

"AGRICULTURE'S IMAGE...WHO SPEAKS OUT"

R. L. LUCKHARDT

Collier Carbon and Chemical Corporation

We have a problem in common...you and I. You as potato growers and consumers of our chemicals are in the same boat with the chemical producers. This predicament we're in together is the lack of understanding which potato eaters have toward your use of our chemicals. Let me put our problem in focus by setting up a question.

What would happen in a supermarket in Chicago if tomorrow they should divide their potato display into two parts of like products and put a sign in front of one part of the display which read: "Fertilized with chemicals"? The other part of the display would have no sign at all. What would happen to the movement of products from those two different parts of the same display?

We can only guess, can't we? Let me give you a clue. Let me read from a recent publication which quotes verbatim from some interviews made in a shopping center. (Quotes from Agrichemical Age, December, 1971, Page 34).

Having heard that, let me ask another question: are people afraid of chemicals? You bet they are! How did they get that way? Maybe you can say it all started with cranberries. People everywhere are now worrying about things they didn't know anything about a few years ago. Mercury in swordfish, for instance. We can now raise questions faster than we can find answers. People are scared. We must recognize this condition among potato eaters.

Who feeds their fears? T.V. does. How many of you watched even 30 minutes of the "Today Show" on T.V. today? There may be millions of man-hours spent today at such shows.

Many people have nothing else to do. You know who they are. They may live in your home. They are your neighbors. The big cities with their unemployment and retired populations are full of people with nothing else to do but listen to the half-truths and less than half-truths made available to them.

The morning paper also communicates with these same potato eaters and gives them a diet of fear-producing articles. Have you read anything from every page of this morning's paper? You're an activist. You're too busy. But the city of Chicago (or Denver or Dallas) are full of people who have nothing else to do.

When you and I see an article in the Seattle or Spokane paper, we don't like, we skip over it in our hurry, call it "baloney" and go on to the sports page or the social columns. But the great bulk of unbusy people read those items and tend to believe them. In conclusion, I think this established my point: neither you nor I have the slightest idea what ideas are daily being consumed by potato consumers.

What can we do about this communication gap between us and our customers in the supermarket? My first answer is that we must have facts. Our communications must be based on solid facts. Facts about the nutritive value of potatoes. Facts about the environmental quality in our potato fields. Facts about the water quality either as runoff or in the water table. Facts about how we conserve water and don't waste it. Facts about how we conserve crop nutrients in order to protect groundwater quality.

Where do these facts come from? From research, of course. Who does this research? It's done by W.S.U. at Pullman, the U.S.D.A. and S.C.S. What's happening to agricultural research budgets? While many of you have your own taxes figured by experts; while most offices have secretaries to do filing; in our University research labs, more professors are washing their own glassware. If glassware doesn't seem important to spud growing, let me report to you further: 1972 will show a sharp decline in field experiments. These aren't the legs to get the plots applied. Agri-

cultural research is getting the axe. Just because agricultural production has been so overly successful, we're cutting research budgets when we suddenly need a lot of research facts. We need facts about (1) nutritive value in potatoes that are well fertilized and (2) water quality both at the surface and underneath.

This brings me to my first challenge: You and only you can bring the pressure to bear to guarantee the research that will produce the facts about both product and environmental quality. We're talking about the quality under, over, in and below your fields. If you don't have the facts, your dead in the water. You then have no chance to communicate. You as an association must protect yourselves with the facts. If you don't have facts, your customers will continue to read the half-truths which always flourish when there aren't any facts.

Now for a second point: Not a one of you sets out intentionally to pollute a river or an underground aquifer. You can't afford to because pollution costs dollars in lost, unused products. The question then is: how can you be efficient in your use of water and in your use of plant food in order to obtain maximum benefits without waste or pollution?

Leading potato growers in this state are doing their level best to irrigate and fertilize efficiently. Such growers use soil tests to guide the start of their fertilizer program. They use soil moisture measuring to control their irrigation. You growers in this state are fortunate to have available consulting services to measure and advise you on efficient use of water and nutrients.

