

APAG elects Mathieu president

The 11th General Assembly of the European Association of Fatty Acid Producing Companies (APAG), held May 22, 1986, in Windsor, England, elected Georges Mathieu of Oleofina S.A. as its president, to succeed E. Snoeck of Akzo Chemie B.V.

Mathieu, a native of Belgium, is managing director of Oleofina. He also is president of Detic, the Belgo-Luxemburgian association of producers and distributors of soap, detergents and other products.

Mathieu told delegates at the general assembly that the demand for fatty acids and glycerine in the foreseeable future should grow in line with current forecasts of economic growth in Western countries of about three percent a year in 1986 and 1987. He cited lower energy costs as another positive sign for the industry. In addition, except for the recently imposed quota on imports of U.S. tallow, natural oils and fats that provide renewable raw materials of the fatty acids industry are in plentiful supply, he said.

However, he warned that the marketing of fatty acids will continue to be highly competitive for European fatty acid-producing companies, with insufficient return on investments due to overcapacity in Europe and competition from other countries that benefit from the Generalized System of Preferences. Finished products from the latter, he said, are offered virtually duty-free entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) while raw materials from which similar finished products could be produced in Europe are subject to import duties. Some of those countries also levy local taxes to discourage exports of the raw materials and to favor added-value processing for subsequent export. Consequently, European producers have to contend with higher raw material costs and imports of fatty acids made from cheaper feedstocks.

Mathieu identified dependence on imports due to insufficient domestic supplies of renewable raw materials as a major obstacle faced by the European oleochemicals industry. However, he said, coordination of resources by the EEC, research establishments, universities, agriculture and industry may provide solutions to some of the problems facing the industry.

Presenting a paper on "Renewable Resources: Oils and Fats," E. McKeown of Unilever House, London, pointed out that the European oleochemicals industry, while large and important, also serves a number of other chemical and manufacturing industries. "It is therefore vital to the industry and to the wider community that its basic feedstocks are assured in cost, quality and continuity," McKeown said, adding that it is necessary to ensure that feedstock availability is economically and socially equitable, that feedstocks are suitable for present and future needs and that science and technology are developed to realize and extend their positions.

McKeown said feedstocks in the oleochemicals business are largely

inedible or obtained as by-products from oils produced for food or animal feed. "Already conventional plant breeding techniques have led to strains with enhanced yields and with varied fatty acid distribution. Work on species new to Europe which can produce rare or even novel fatty acids such as cuphea, a source of medium chain fatty acids, is proceeding. Enhancement of these yields and adaptation for growth in temperate climates would be beneficial to the industry and open the way for new crops for agriculture in Europe."

McKeown discussed how traditional breeding methods could be speeded up, with opportunities for applying biotechnology in processing of oils and fats and in the modification of triglycerides and fatty acids.

"New horizons are appearing in biotechnology, and we may find that classical chemistry, enriched and strengthened by the effort devoted to petrochemical research, will find application in the treatment and modification of oils, fats and fatty acids and open up new fields for the oleochemicals business," he said.

Nonionic surfactant usage

A review of the use of nonionic surfactants in U.S. laundry detergents was presented by Jesse L. Lynn Jr. of Lever Brothers Co. at the AOCS annual meeting in May in Hawaii.

The nonionic surfactants commonly used in U.S. detergents are those formed by the addition of ethylene oxide to an alcoholic hydroxyl group, according to Lynn. Alcohol ethoxylates were introduced into the U.S. as textile chemicals shortly before 1940. Their first significant use in U.S. laundry products occurred in the 1950s. Today, over one-fifth of all

detergents sold in U.S. supermarkets contain nonionics as their sole or major surfactant, Lynn said, noting that about four-fifths of all laundry detergents contain at least some nonionic surfactant.

Factors promoting this growth over the past 15 years have included phosphate restrictions, the introduction of detergent-softener products and the growth of heavy duty liquid detergents. Another factor has been the availability of consistent quality, cost-effective nonionics produced from relatively low-cost primary straight chain alcohols.