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NPFI's president sees overproduction and seasonal nature of fertilizer sales as the two major problems of the industry

WHEN the National Plant Food Institute selected Richard E. Bennett, president of Farm Fertilizers, Inc., as its president for 1958-59, it demonstrated once more its belief in a sound bit of advice: If you want a job done well, ask a busy man to do it. For Dick Bennett has enough irons in the fire to confound a lesser man, but has demonstrated his willingness to take on tough extracurricular assignments, and his ability to handle them effectively, whenever he is convinced that he can perform a genuine service.

Before entering the fertilizer industry in 1947, Bennett had been in the pharmaceutical business for some 36 years with the Smith Dorsey Co. of Lincoln, Neb., serving as company president for 25 of those years. The firm was sold to a Swiss pharmaceutical house—the Wander Co.—in 1951.

While still associated with Smith Dorsey, Bennett had branched out into a number of other enterprises. For some 12 years, he served as president of Western Mineral Products Co., an insulating materials firm. Bennett sold his interest in this company to the Zonolite Co. in 1946. Bennett is also chairman of the board of the Frito Midwest Co. in Omaha, and vice president of the Wilkinson Mfg. Co. there. He is also president of the Bennett Chemical Co. in Denver, an enterprise much more closely associated with the fertilizer industry.

Bennett's entry into the fertilizer business came in 1947, just after he had disposed of his interest in Western Mineral Products. Approached by an acquaintance who wanted to enter the fertilizer field, Bennett looked into the matter and agreed that the future looked very promising. While developments in very recent years have hardly lived up to the earlier promise, Bennett still believes firmly in the fundamental soundness of applying chemistry to agriculture, and still sees plenty of potential for fertilizer expansions ahead. But there is some question, he admits, as to whether demand will ever be allowed to catch up with

supply. Overproduction, in his view, has been one of the industry's two major problems during the past decade. The other, and one that is not so readily subject to control, is the highly seasonal nature of the fertilizer business.

While Bennett's fertilizer career has not been especially long in terms of years—roughly a dozen—it has made him a witness to the industry's most dramatic changes. No industry has changed more in the past decade, says Bennett. The past 10 years have seen fertilizer production change from a backward, crude mixing operation to a highly technical, carefully controlled series of chemical manufacturing operations.

Bennett and his companies have made it a practice to keep in the forefront of this technological progress. Farm Fertilizers, for example, was to the best of Bennett's knowledge the second company in the country (following Davison Chemical) to produce granular fertilizers. It now turns out 100% of its production in granular form. The company also makes its own superphosphate, and produces all of its own grades of chemically compounded fertilizers—a term Bennett much prefers to the more common but less accurate "mixed goods."

The Denver company that bears Bennett's name set out initially to produce ammonium sulfate. This was later replaced by diammonium phosphate. In marketing its new DAP, the company ran into intense competition, mainly from the product's developers, Tennessee Valley Authority. For a time, Bennett campaigned actively against TVA as a competitor in the commercial market, but finally decided to withdraw and shut down, at least temporarily, the Denver operation.

When Dick Bennett is not occupied with the affairs of his several companies, he can usually be found hard at work on some trade association matter or civic activity. Among the latter, his first love is the YMCA; he is a past president of the Omaha "Y," current chairman of its board of trustees, and



Richard E. Bennett

Born Dec. 9, 1891, Lincoln, Neb. Attended high school in Lincoln. Smith Dorsey Co., 1911-1951, sec'y. 1913-26, pres. 1926-51. Western Minerals Products Co., pres. 1934-1946. Chairman of board, Frito Midwest Co. Vice pres., Wilkinson Mfg. Co. Pres., Farm Fertilizers, Inc., and Bennett Chemical Co., 1947 to date.

a director of the Estes Park "Y" conference and member of the National Council of YMCA's. He is active in the Episcopal Church, and past president of Omaha's Rotary International.

He has been active in the fertilizer industry's trade associations almost from the time he entered the business. Bennett served as a member of the board of the National Fertilizer Association prior to its merger with the Plant Food Council to form the present NPFI. In 1957, he served as president of the Middle West Soil Improvement Committee, and helped complete the negotiations through which MWSIC became the Midwest arm of NPFI.

In all of his activities, whether in trade associations, the "Y," Rotary, or whatever, Bennett is guided by one firm principle: If he is asked to do something, and agrees to do it, he will do it as well as he knows how. He has repeatedly proved that he will not spare himself to do whatever is really needed. But by his own account, unless he is genuinely interested and genuinely needed, he would not walk across the street to attend a meeting. "Meetings are no novelty to me," says Bennett, "but where I am needed, I'll serve." Such an attitude makes it a safe bet that any meeting Dick Bennett attends will be better because of his participation.