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NAC's executive secretary has been its chief for 25 years, in the pesticides industry all his business life

WHEN Lea Hitchner finds something he likes, he sticks to it. He is rarely seen without his pipe. He has been wearing bow ties—and no other kind—since “about the time of the first world war.” He has been an energetic force in the pesticides industry since 1915, and the top executive of its trade association—The National Agricultural Chemicals Association—since 1933. Hitchner had a good deal to do with founding the NAC, in fact, and as it celebrates its 25th anniversary this month, Lea Hitchner celebrates his 25th anniversary at its helm.

If ever a man could accurately summarize his whole career with the two words “agricultural chemicals,” Hitchner is that man. He left college in 1915—without even staying long enough to get his diploma—to join a new pesticides manufacturing firm, and his entire business life since then has been concentrated on the agricultural chemicals industry.

The industry's products, and indeed its very nature, have changed immensely within Hitchner's time. In 1915, there really was no separate pesticides industry as such. Most of the products sold for pest control were inorganic materials—with a few botanicals thrown in—which had come into use from other industries. The paint industry supplied London purple and Paris green. Arsenates came from the smelting and refining industry, ground sulfur from the sulfur producers, and some pyrethrum from importers. The work of the NAC, and of Hitchner as its pilot, has done much to give pesticides manufacture identity as an industry—even though much of it still may operate as a part of other industries, especially the chemical industry.

Hitchner's first job was with the Kiltone Co., a small organization that Hitchner helped to set up with a small plant in Newark, N. J. One of the company's backers, and its first president, was William Dare, a local druggist. Another was the now famous Charles Seabrook, founder of Seabrook Farms and one of the pioneers of true scientific farming.

The young company made Bordeaux mixtures, lead arsenate, London purple, Paris green, and sulfur combinations. It later added powdered lead arsenate to the paste form it had been

producing, and then calcium arsenate and other products as they were developed. Hitchner worked first in the factory, then in the laboratory, and then in sales. Within a few years, he had become the small firm's president.

During the 1920's, a good deal of merging and consolidation was in progress among smaller companies in this relatively new field. Toward the close of the decade, Hitchner negotiated a merger between Kiltone and John Lucas & Co. of Philadelphia, through which the Lucas-Kiltone division was formed, again with Hitchner as president. Following the merger, all operations of Lucas's pesticides plant at Gibbsboro, N. J., were moved to Vineland, combined with those of the Kiltone Co., and greatly expanded. (As a sideline to his career, Hitchner took an active part in forming a motorized fire department in Vineland; he is still an “exempt fireman.”) A few years later, the division was sold to Sherwin-Williams, and all of its operations were concentrated at Bound Brook, N. J. Lucas-Kiltone was retained as a marketing unit, again with Hitchner as president.

By this time, Hitchner had long been active in the trade associations which dealt with the young industry's products and problems. These included the Insecticide Manufacturers Association, Inc., which had been organized about 1914, and the Agricultural Insecticide and Fungicide Manufacturers Association, founded in 1924. The latter organization broke up in 1932, and its work was taken over by the Manufacturing Chemists' Association. Hitchner, who was then chairman of MCA's insecticide and fungicide committee, inherited the handling of these affairs.

Not quite a year later, Hitchner was influential in arranging for representatives of 14 companies to meet at Atlantic City, where in August 1933 the Agricultural Insecticide and Fungicide Association was formed. This organization was the direct predecessor of the present NAC; the name change was effected in 1949 when the association's office was moved from New York to Washington, D. C.

Hitchner was elected president of the AIFA at its first official meeting in March 1934. Originally, the president



Lea S. Hitchner

Born Bridgeton, N. J., 1894. Attended Wharton School, Univ. of Pa. Kiltone Co. (later Lucas-Kiltone div. of John Lucas & Co. and Lucas-Kiltone div. of Sherwin-Williams), 1915-33; production; laboratory; sales; company or division president 1920-33. NAC chief exec. officer (first as president, later as executive secretary), 1933 to date.

was the only paid officer. In 1940, when other changes were made to provide greater flexibility, the chief full-time paid officer—Hitchner—was given the title of executive secretary which he has held to this day.

It was not without some misgivings that Hitchner decided to accept, back in 1933, the proffered job as first paid executive of the new organization. He was somewhat concerned about the problems of securing strong support from the industry personnel in companies which up to then had been his determined competitors. Before deciding to accept the new job, Hitchner called each member of the new organization, and in each case received assurance of solid support.

Hitchner has adroitly managed year by year to keep top executives throughout the industry actively engaged in the NAC's programs and in the work of its committees. He has also built an able staff which, along with the industry, has grown in size and responsibility.

Hitchner is now beginning to turn over to specialists on that staff some of the committee work which formerly fell on his shoulders. Nevertheless, he is still a member of a dozen committees of other technical organizations such as the Entomological Society, the Phytopathological Society, and the American Standards Association. He has served on the editorial advisory board of *AG AND FOOD* since the journal was founded in 1953.