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(For Branch Offices see page 482)

Doing It Now

AG AND FOOD's field editors have just finished another of their annual fertilizer surveys. For the 1958-59 season now closing, they have found that weather—to a greater extent than in any other recent fertilizer year—has exerted a tremendous influence on sales. Cold, rainy weather delayed spring farming operations considerably, but the fine days that followed in most areas brought on a spurt in farm activity, including fertilizer application. There is a good chance that by the time the last bag is counted, total sales this year may once more have shown a small to moderate increase.

Of even greater significance to the fertilizer industry than sales this month or this season are the trends that may be expected for the future. There, the outlook is bright—largely because the industry as a whole, the individual companies which compose it, and the organizations which represent it, have “taken arms against a sea of troubles.” New or expanded educational and promotional plans are springing up across the country, and new knowledge of the farmer's needs and desires—and his shortcomings—is being put to practical use.

Sparking the upsurge in properly directed promotion is the National Plant Food Institute, whose monumental study of farmers' attitudes toward fertilizer has brought about more soul searching than the industry has seen in many a year. As AG AND FOOD's field editors went about gathering information for this year's annual survey (see page 428 of this issue), they asked scores of industry representatives what effect the NPMI study was having on their promotional plans. Most replied that as yet it is too early to see any specific results this year. But it is not too early to predict that long-range results will be beneficial to both farmer and fertilizer producer, and on a significant scale.

In the Midwest, industry people “from the smallest dealer to the largest basic producer” are studying the NPMI study, and will assign it a big role in shaping their future promotion plans.

In the West, the NPMI survey will result in intensified promotional efforts, directed more precisely at the target—the farmer who is not now buying. Already some companies have begun using the survey to modify their promotional programs; others plan to make changes with the beginning of the next fertilizer year.

In the South, the NPMI's findings have led to stepped up educational efforts by salesmen and dealers. Some companies, even relatively small ones, have indicated that they plan to hire agronomists, especially to formulate information and education programs on proper fertilizer use.

And so it goes. The NPMI itself is well along in its own “plan of action.” More frequent NPMI-sponsored meetings, more localized in scope, are putting information about fertilizers into the hands of people who can use it best, and in a form in which it can be used most readily. A stepped-up program of financial grants is accelerating the flow of practical information on fertilizer economics in the direction of farmers, and helping to drive home facts to him through the printed and spoken word and—most important—through demonstration plots.

All of these activities augur well for the future. “Doing something” about the weather, i.e., controlling it, may still be a project for the rather distant future. But the fertilizer industry has learned a great deal in the past year about some other factors that influence its business. And about those factors it is doing something now!