

Notes from an Agronomist

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We forget too easily, that fertilizers, applied as our soil supplements of inorganic minerals and elements for improved crop yields (and nutritional values), can function with fullest success only on the living, not the dead, soils. That living aspect of the soils, via microbes, depends on residues of organic matters grown on the soil for the nutrition of those lowly life forms.

We forget, when we chide the lack of

scientific proof for the value of organic matter as fertilizers, that the microbes always eat at the first sitting; our crops, at the second; and we eat, several sittings later.

Agricultural surpluses are a frustrating specter mainly for the economist. They do not exist for the student of soils and crops, the agronomist, of biotic mind and of concern about the soil as nutrition.

Pesticide Safeguards Under Study

Los Angeles. Consumers are "captive customers" of the manufacturers of "economic poisons" such as those used to kill agricultural and household pests, said Helen Nelson, California state consumer consul, at hearings on increasing safeguards against pesticides in California.

"To suggest a tightening of regulations is not to suggest abandonment of pesticides," she said. "The individual, if he is afraid of such poisons, may choose not to have them around his house and garden, but he can't keep them out of the air he breathes and the water he drinks, or off the fruit and vegetables he eats."

A committee appointed by California's Gov. Brown recommended tighter controls on licensing and use of pesticides, the monitoring of animals and plants, and of human beings to measure the levels of various chemicals in their systems, and has urged research and development of less dangerous pesticides.

A representative of a growers' association said that increasing restrictions "could easily result in less plentiful and more expensive food."

Yet surpluses of almost every agricultural crop continue.

He decried Rachel Carson's book, "Silent Spring," saying that it was unscientific and unrealistic and emotional in its outlook.

However, the report of Pres. Kennedy's Science Advisory Committee, "though it is a temperate document, even in tone, and carefully balanced in its assessments of risks versus benefits, adds up to a fairly thorough-going vindication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* thesis." (Science, Vol. 140, p. 878.)

Blood Pressure Lowered by Protein Supplement

Only four days on a protein supplement significantly lowered blood pressure among a group of dental students at the University of Alabama, Dr. W. M. Ringsdorf, Jr. and Dr. E. Cheraskin report that finding in *The Journal-Lancet*, publication of the Minnesota state medical society.

The doctors gave 40 grams of a protein supplement to the students every day. By the fourth day, their pressures had dropped from a systolic reading of 120.3+8.8 to 114.7+7.8, and from a diastolic reading of 72.3+6.4 to 68.5+4.4.

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