analysis that is what he wants.

In the second place, these grade simplification efforts sometimes hurt rather than help us. As an example; for years

we sold 7-7-7 in southern New England in considerable quantities. We were advised by agronomists that 7-7-7 should be eliminated and that 8-8-8 and 10-10-10 should be pushed; and what is the result? We have some calls for both 8-8-8 and 10-10-10 but the greatest demand is still for 7-7-7, and we are carrying three grades in the 1-1-1 ratio, whereas we formerly had one. Substitutions usually result in an assertion from the customer that if we don't have it he knows where he can get it.

The largest part of the fertilizer industry was indicted in the 1930's and one of the counts in the indictment concerned "conspiring with agricultural experiment stations to limit the number of grades of fertilizer." Since this case was never tried we have never had an answer from the courts about whether we can discuss grade limitation with anybody. Our own attitude is that if some state officials wish to discuss grade limitation we will listen to them, but we won't talk, and certainly we won't come to an agreement with them.

Another factor which we always run into when we listen to these people is that they all believe that great savings will accrue to the farmers if we sell them

high analysis goods. I have never been convinced of that. There is a huge industry with tens of millions of dollars invested in plant and equipment to produce normal grades. By that I mean grades made from 18% to 20% superphosphate. Everyone has to spend money on equipment to produce the grades that the test tube boys would like and what will happen to the investment in plant to produce normal grades?

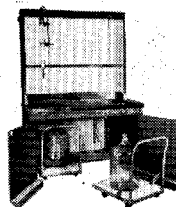
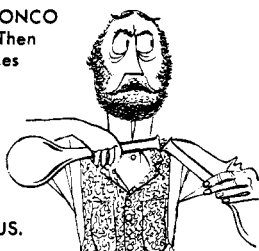
Does anyone, furthermore, buy triple superphosphate on a unit basis as cheaply as normal superphosphate? Certainly we don't in New England. There are very few companies that seem to be making higher analysis goods with only one handling. The economy from high strength fertilizer has, to my mind, never been adequately demonstrated.

I would like to see some of these advocates of higher analysis fertilizer make an 8-16-16 with sufficient overrun so that even nine times out of ten the official sample will be free from deficiency. It is true that you can do it in some of these souped-up modern plants, but they cost money and somebody has to pay for them. They are going to be on the fertilizer bill whether the farmer sees it or not, unless the industry wants to cross off its capital and surplus as it did in the 20's.

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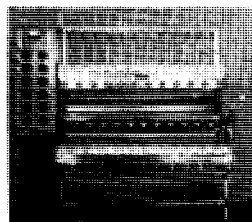
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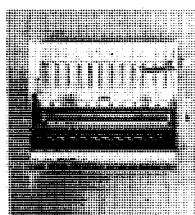
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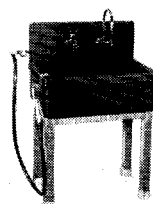
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