

Films go to TV stations and to various farm and civic organizations. Publicity program includes personnel items. Ripley-type cartoon was sent to weeklies. Tailored technical newsletters go to special customer groups

A program of . . .

Agricultural Public Relations

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Fertilizer producers, like most other chemical processors, must cater to several different "publics." Here is the program through which one major company has successfully wooed the "publics" whose support it must have. All hinges on one important feature: service

How does a new corporate entity—or for that matter, any company—seeking to make its mark in the farm chemicals industry, achieve favorable recognition and its concomitant acceptance? How can a manufacturer of basic chemical products that are available from many sources build an attractive corporate image—one that will set the company and its products apart from the crowd, but at the same time contribute to the prestige of the entire industry?

These are some of the vital questions faced a few years ago by the newly-created Nitrogen Division of Allied Chemical. Allied was no stranger to the fertilizer field, but it was making a definite shift in its approach to fertilizer operations. In 1952, it formed the Nitrogen Division from parts of two of its other long-established divisions. From Solvay

Process it took nitrogen manufacturing; from Barrett it took nitrogen sales and distribution. The new division inherited all the skills and abilities that had been developed in 60 years of nitrogen pioneering and production, but it also acquired a new name and mission.

At the time the division got its new name, it also entered a new phase of marketing which would bring it into contact with the consuming farm public, and with many more public, governmental, educational, and other groups than ever before. To compound the problem, the division also created new trademarks and brand names, and with them new advertising and promotion patterns. In essence, here was a new influence in the fertilizer industry, and an entirely new business unit as far as everyone outside the industry was concerned.

What should be its approach to public relations?

It is an axiom in public relations that if a company is recognized and well-known to others, and its activities are identified with the public interest, the company will be respected and should prosper. Also, it is a generally accepted principle that service—helping others in worthwhile endeavors—is one of the best ways to act in the public interest. Accordingly, service was chosen as the guiding principle of the public relations program and has remained its dominant theme.

The first job was to identify the various "publics" with which the new division would be dealing, and then decide on the programs which would be of service to them. The principal groups selected, and why, are as follows:

Fertilizer Industry. This group of

hundreds of producers had long been major customers of Allied, so it was easy to see that public activities in their interest would also serve the Nitrogen Division's interest in running a profitable concern.

Government. Agriculture is unique as a business throughout which government control, assistance, or interest is all-pervading. Obviously, any public relations program had to consider this, and must generally complement national, state, or local government activity.

Education. Agricultural education is a specialized and well-defined activity from rural high schools through the agricultural colleges. Assistance here could not help but be beneficial to agriculture, and thus to the fertilizer and chemical industry.

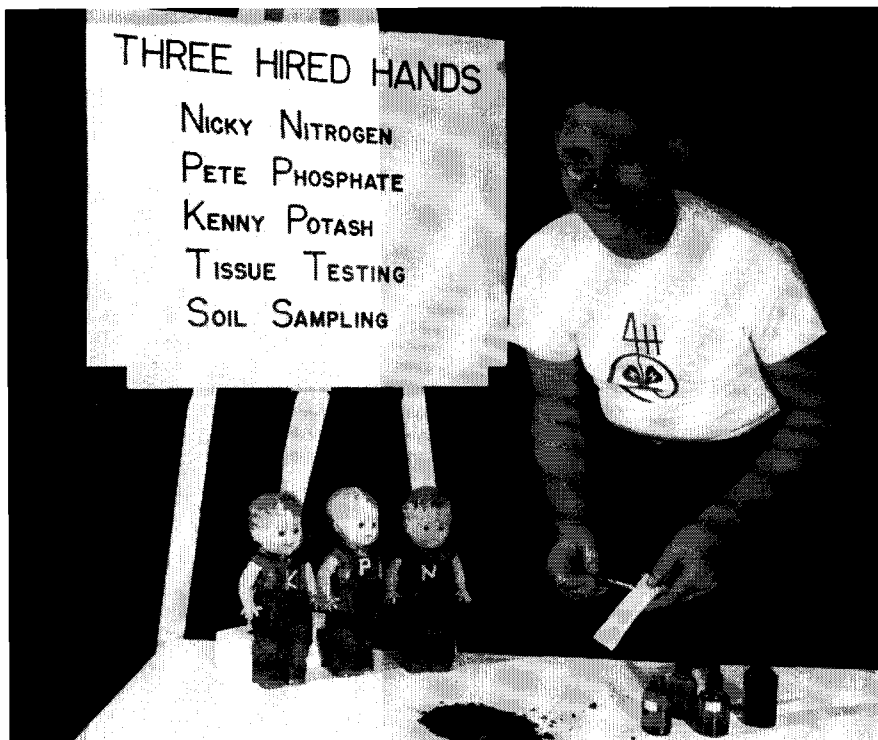
Information Media. Agriculture is served by more news media than any other business on earth. Hundreds of periodicals, newspapers, radio stations, commentators, orators, and opinion leaders constantly seek the farmer's attention. Obviously, this is an essential group with which to work.

