

# profile...

## President of Southwest Sprayer & Chemical believes service, not price cutting, is best road to success in pesticide business

**T**ELL THE FARMER THE TRUTH about insects, insecticides, and their use, in simple terms that he can understand. If it can't be explained so the farmer can understand, it can't be sold. This is the philosophy of Southwest Sprayer & Chemical Co. and particularly of its president, Charles M. Meadows. It has paid off.

Meadows and a partner, the late Harold A. Waters, started Southwest with a borrowed \$5000 "in a two-by-four warehouse down by the railroad tracks" in Waco, Tex. That was in 1950. This year, comfortably settled in more spacious quarters, Meadows expects sales to exceed \$1 million.

Meadows was with Sherwin-Williams in 1949 when S-W decided to withdraw from the agricultural chemical business. S-W had just introduced in the South a new liquid cotton insecticide, which was well received by cotton growers. Meadows and Waters had done much research work in Texas on the new insecticide. So when S-W called it quits, the two decided to form Southwest, taking over S-W's contracts in the Waco area where they were well known to farmers and dealers.

Meadows is a firm believer in "quality selling." He stresses service for the farmer, and avoids competitive price cutting. Southwest sets its prices at the beginning of the season, maintains them throughout the season—regardless.

But it took experience, says Meadows, to prove to him that price cutting does not pay. Southwest's sales-and-profit record holds the proof. In 1950 and 1951 the company had profits of \$28,000 and \$45,000 on sales of \$414,665 and \$1.15 million. But Meadows terms these years "accidents," since demand then was greater than supply.

In 1952 Meadows decided to meet competitors' prices, and lost \$52,000 on sales of \$756,000. Then and there he withdrew from the price war and settled upon "quality selling." The next year, 1953, Meadows calls the most important and crucial in Southwest's operation. He set his prices by adding 25%, for operational expense and profit, to the factory-billed cost of all chemicals. Sales dropped by more

than half to \$354,000. But the company showed a profit of \$10,000.

Southwest has shown a profit ever since. Meadows says that 1954-57 were "clean-up years" from the mistakes made in 1951-52. Last year, on sales of \$1 million, the company cleared \$55,000. Meadows intends to continue selling service, advice, and know-how along with his chemicals. His customers, he says, may leave him once because of price, but when they come back a second time, they stay.

Meadows' background fits him perfectly for his job. He was reared on a tenant farm in Louisiana and knows cotton from the ground up. He graduated from Northwestern State Teachers College (La.), received his master's in entomology from LSU, and his doctorate from Ohio State. Along the way he picked up much practical experience by working at the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station.

In the fall of 1946, Meadows and Waters made their first successful experiments with low-gallonage spraying from ground sprayers. This was with herbicides. About this time they became interested in the problem farmers had in applying insecticide dusts on windy days. In 1948, the team perfected a system for applying insecticides, as spray, at rates of from one to five gallons per acre. The equipment was introduced commercially in 1949. The two men also worked closely with Spraying Systems Co. to perfect the now-famous Tee-Jet nozzle.

As a result of all this work, Meadows is sold on liquids over dusts. Southwest does not even handle dusts. Its big mover is its toxaphene-DDT "Two-One" mix, although it sells both materials separately. It also handles parathion, desiccants, herbicides, and an extensive line of spray machinery.

Meadows is now starting another program at Southwest—flame delinting of cotton seed, in equipment Meadows himself designed. Delinted seed results in a better stand of cotton which, in turn, makes it easier for mechanical harvesters to operate.

In 1957, Meadows helped Hercules Powder set up its toxaphene-DDT test program in Louisiana. This program proved the effectiveness of chlorinated



**Charles M. Meadows**

Born, Merryville, La., Nov. 8, 1912. A.B., La. State Normal College, 1936; M.S., Louisiana, 1938; Ph.D., Ohio State, 1942. Fellow, La. Experiment Station, 1936-38. Asst. Entomologist, Ohio State, 1938-42; in charge, cotton insect investigation, 1942-44. In charge, Malaria Control Unit, U. S. Navy, 1944-46. Tech. Rep., Sherwin-Williams, 1946-50. Pres. & Gen. Mgr., Southwest Sprayer & Chemical Co., 1950 to date.

hydrocarbons against so-called "resistant" boll weevils when early season control measures were taken. As a result, Southwest now enjoys substantial sales in Louisiana.

Aside from Louisiana, most of Southwest's sales come from 29 central Texas counties surrounding Waco, where Meadows is popularly known as "Doc." He feels more at home out in a cotton field than he does behind a desk, and often can be found at 6:00 A.M. eating breakfast at the home of one of his farmer-customers. At the plant, "Doc" shuns a private office for an open room right off the storehouse. "Farmers feel easier when they see you out in the open," he explains, "and are more likely to come in and discuss their problems with you." These problems, besides cotton, may range from a sick cow to disinfecting a barn.

"Doc" has a 500-acre farm 30 miles north of Waco, much of which is planted in the best looking cotton in the area. This farm, he feels, is his best advertising, especially when he leaves empty Southwest containers liberally exposed to view. Neighboring farmers get a little peeved when they see how well a "city boy" from Waco can do on previously worthless land. This, says Meadows, makes them all the more determined to do as well or better—and usually with Southwest products. What they don't know is that the "city boy" hails from a tenant farm in Louisiana.