

# Meetings

## WORLD CONFERENCE ON OLEOCHEMICALS



# Oleochemicals: the invisible industry

To most consumers, the world of oleochemicals is an invisible industry.

Even many of those who work in the oleochemicals industry feel a bit dwarfed by the fact that 90% of the world's annual production of approximately 60 million tons of animal and vegetable fats and oils is consumed in edible products. But the nonedible use of fats and oils in oleochemicals is pervasive, if relatively unknown, in modern life. Oleochemicals are most obvious to consumers in personal care products and pharmaceuticals—soaps, detergents, cosmetics. Less obvious to the public is the use of oleochemicals in mining, petroleum production, transportation, plastics, paper production, printing inks, metal working, rubber manufacturing, textiles, protective coatings, leather goods, and as intermediate chemicals in a host of other applications.

The World Conference on Oleochemicals to be held September 18-23 in Montreux will be the first major intercontinental gathering for the industry. The meeting will be a time not only for international technological exchange, but for the industry to take stock of itself, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and try to determine what the future holds.

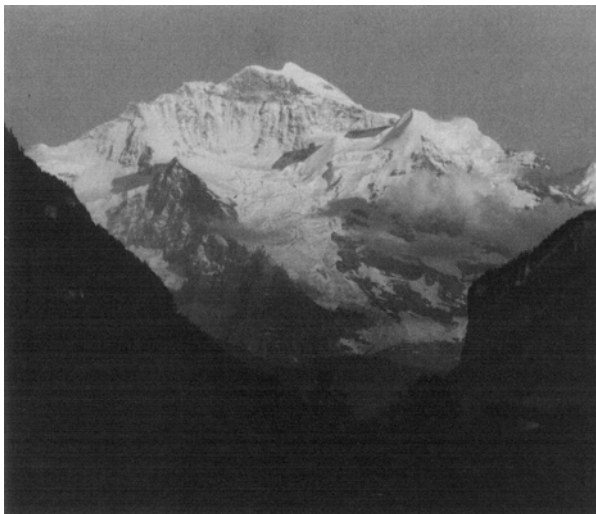
The oleochemicals industry has expanded dramatically during the past quarter century. Development of new chemical intermediates with practical applications

for expanding industrial economies has paced the growth. The business has become more international. European firms have acquired interest in American companies. In one case, an American subsidiary of a major European conglomerate recently acquired a subsidiary of its own in Europe. Joint ventures between European and North American firms are no longer rare. In Malaysia there are new plants to produce industrial fatty chemicals. Japan's fatty chemical production is close to half a billion pounds annually, if not more.

But recent years have not necessarily been good economic years for oleochemicals. As oleochemicals are used so widely in modern life, the industry's economic health reflects that of the world's overall economic condition. The opening session of the Montreux conference will examine the marketing and economics of oleochemicals—what has happened in the past and perhaps what the future holds. U.S. production of fatty chemicals in 1978 was estimated at about 1.7 million tons, with production estimated to reach 2.0 million tons by 1983. European fatty acid production in recent years has been estimated at 640,000 tons, far below capacity. Hopes for a world economic recovery have spurred hopes for improved oleochemical economics.

There are two major questions in the oleochemical business tied to economic viability: source of raw

## Meetings



materials, and types of chemicals to manufacture. Natural fats and oils vie with petrochemicals as potential raw material sources. That topic will be discussed in Montreux. Although crude petroleum prices were stable for many years, the price increases and supply interruptions of the past decade brought renewed attention to natural fats and oils as a more dependable source. While scientific and technological specialists are looking for new processes and new chemicals, marketing specialists try to divine the best route to a profitable future for their firms. In recent years, some companies have begun emphasizing production of downstream fatty chemicals—the more complex chemicals—rather than standard fatty acids. There will be extensive discussion in Montreux on the production, processing and uses of fatty acids, fatty alcohols and fatty nitrogen compounds, the three main categories of oleochemicals.

### WORLD CONFERENCE ON OLEOCHEMICALS

Energy costs and environmental concerns have become increasingly important in recent years. In Montreux there will be a full session on this topic, with emphasis on how to use processing by-products economically.

The final day of the conference will focus on fatty chemicals applications and analysis, along with new chemistry relating to fatty chemicals. The full tentative technical program was published in the May 1983 *JAOCs*; a conference proceedings is tentatively scheduled to appear as the February 1984 issue of *JAOCs*.

As important as the technical presentations will be, most persons who attend such conferences agree that just as important is the opportunity for informal conversation between registrants. The accompanying exposition will give registrants a chance to view the latest in equipment and services offered by suppliers to the industry.

Persons who have not yet registered for the meeting may do so using the registration form in this issue of *JAOCs*, or may register once they arrive in Montreux. Meeting registration will be open Sunday afternoon, September 18, in the Montreux Convention Center. However, persons who plan to register on-site should make housing arrangements before traveling to Montreux.

In brief, when the conference ends, the world of oleochemicals may not be much more visible to the world's consumers, but those who work in the industry may well have a better idea of their industry's scope, who their colleagues are around the world, and what the future may bring.