These leading growers also use plant analysis as a guide to nitrogen additions during the growth of the crop. This is "spoon feeding" to help get maximum results with minimum loss of nutrients to the environment.

Thus, my second challenge: if there is any grower here who is fertilizing "by guess and by gosh"--that is flying by the seat of his pants--let's get with it and use the tools available to guide your practices for maximum efficiency. Only you can make the growing of potatoes safe for the environment which you farm. If you don't want laws about fertilizer use, then you can help prevent it by being sure they aren't "needed."

My third and last challenge to you is this: does your own family know what you're doing to be efficient with your inputs of water and nutrients? Do you communicate at home? Does your son in college know you fertilize by soil test or plant analysis? Does your brother in Chicago know that you are careful with your irrigation water not to overuse it and excessively leach your soil? Have you explained it to the men in your Lion's Club? Have you ladies told your PTA, Ladies Aid or Garden Club how you handle chemicals out on the farm?

You get the picture don't you? These sons and daughters, brothers, club members and teachers will never realize how you practice conservation unless you tell them. There is nowhere in the world that you can buy a public relations program that can do in your own town and among your own family and friends the job you yourself can do in telling the truth. You can hire some of the job done in Seattle or Chicago. But no program will really work unless you are busy working at it yourself at home.

The truth is what most people want to believe. Very few people are so perverted that they prefer the big lie. People want to believe their water is safe, their potatoes nutritious, of good quality and fair price. They are waiting for us to tell them. This communication--this telling--like charity, begins at home... in your home, your town, your schools, the office of your doctor, your legislator and your local government officials. We must each appoint ourselves a committee of one to get the truth told about our concern in protecting the environment as we grow good crops of potatoes.

Let's stop here and ask ourselves a question about communications. Who needs the truth the most? Where is the audience we most need to contact?

My answer: the most critical audience of all is likely the students and teachers in our schools. They are the brains in the community. They do the thinking, the talking, the debating, the theme writing...they are the well-fed activists who will be tomorrow's government agents, teachers and potato eaters.

How do you get the facts to them? Have you talked to a high school teacher lately? Have you asked them what information sources they have available on the subjects of nutritive value of potatoes and environmental quality? Have you seen their references for your young people? Very likely you will find specific ways you can help in providing resource material.

Our company is trying to be of help in providing lists of information sources for teachers and students in the public schools. We monthly put out a publication here in the West which we call, "Planet N Abstracts." This abstracts information about the use of plant food as related to environmental quality on our spaceship Earth which is the one planet with nitrogen. If you would like to receive this little publication or have it sent to a student, teacher, newspaper or whomever, we invite you to fill out a form available in the rear of the room. We will be glad to include you, free of charge, for a year if you can make good use of the material in your own personal "tell-it-as-it-is" communications program.

We also have a two-projector film presentation which features leading north-west farmers as they tell about how they farm to the Nth degree to achieve efficiency in crop production and at the same time protect the environment. By contacting a Company representative here in the area, you can make arrangements for a showing.

We are convinced that the leaders of your business are doing a great job of conservation and environmental protection as well as nutritious food production. We are also convinced that more farmers are moving this way each year. You have a positive and constructive story to tell. How are you going to do the job? We as a supplier want to help you.

In summary, we've said three challenges face you as potato growers involved with protecting environmental quality. First, you have every reason to push for more agricultural research to produce the facts about the nutritional quality of your product and the quality of the soil, air and water in your fields. Second, your agricultural practices must be continually upgraded for greater efficiency in use of water and chemicals. Look to those dealers and other service organizations who can help you monitor your inputs. Thirdly, decide who you want most to hear your true story of conservation, find how to talk to them, get the communication job done, starting in your own home and your own town. Lastly, look to your responsible suppliers to join your team and work with you. Give these responsible suppliers a fair chance to help you.