Farmers? Yes, to reach farmers with a program of service was one aim of the program. But this contact was designed to be largely indirect. A competent job with the other major groups, it was felt, would inevitably reach the key figure in agriculture, the farmer. To try to reach him without their help would be folly.

The programs undertaken on behalf of the selected groups are continuing ones. They have been modified from time to time and remain flexible to meet changing conditions. Yet they are consistent. Once a desirable public role is achieved it must be retained or all the effort and expense of first assuming it will be lost. This cumulative effect of consistent public relations is exemplified in the public role of the Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. For more than a quarter-century Firestone's farm youth work, farm and racing tire development, radio and TV concerts, and other public work have sustained its reputation for leadership in agriculture, industry, and the nation at large. With many such examples before it and many techniques available, a progressive management needs only money and time to create a favorable public image for its business.

Industry

The Nitrogen Division's P-R job for the fertilizer industry was conceived to be one of helping the industry improve its business. And benefits were certain to accrue to the division, as the leading producer of nitrogen, by having nitrogen used profitably by the industry's customers. Accordingly, the



Farm youth organizations teach fertilization and other good farming practices. Nitrogen Division is donor of 4-H Field Crops Awards and contributes to Future Farmers of America Foundation

first program launched for the industry consisted of a schedule of full-page, noncommercial, color ads in leading farm magazines.

Called the "profit theme" series, these institutional-type ads reached millions of farmers with the message that the prescribed use of fertilizer is their most profitable practice. The ads urged the farmer to seek and follow the advice of his county agent, dealer, and banker, and use enough fertilizer to make his crops pay. These ads were careful not to urge just greater use of fertilizer, but rather the scientific use of enough plant food. In fact, one of the ads used a soil bank theme that the profit-oriented use of fertilizer does not add to surplus, but adds instead to the farmer's net return.

After two years, this program was altered to feature a theme based on the desirability of using bagged mixed fertilizers. Again millions of farmers are the audience; and magazines, several thousand billboards, and some 60 radio stations are the media. Insofar as evaluation is possible, this program seems to have met with considerable favor by the industry. It has satisfied the objective of rendering service and thus is considered worthwhile relations activity.

Service to the industry also takes many other forms. Instead of just extolling the virtues of its products in industry magazines, the division created "Arcadian News," a four-page color insert that each month features advice on technical problems in fertilizer manufacture, new tonnage opportunities for mixed fertilizers, and promotional tips and news. As an

"advertorial" service it also falls into the public relations category, and has achieved a circulation of thousands outside its magazine circulation.

Not the least service to the industry has been the division's search for, creation of, and promotion of new markets for fertilizers. Notable among these activities has been the stimulation of research on the use of fertilizer for forest lands, accompanied by active commercial promotions. Some 400 million acres of commercial forest land offer great opportunity for development in the field. Translations of advanced work, publicity, literature, and pioneering development work have carried the subject of forest fertilization from the heretical state to a comfortably respectable position. In addition, the division's roadside landscaping promotion, fish pond fertilization, and lawn product development have been conducted for the benefit of all fertilizer producers.

All of the usual service activities have supplemented the organized program. Division officials take part in industry trade association affairs, appear before governmental groups, and write and speak on behalf of industry interests. Organized plant and laboratory tours show industry members the complex chemical side of the nitrogen business and how their problems are investigated by the use of electronic "brains," miniature mixing plants, and extensive research facilities. Publications also are part of this regular service work, and help to keep the industry abreast of all new developments in nitrogen technology.



