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## Speak Your Piece

THERE ARE hopeful signs that the agricultural chemicals industry is making progress against one of its toughest problems—the lack of satisfactory communication. The problem is many-faceted, and improvement in some of its phases has lagged lamentably behind that in others. Furthermore, even where progress has been greatest, the proverbial “room for improvement” is still much in evidence. Even so, there is reason for some optimism.

It appears, for instance, that members of the industry are gradually shedding their reluctance to contribute data toward compilation of meaningful and useful statistics. This aspect, tied up as it is with questions of intercompany competition, has been one of the most difficult. Progress in this area might be described as moderate, since steady improvement can be demonstrated on a year-to-year basis, although blank spaces, question marks, and broken lines in tables and charts bespeak the lack of full cooperation.

Perhaps complete production and sales statistics will never be available in this highly competitive industry. But many manufacturers would do well to examine more closely the figures they withhold, to see if perhaps their revelation in the interest of better statistics for all might not in the long run be more advantageous than their retention as trade secrets. Does any company, after all, really fool its chief competitors?

Less progress is apparent in a second phase of the over-all problem, the need to increase public awareness of benefits provided by the industry's products. Individual companies' campaigns in behalf of their own products are not enough. The public relations program of the NAC is an example of the kind of program that is needed; such efforts deserve stronger industry support—both moral and financial. That much more industry-wide attention is needed is attested by the ease with which quacks and cranks can use the expression “chemicals in foods” to stir public reaction that sometimes borders on panic.

The producers and farm users of agricultural chemicals well know the immense benefits these materials provide. So, too, do the processors who prepare chemically-protected and chemically-improved foods by the ton for the public's tables. But somewhere along the line the flow of information is throttled. The public gets perhaps just enough to prove that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

The industry knows and believes in its products. It needs to be less modest or timid in talking about the benefits those products bring, particularly when it is talking to the consuming public. And it ought to be talking to the consuming public a great deal more.

Perhaps the most impressive communications progress to date has been in intra-industry exchange of research data. The Miller Amendment, with the prospect of additional legislation in the reasonably near future, has given emphasis to this part of the problem. Sound progress was being made before, and considerable acceleration has been in evidence within the past couple of years.

The nature of the problem has been somewhat different here, with the difficulty springing less from reluctance to reveal, or from modesty or timidity, than from lack of a fully adequate forum.

A major step forward was the staging, first in 1956 and again early this year, of pesticide residue conferences sponsored by the USDA with an assist from FDA. Industry representatives turned out in good numbers for these conferences, and much timely, useful information changed hands. The conferences have proved there is a genuine desire, as well as a need, to exchange residue data.

If further proof were needed, it came in the impressive response to the scheduling of a symposium on pesticide residue analysis methods for next month's ACS meeting in Miami. The Division of Analytical Chemistry and the Division of Agricultural and Food Chemistry, joint sponsors of the symposium, have scheduled four solidly-packed half-day sessions for this single symposium.

If the industry could transfer to its business information, public relations, and other communications problems the zeal that characterizes its current approach to the discussion of residue data, it could quickly convert mountains to molehills.