

Letters . . .

NAC Answers Organic Gardener's Criticism

DEAR SIR:

This is in reference to the letter of Editor Robert Rodale of *Organic Gardening and Farming* (April 1958 issue) in which he asserts "in the long run, insecticides will be judged on what they do to our health, not what they do to the bugs."

In use for many years, insecticides have already had a "long run" in agricultural production, and in public health programs controlling insect-borne diseases of man.

The record, scientifically documented in entomological, public health, medical, and other professional journals, is voluminous and readily accessible to those who would study it.

That record proves, first, that insecticides have made notable contributions to an increasing agricultural production that ensures for the American people an adequate and nutritious food supply superior to that available to any other people anywhere in the world today, and in all of recorded history. Famine stalks some other lands even now, while in this country our economy struggles to dispose of food surpluses! The relationship between our adequate food supply and "our health" is so obvious as to require no detailed elaboration.

Nevertheless, the considered judgment of two authorities outside the pesticide industry is of particular relevance here.

A. L. Miller, congressman from Nebraska, and a medical doctor, has said:

"It has given me much satisfaction to have sponsored the most recent major amendment to our nation's Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act for, with the passage of the bill, it gives complete assurance that our food is safe in so far as agricultural chemicals are concerned.

"The American food supply, undoubtedly, is the safest in the world."

Next, and from Bernard E. Conley, pesticides committee chairman of the American Medical Association:

"Pesticides play an important role in providing the nation's food supply and protecting the public health. . . . Thanks to the Miller Amendment to the Federal Food and Drug Act, the consumer is assured of an unparalleled degree of protection."

The over-all record also proves, second, that insecticides have been a vital factor in reducing, and in some areas eliminating, malaria and other insect-borne diseases of man.

As one competent authority states the case for insecticides, consider the following from David E. Price, when he was Assistant Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service:

"Pesticides are a great boon to mankind. We use them in and around our homes; they are used on farms; in industry; and they are used in many public health programs to prevent the spread of disease. . . .

"You yourself can use pesticides with complete safety—if you follow the directions that come with them.

"When I say that pesticides are safe, I am not just expressing a personal opinion. My statement is based on extensive research conducted by the Public Health Service."

Read the Record

In the face of this and other evidence, Mr. Rodale still wants to know "what are the insecticides doing to our health?"

He should read the record; it is available for all who seek the facts. This record could be read in better perspective if some prior reading were done by Mr. Rodale on famine and pestilence as they have afflicted mankind down the centuries—and the relationship between insects, and famine and pestilence.

Mr. Rodale should also match the record of insecticides, and those who manufacture and distribute them, against the "positive things" he says the industry should do as a "positive benefit to the public."

First, he says to industry, "don't blame the public for any resentment against chemicals that they may have."

Industry doesn't agree that "the public" bears resentment against insecticides. The record shows that the public generally regards insecticides essential to efficient agricultural production, successful gardening, and to many effective public health programs. Proof is the ever-increasing use of these materials.

Industry agrees that an infinitesimal and articulate segment of the public resents insecticides, and criticizes them continually. For that small segment, as for the public at large, industry will continue to provide factual information on the necessary role of insecticides in

the modern world. Industry hopes that in any re-evaluation Mr. Rodale may make he will give proper weight to the evidence, in favor of insecticides, on his own question: "what are the insecticides doing to our health?"

Mr. Rodale also advises: "start considering that the public interest and the well being of the chemical industry are one and the same."

Advice Is Late

He is extraordinarily late with this advice, as the documented record proves. Industry has been in the forefront, over a period of years, in seeking and supporting Federal and State legislation designed to protect the user, and all involved in the manufacture and distribution of insecticides, against hazards inherent in the handling of these materials.

Furthermore, industry through NAC as well as on individual company initiative, has devoted no end of time and money to educate users on the safe use of insecticides. The very few deaths and serious illnesses attributable to these materials attest to the effectiveness of industry's educational efforts.

Instead of "worrying," which is what Mr. Rodale says industry should do, industry has in fact and over the years done something positive to safeguard the public.

Naturally this educational program will be maintained in the years ahead, and strengthened in every possible respect.

Coupled with this will be a continuance of "constructive thinking and research" which have been characteristic of the industry for years as it has sought to fulfill its special and vital responsibilities in man's age-old war on insect pests.

Industry will continue to work with USDA, the Land Grant Colleges and Universities, FDA, and other agencies and organizations concerned with insect control.

Meanwhile, industry hopes that Mr. Rodale and those who share his views will, at long last, read the record which proves—among other things—that insecticides do improve public health.

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