NITROGEN DIVISION, ALLIED CHEMICAL · SUPPLIERS OF NITROGEN TO THE FERTILIZER INDUSTRY



Billboard space is divided between institutional (see top) and product advertising

Research work sponsored outside the company is also made available to the industry. For instance, a four-state Midwestern survey of 400 farmers was conducted last year to determine the relative influence of various news media on the buying patterns of farmers. Results are being made available to the industry, and will be published in the industry's interest.

Government

The strong influence of government throughout agriculture suggests that an agriculturally based company should cooperate with the government in efforts to improve agriculture. However, this is not easy to do directly. Direct representation before the legislature is normally handled by trade associations, and individual companies are seldom involved in agricultural policy.

The direct contact the division does maintain is mostly carried by its technical service, research, and agronomic people. They meet frequently with technical people from the USDA, which is genuinely interested in the production of better, more economical fertilizers. The two groups get together on common problems, and cooperate in solving them. Cooperative research in crop nutrition is conducted at experiment stations, both state and national. Tree nutrition studies are conducted in cooperation with the U. S. Forest Service at its experimental forests, and all of the division's developments and literature are communicated to Forest Service workers.

At the state level there is also close

cooperation with extension fertilizer control and research officials. Since each state has its own program of fertilizer recommendations, it is important to stay in close touch with all of them. This work has been going on for some 40 years in a generally harmonious fashion.

Target of the principal direct public relations work is the county agent. He is a key figure in putting to work the state and federal crop fertilization recommendations. He works with farmers and advises them on their daily problems and thus needs up-to-date educational and informational matter. Periodically, Nitrogen Division has mailed to most of the county agents in the U. S. samples of new materials, technical literature, farm youth work literature, educational displays, wall charts, experiment kits, and, on request, loaned films. Additionally, it has supported the county agent's association and publications with educational advertising, and has featured him in institutional ads as an important figure for the farmer to consult. It has also made available to him hundreds of thousands of soil sample bags to encourage more general use of this extremely helpful technique.

Education

A great deal of indirect cooperation with government agricultural agencies falls under the heading of education, and in this area the division has assumed a major public relations role. It has been through improved education and scientific developments for the farm that U. S. agriculture has

become the most productive in the world. Assistance in this area is one of the worthiest things an industrial concern can do. It is not sheerly altruistic, either; better educated youngsters will be tomorrow's better farmers and customers.

The division was fortunate in being awarded the National 4-H Field Crops Awards program by the National Committee on Boys' and Girls' Club Work. This committee, organized in 1921, serves 4-H in cooperation with the Extension Service of USDA. It is a non-profit group of business and civic leaders who help promote the 4-H movement. Through it the division finances field crop project awards for rural young people. Among the objectives of this program is one to demonstrate improved practices, especially those relating to crop nutrition and maintenance of soil fertility through soil testing, recommended crop practices, and the proper use of plant foods.

Some 2 million boys and girls are enrolled in 4-H clubs, and there are more than 20 million former 4-H members. Some 335,000 adults serve as volunteer leaders. This activity is highly organized. State 4-H programs are conducted by the state extension service under supervision of state 4-H club leaders at land grant colleges. County agents and trained volunteers guide the work at the county level.

There are about 325,000 youngsters in the field crop program. At the county level, the division provides four gold-filled medals of honor for county winners. State award winners are given a trip to the National 4-H Club Congress held annually in Chicago. The national awards consist of six college scholarships of \$400 each.

Divisional officials, agronomists, salesmen, and public relations people all participate in this program. A booklet prepared to assist 4-H leaders in conducting field crops projects has been distributed to every state. A special brochure has been developed advising the local fertilizer dealer how he can help make local 4-H projects successful. This program puts divisional people in touch with government agricultural and educational people at all levels. This develops on both sides an appreciation and understanding of mutual problems, and has helped materially in establishing recognition for the division among government agencies.

