

Pesticides or Hunger

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•FOOD AND FIBER production is America's greatest asset; it is the basis of its standard of living and national prosperity. The efficiency of farms is such that the burgeoning population is more than adequately nourished by the work of less than 5 percent of the people, releasing 95 percent to advance industry, public works, education, research, and to enrich America's culture and to maintain its defense. For the first time in man's long struggle against want, America has, in this century, accomplished the means to banish hunger and exposure from the Earth. This is by far the greatest victory that democracy has won.

This achievement has been the work of many people in all walks of science and farming. Each area of scientific research has played its own significant role. Among these, chemistry has contributed substantially to the many advances in soil fertility, plant and animal nutrition, pest control and food processing, preservation and distribution. These contributions are abundantly reflected in the vast array of wholesome, nutritious and high-quality foodstuffs available, virtually at all seasons, to the consumer, at an average cost of less than 20 cents of the take-home dollar. This is the lowest cost for the highest nutritional level of any country. Agricultural chemicals, including pesticides, are essential factors in the efficient production of foodstuffs and, in addition, these chemicals are primarily responsible for the reduction and control of many major insect-vectored diseases, thereby contributing to the health and longevity of America's people.

The recent clamor directed against agricultural chemicals is generally gross distortion of the actual facts, completely unsupported by either scientific experimental evidence or practical experience in the field. The assertion that pesticides are the sinister companions of radioactive nuclear fallout is simply ridiculous. The contention that the land and the waters beneath have been universally and irrevocably contaminated by a rain of pesticides is firmly contradicted by documented Federal and state surveys and records which show less than 5 percent of the land area actually exposed to such chemicals in an average year. The suggestion that insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and nematocides are in fact "biocides," destroying all life, is obviously absurd in light of the fact that without selective biological activity these compounds would be completely useless. The claim that resistance to an insecticide among a particular species of insect necessarily invokes biological superiority is confronted with the experimental evidence that insecticide-resistant strains are found to be biologically inferior.

The asserted damage to wildlife by pesticides has been crassly exaggerated. At worst it can only be considered a minute fraction of that caused by natural causes such as frost wastage, flood, drought and epizootic diseases and predation. At best, pesticides have contributed substantially to wildlife welfare by protecting forest canopy and grazing verdure through control of insect ravage and disease.

There are many other areas of man's activity which press upon wildlife that are considerably more harmful than the worst of agricultural chemical practice, notably highways, airports, cities, factories, mines, power lines, TV towers and, especially, the overwhelming encroachment of billions of humans upon the haunts and feeding grounds of wild creatures.

The real danger to man's survival lies not in the controlled use of chemicals but in the hoards of insects and miasma of disease which would sweep over crops and

animals, denude the forests and leave hunger and destitution and want in their wake.

If many of the proposals recently directed against the use of chemicals in agriculture were to be actually carried out, life in America and all over the world would return to the Dark Ages, and insects, disease and vermin would once again inherit the Earth.