

# Letters . . .

## From An Organic Gardener

EDITOR'S NOTE: AG AND FOOD is pleased to grant the writer's request that the following letter be published *exactly* as written.

Dear Mr. Hader:

I have read with interest your editorial "Don't Let Hysteria Rule" and the article "Don't Let the Insects Rule," both in your February issue.

Of course, there is a gulf between us which possibly can't be bridged with words, but I would like to try to get in a few words edgewise.

I think that the two articles in your February issue are a good case for your side except that they pretty well skip one *very important* point. They don't provide much (hardly any, in fact) evidence to calm the public fear that agricultural chemicals are present in our food supply in too large amounts. Your coverage of the health question is slim.

We all admit that without insecticides there would be more insects—but *what are the insecticides doing to our health?* In the long run, insecticides will be judged on what they do to our health, not what they do to the bugs.

## How the Chemical Industry Can Avoid Bad Publicity

People in the chemical industry are becoming sensitive to the fact that a fair-sized segment of the public does not regard insecticides and various food additives as a complete blessing. Articles in the trade press report alarm and discouragement that many newspapers, magazines, and a few associations present a "biased" and "unfair" view of the function of chemicals in the production and processing of our food supply. Occasionally, organic gardeners are blamed for stirring up this trouble, along with various other outspoken radicals and "faddists."

Even though I myself am an organic gardener and have spent my full time for the last nine years editing Organic Gardening & Farming magazine, I am not completely unsympathetic to the problem that the chemical industry now finds itself in. Specifically, I think that there are certain positive things that the chemical industry can do now that would both be of positive benefit to the public *and* would help give pesticides and food additives a better press.

Here is step number one:

*Don't blame the public for any resentment against chemicals that they may have.*

It is in the American tradition to be independent and jealous of one's rights. A public pest control campaign such as the 1957 Gypsy Moth program is bound to cause some people to resent government treatment of private property without asking permission. Chances are spraying of plain old water would annoy people. American's are like that, and the chemical industry should realize it.

Furthermore, since the chemical industry is spraying a much more potent mixture than plain old water, it should accept as a fact of life that some segments of the public will become alarmed. These alarmed people will be the type of person who knows what is going on in the world. They will and are now creating a public relations problem of the first magnitude for the chemical industry.

Step number two:

*Start considering that the public interest and the well being of the chemical industry are one and the same.*

Although the chemical industry is spending vast amounts of money to test the toxicity of various materials, it is doing this primarily so that government regulations can be met, enabling more pesticides to be sold and thereby creating a larger income.

Too often, in official pronouncements, the chemical industry states loudly that there is nothing to worry about. This fools no one. Enlightened consumers consider it a cover-up—and many times they have been right.

When dealing with the extremely powerful types of agricultural chemicals now being used, *there is something to worry about.* The FDA thinks so. Some people in the USDA think so. Many entomologists think so. And a large number of consumers think so too.

Perhaps it is time for the chemical industry to do *a little more worrying* about public health. And some constructive thinking and research too. Then perhaps you'll have a story to tell the public that will be believable because of its truth, and effective because of its honesty.

ROBERT RODALE  
Executive Editor

Organic Gardening and Farming  
Emmaus, Pa.

## Ignoring Basic Research

DEAR SIR:

With regard to the editorial "Synergism in Selling Fertilizer" in December's AG AND FOOD, it seems to me

that our thinking is a little out of balance. Perhaps we should dig below the surface and evaluate what we are dealing with and how we will benefit from mutual back scratching by NFFI and the experiment stations.

Because we have ignored fundamental research, we are on shaky ground. We have oversold and overextended ourselves to the point where even a small decrease in sales is viewed with alarm. The day of reckoning is fast approaching, and we are looking for a scapegoat. So we are going to broaden our activities and thicken the smoke screen. I am convinced that there is only one way to put the fertilizer business on a sound basis, and that is by supporting fundamental research. But, a fertilizer dealer doesn't like to hear about the negative results that such research may turn up—they affect sales adversely. If we realized it, negative results can be the starting point of a fundamental research program aimed at finding out why those results were obtained.

We have to look to our research institutions for that information. And seemingly, it sounds like a good idea for NFFI to cooperate with them. Actually, it is not good. Research, to be of value, must be unbiased. It must be approached with an open mind. Until NFFI is willing to accept not only positive and favorable results, but negative ones as well, its support will do more damage than good.

In our endeavor to encourage the sale of more fertilizer—which boosts our worthless surplus—we have been several jumps ahead of our research organizations. From field results, I would think it better not to breathe down the necks of research people. We may find that if we divorce ourselves from the research programs of experiment stations and let them have a free hand, we would end up with results that are basically sound and of much more value for sales purposes.

Synergism is fine between fundamental research groups, but when you combine politics with research, you end up with a satellite that won't leave the ground. Let's give this more serious thought. We have to sell the farmer in the face of lower prices for produce. Let's find out how we can make him money before we service him to death with propaganda and soil tests which we do not know about.

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