Work with the Future Farmers of America is another way the division serves agriculture. The FFA is a nationwide organization for boys studying vocational agriculture in public secondary schools. The organization is part of the program of the U. S. De-

partment of Health, Education, and Welfare; its adviser is chief of the U. S. Office of Agricultural Education in Washington. There are some 380,000 student members in about 10,000 FFA chapters.

The Nitrogen Division made its first contact with the organization five years ago when the national adviser, W. T. Spanton, and the national officers visited the division's headquarters on their annual good will tour. This visit has been repeated each year since, and affords the young men opportunity to tell Allied officials of their work and to learn of Allied's. The youths are entertained and shown spots of interest in New York. In turn division personnel are their guests when some 10,000 FFA boys hold their annual national convention in Kansas City.

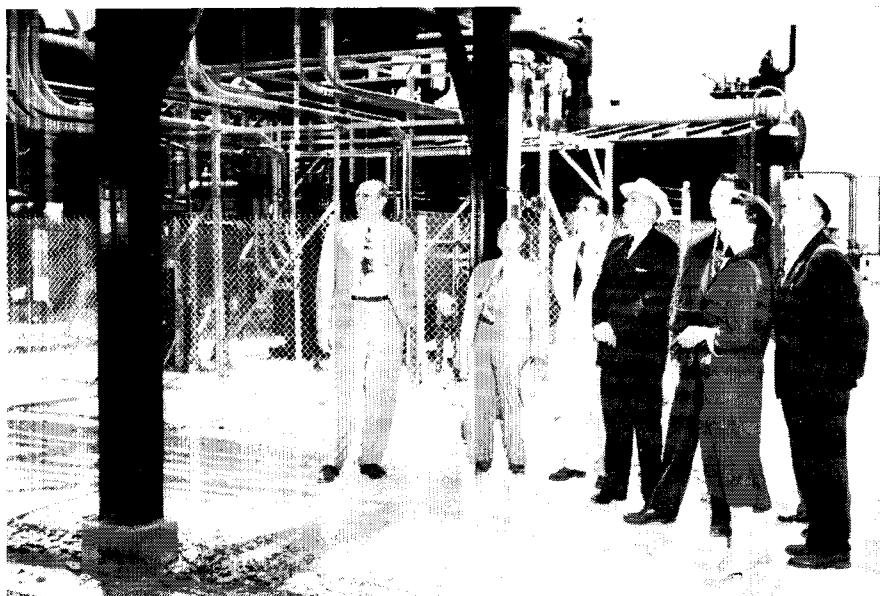
Nitrogen Division officers have participated actively in the work of the Sponsoring Committee of the Future Farmers of America Foundation, and the division's president was chosen committee chairman this year.

Information Media

Local newspapers are served with mats and news releases, and are given story leads of local interest by division representatives in their areas. The small papers are difficult to serve from a remote headquarters because of the geographical limits of their interest, so the news must be tailored for them.

In that connection, local public relations activities in the division's plant cities are handled by the plant managers and their assistants. The central office provides staff services in publicity, advertising, and display work mainly on request of the local manager. This method of operation is based on the premise that the manager is in closest touch with local affairs, and should have the responsibility of good community relations. Professional staff services back him with help and advice. Occasionally, industry-wide activities are desired in plant communities; in these cases the headquarters staff works closely with the manager in getting the story told to plant city residents and employees.

Radio-TV is a potent force on the farm, chiefly because of the good work of members of the National Association of Radio and Television Farm Directors. These RFD's put human interest and much information into their programs for farmers. To work with these important people who daily speak to millions of farmers, the division became an associate member of their organization, and has participated in their annual and regional meetings. It has sponsored activities for them and



Plant tours for customers and various special groups contribute much to making the company's products and operations better known

conducted them through its plants, and has employed many of them in its commercial broadcast programs. Editorial service to this group consists of furnishing news and pictures, films, and story leads, as well as technical literature on new fertilizer developments.

Through the Farm Film Foundation and several other film distributing organizations, the division has achieved an audience of millions for its noncommercial films. One, "Man Against Hunger," has had an estimated audience of some 19 million through its wide use as a feature on TV. Farmers apparently enjoy seeing their role portrayed as one vital to human progress and welfare.

Opinion leaders who influence farm affairs, and organizations of people interested in agriculture, are reached through direct mail, through speakers, or through news and advertising. The benefits of simply being known to many people are largely intangible, but time and again as a result of this knowledge the division has been selected to play some role because someone knew of its interest.

