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## What They Don't Know Does Hurt

IN OUR STUDY of the National Plant Food Institute's survey of farmers' attitudes toward fertilizers, we have been especially struck by two of the major findings. First, farmers know little, and understand less, about ratio, grade, and analysis as those terms apply to commercial fertilizer. Second, two out of three farmers, if given a choice between commercial fertilizer and animal manure—both in unlimited quantities—would choose manure.

There can be little doubt that these two findings are closely related. They probably represent, in fact, two slightly different ways of saying the same thing: the fertilizer industry has not yet succeeded in imparting to farmers a full grasp of the merits of its products.

Surely it can not be said that the trouble comes from not trying. For directly and indirectly the fertilizer industry—especially during recent years—has beamed tremendous quantities of good information toward farmers. It must come as a surprise to many that so little of the information is hitting its mark, and that so much of it is lost on the very persons who need it most.

On this point, the survey has shown that even though farmers like commercial fertilizer and consider its generous use one of the marks of a "good farmer," the commercial material is still considered a substitute, less to be desired than the natural material.

Virtually everyone, including the producers of commercial fertilizer, agrees that the use of animal manures is a highly beneficial practice, and one that most good farmers should and do follow. By no means everyone would agree, however, that animal manures can do a better job than mineral fertilizers, when the latter are properly used.

As one member of the NPFII field staff observes, commercial fertilizers can do everything manures do, and more, when used in adequate amounts and in conjunction with other sound management practices. The continuing preference for manures, he says, demonstrates an unconscious adherence to the "outmoded humus theory," and is a point on which the industry still needs to do a great deal of missionary work.

In the matter of ratios and analyses, the problem appears to be one of language or symbols. Despite all the educational programs to which he has been exposed, the farmer still appears not to have received his fertilizer information in a form that is meaningful to him, or that will enable him to use it in the solution of his own immediate problems.

Here is a real challenge for fertilizer manufacturers. Something must be done to help the farmer understand his soil-crop-fertilizer relationships. Perhaps the answer lies in more basic education on the meaning of soil tests and fertilizer analyses. Perhaps what is needed is an entirely new approach to the method of expressing fertilizer nutrient content.

But, whatever route it selects, the industry must give closer attention to the language it uses. For as the NPFII survey shows, the industry's message, up to now, simply has not been getting through.