

Chemicals

Farmer Lashes Firms Claims

A Wiltshire farmer, Mr. C.B. Wookey, stirred up the annual conference of the British Crop Protection Council (BCPC) at Brighton, England, by describing as "rubbish" the claims of agro-chemical firms that farmers cannot manage without chemicals. Mr. Wookey, farms 1650 acres organically, using no chemicals of any sort.

The BCPC consists of representatives from government bodies, research organisations, farmers, the agro-chemical industry and environmental bodies

In a speech on "weed control practices on an organic farm", Mr Wookey said "the p.r. boys of the agro-chemical industry are the best in the world. They have persuaded—I thought of saying conned—the farming fraternity that you cannot grow good clean crops without chemicals. Believe me when I say this is rubbish".

"No one knows what we are doing by applying all these poisons—and they are poisons whatever we like to dress them up as—to our land and our crops. Barely a week passes without some instance of poisoning being reported and when you couple this with the thalidomide tragedy and Rachel Carson's exposure of the DDT story of bio-magnification, you must, in all conscience, begin to wonder whether all is well on our farms today under the present system of farming".

Herbicides (weed killers) account for the largest part of the \$14 billion a year world market in agrochemicals. Last year herbicides took 43% of the market, insecticides 32% and fungicides 18%.

Mr. Wookey says that he successfully controls weeds by "not allowing annuals to seed, timely operations, constant attention to detail and working with, rather than against, nature. We have many visitors to our farm and the predominant remark when they have been round is "amazing—I wouldn't have thought it possible".

Food Output "Depends on Environment"

"The writing is on the land" said a participant at a recent meeting in Rome of specialists on agriculture and the environment; "in Sub-Saharan Africa there is a downward spiral from which it could be difficult to escape".

Participants urged that policy makers give more attention to protecting the environment which makes the production of food possible. There was an unanimous view that if food output is to be sustained and increased to keep pace with population then environmental factors must be given more consideration by policy makers.

The loss of soil is causing acute concern in some countries. China was cited as one example of a country where millions of tons of top soil are lost every year. "We have learned to grow crops but not to manage soil", said one participant.

Desertification, the depletion of tropical rain forests, soil erosion and land degradation were among factors stressed as areas of acute environmental concern. The spread of desert is a major problem in many arid and semi-arid land areas, eating up land that once grew food. Yet there are ways in which deserts can be halted—erecting barriers, for example, in the form of hedges.

Unless governments and international aid agencies recognise that measures to protect the rural environment are needed, there is a serious danger, believed participants, that the downward spiral will continue and food output put at risk.

EEC "Milking India" claim

A campaign has been launched by the **India Committee of the Netherlands**, a non-government organisation*, to get "EEC Milk Out of India". The campaign aims to stop what the organisers describe as "the vicious circle of European Economic Community dairy aid to, and animal fed imports from India".

It claims that for 15 years the EEC has supplied India with large amounts of dairy aid for its development programme "Operation Flood". One of the aims of this programme was to make India self-sufficient in milk production by 1985. "Instead India is now more dependent on imports than ever" believes the committee.

At the same time India is exporting large amounts of highly nutritive animal feed to the EEC while there is a serious shortage in India itself. "With this feed India could produce six to ten times the amount of milk it has received in EEC dairy aid during Operation Flood 11 (1978-85)".

The committee says that under the programme a cross-breeding programme of Indian cows with western dairy animals is being implemented and that this will lead to reduced availability of coarse foodgrains and animal draught power for agriculture.

* "India as EEC Milch Cow", price \$3, (free to India); India Committee of the Netherlands, Oudegracht 36, 3511 AP Utrecht, Holland

Pay Attention to People, urges Bank

In a major new study, which draws on 35 years experience, the World Bank has warned against over-ambitious economic planning. It says that the lessons of these years are that countries should be wary of comprehensive long-term plans "which rely on overtly sophisticated forecasting exercises".

The report urges policy makers to "pay attention to the human dimension", especially to women. Development projects engage people in a variety of roles, it points out, "as beneficiaries, producers, consumers, and even...as victims". Social analysis frequently fails to take into account, it says, the special needs of women—"in many respects, the largest underutilised resource for development".