Farmers

Millions of farmers see and hear the division's advertising in their homes, on the road, at their dealers, at the fair, and just about everywhere. This is recognized, of course, as direct selling. But farmers' knowledge of the firm behind this must come from its work with all other important publics. For instance, the work for the fertilizer industry takes educational messages to the farmer. Developments in new uses for fertilizer reach him as news.

Recognition by governmental groups means that the firm is not unknown when a farmer inquires as to the nature of the company. Youth work takes the division into the homes of hundreds of thousands of farmers

as friends of their children. Teachers of the children also know of its service, giving the farmer another reliable reference source. And being known in the agricultural college system has already been rewarding by bringing the division some top-rated graduates.

Earning recognition by the news media through service to them has resulted in the tangible reward of volumes of publicity, and the intangible value of having begun to develop a favorable company image in the mind of the farmer. Thus there is adequate evidence that the Nitrogen Division's public relations objectives are definitely being achieved.

The Cost Factor

All this activity must sound costly to the small company in the fertilizer industry, and perhaps beyond its reach. And it must be admitted that an across-the-board P-R program on a national scale is not inexpensive.

However, experience has shown that P-R projects can be very profitable in terms of the dollars spent. For example, the film "Man Against Hunger" cost only \$6000; yet it has reached an estimated 19 million viewers through free distribution. Another film, "Modern Soil Builders," cost \$15,000; it has had some 12 million circulation and is still going strong.

Straight publicity work, which most commercial firms should conduct on a regular basis, is the least expensive activity. Yet if properly done it carries the company's people, activities, and products before the public in a most effective way. A modest publicity program may be conducted for a few thousand dollars a year, most of the cost going for photographs, travel, and art services. Educational work may be conducted on a satisfactory basis for less than \$10,000 a year, which should cover the cost of a few displays, brochures, and other literature

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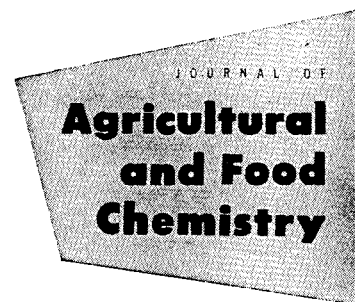
necessary to tell an educational story to vocational agricultural students and similar groups. Concerns which do not operate nationally and are interested mainly in a locality, or at most a state, can do a capable job on a budget of \$25,000 or less a year.

Activities conducted on a national scale are naturally quite a bit more costly. In six years the Nitrogen Division's public relations and advertising budget has increased about 10 fold as its areas of interest have grown. However, working with the farm population is still much less expensive than is national work directed at the entire U. S. population. Since farming is a rather well defined industry, the audience it provides is reached more easily and at less cost than is the vast general public.

One of the Nitrogen Division's relatively inexpensive but very effective means of communication is a series of newsletters and bulletins which are issued on a regular basis and which cover various aspects of the business. The division uses 15 such communications, distributed internally and externally; they discuss products, provide news of developments in the industry, and supply new product data, safety and handling information, and other practical material. A few of the division's bulletins are "Feed Urea Flashes," "Agronomic News," "Fruit Notes," "Arcadian News," "Nitrogen Notes," "Arcadian Spreader," "Ammonia News," and "Technical Service Bulletin." About 100,000 mimeographed or printed bulletins are distributed annually.

Supplementing its bulletin work, the division reprints articles of interest from a score of magazines, distributing them to customers, its own field force, schools, and special mailing lists of people known to be interested in advancing various phases of agriculture. Bulletin and reprint work is in addition to the regular preparation of commercial pamphlets on various products. It is considered more educational than commercial in nature; yet it does serve to emphasize the firm's area of commercial activity.

In view of the very wide variety of public relations projects possible, and the equally wide spread in costs for various types of P-R activities, it is evident that some kind of P-R program is possible for virtually every company. Whatever its size, each company can tailor a public relations program to its budget. Each program should be designed for maximum results from the money and effort put forth. And in the long run, the costs will most likely be returned severalfold in improved business for the company and greater vigor for the entire industry.



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