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Monsanto vice president sees research, sales, and profitability as inseparable trio of essentials for agricultural chemicals industry

A SOUND TECHNICAL BACKGROUND, a solid faith in the value of research, and a natural aptitude—fortified by years of experience—in sales are the attributes which Monsanto's Charles H. Sommer will bring to bear on his new responsibilities as vice president of the National Agricultural Chemicals Association. Sommer, vice president and general manager of Monsanto's organic chemicals division, was elected to the NAC post at the association's Spring Lake, N. J., meeting last month. In the normal course of events he will become its president in 1958.

Sommer's influence as one of the administrators of NAC affairs will doubtless be directed chiefly toward solution of the industry's sales problems. For Sommer is primarily a marketing executive. His rapid advancement at Monsanto has been the result of his performance in a succession of sales positions of increasing responsibility.

Having joined Monsanto in 1934, a year after receiving his B.S. from the University of Arizona, Sommer moved in short order into marketing activities. By 1939, he was manager of plasticizers and intermediates sales for the organic chemicals division. Ten years later, following two intermediate promotions in sales, he was appointed assistant general manager of the division. In 1951, he was made general manager of the company's Merrimac Division, and on Jan. 1, 1954, he became, at 43, general manager of the organic chemicals division and a Monsanto vice president.

Brand-Name Marketing

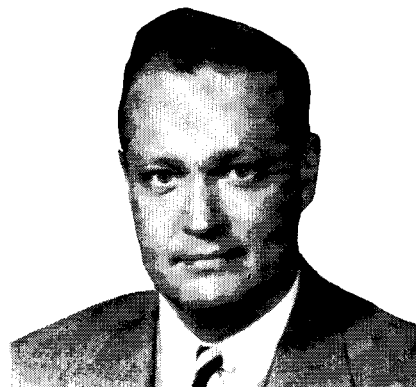
When Sommer assumed responsibility, Monsanto was selling only technical materials in the agricultural field. Under his direction, the organic chemicals division has undertaken the mar-

keting of farm chemicals under the Monsanto label. This program was launched in 1955, and originally embraced 18 states. Last year it was broadened to the extent that the Monsanto line of agricultural chemicals is now sold in 38 states.

Sommer's philosophy on more direct marketing is that it provides closer contact with the farm market itself, giving the company a better understanding of agricultural problems that may yield to chemical solution. At the same time, it shortens the channels through which products and information flow from the company to the grower. The advantages of the system are important to both the company and the grower, Sommer feels, from both the technologic and the economic points of view.

Under its brand-name marketing machinery, the organic chemicals division will continue to make available commercially the patentable products issuing from its expanded research program—another Sommer-sponsored project. Sommer has long been convinced of the necessity for a sustained program of high-quality research, and he feels that the agricultural industry is an area of especially great importance. His aim is to see the agricultural chemicals industry—and naturally Monsanto wherever feasible—provide the answers to as many as possible of agriculture's problems.

Under Sommer, research in agricultural chemicals has become the largest item in Monsanto's over-all organic chemicals research program. The division is now in the fourth year of a five-year program of expanded agricultural research, backed by a firm commitment that no curtailment of effort will be made before the end of the fifth year, even if no marketable product should reach commercial fruition during the period. (Actually, several new products have already



Charles H. Sommer

Born Sept. 24, 1910, St. Louis, Mo. B.S., Chem. Eng., U. of Ariz. (1933). Monsanto Chemical Co., 1934 to date. Organic Chem. Division, Mgr. plasticizers and intermediates sales, 1939-49; Ass't. Gen. Mgr. sales, 1949; Ass't. Coordinator Sales, 1949; Ass't. Gen. Mgr. of division, 1949-51. Merrimac Div., Gen. Mgr., 1951-54. Gen. Mgr., Organic Chemicals Div., and company VP, 1954 to date. VP., NACA, 1957.

been launched commercially within the period, two of the best-known ones, herbicides Radox and Vegedex, having achieved nationwide distribution within the past year.)

Sommer is sold on the value of sustained support for research, and feels that success is more likely when research personnel are confident of continued backing from management. The current five-year program, says Sommer, will most likely be followed by another, perhaps even longer-term plan, and undoubtedly on a still larger scale.

Money for Research

But research is expensive, and money for its support must come from profits. The question of profitability is, in Sommer's view, the over-riding problem now faced by the agricultural chemicals industry. Without profits, he observes, no producer of farm chemicals can continue to spend time and money on the search for new and better products. And lack of profitability for producers will ultimately work to the disadvantage of the users of pesticides and fertilizers, through curtailments in variety and availability of inventories, through discontinuance of informational and other services, and—especially—through de-emphasis of research.

In a word, then, profitability is the goal toward which Charlie Sommer is striving in his efforts for Monsanto, for the NAC, and for the agricultural chemicals industry.