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Enlightened Self-interest

THE NATIONAL PLANT FOOD INSTITUTE has launched a commendable program for greatly expanded activities in research, education, and promotion. Its aims: to boost fertilizer sales by speeding up acceptance of proper fertilizer usage, and to enhance the standing of the industry in the eyes of farmers, agricultural workers, and the general public.

With agricultural surpluses and overproduction looming as major deterrents to the nation's continuing economic progress, it might appear that encouraging the more intensive use of fertilizers—best known for their ability to step up production—would be doing no favor for the farmer, the consumer of farm products, or any other group except the fertilizer industry. It would be selfish of the industry, indeed, to seek profits for itself at the expense of the rest of the economy; such a policy could hardly be expected to enhance its standing in the eyes of anyone.

Fortunately, expanding the market for fertilizers does not have to mean greater total production of agricultural commodities or burdensome additional surpluses. The enlarged program of the NPFI can be one of truly enlightened self-interest, for it can actually help to ease some of the pressing problems of agriculture while building a better future for the fertilizer industry.

In stating the objectives of its enlarged program, NPFI has wisely specified *proper* fertilizer usage as the kind it intends to promote. And proper fertilizer usage can help the farmer or grower to increase productivity and profit while holding total production at existing—or even slightly lower—levels.

At the institute's June meeting at White Sulphur Springs, agronomist E. T. York, northeast area manager for the American Potash Institute, showed graphically that for a given total production a farmer can earn a greater net profit by growing his crops on a smaller total acreage. He does so by replacing land and labor with fertilizer, pesticides, and improved agronomic practices; his increased efficiency more than counterbalances his decrease in acreage. The fertilizer industry sells more fertilizer, the farmer makes more money (while farming fewer acres and conserving both energy and land), and the general public gets no additions to its unwanted stockpiles.

" 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished," and we hope the program succeeds. We hope, too, that the institute will find a way to pursue its program with the full support of all segments of the industry. The potash producers who—even though they consider the program's basic aims commendable—object to the institute's plans for financing it, and in protest have tendered their resignations as NPFI members, can cite some cogent arguments to support their stand. They feel that because of their heavy contributions to the American Potash Institute for similar promotional programs, they should not be asked to carry so much of the NPFI's added financial burden. The rest of the NPFI membership, on the other hand, can make a good case for assessing all of the basic producers—but only the basic producers—on an identical basis.

Since all who attended the NPFI meeting agree on the desirability of the new program, we hope they will find a way to agree also on the allocation of its costs. There still appears to be room—and time—for dispassionate discussion to achieve a meeting of minds on the financing question, even as the program itself gets actively under way. The chances for maximum effectiveness will undoubtedly be brighter if the full support of the entire industry is assured.