The Case for DDT

The Wisconsin DDT hearings resumed last month after being in recess since January 17th. The hearings are being held before the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources on petitions filed by the Isaac Walton League and the Wisconsin Citizens' Natural Resources Association, seeking to ban use of DDT in the State. Actually it is the Environmental Defense Fund of Patchogue, N. Y., that is behind the anti-DDT forces. It has provided the funds and legal talent to fight pesticides all over the country.

When the hearings resumed in late April, producers and users of pesticides at last had an opportunity to get some of their case on the record, countering the charges of environmental pollution that had been repeated by numerous witnesses hostile to pesticides who had appeared in the earlier hearings in December and early January. One strong witness testifying to the need for continued use of DDT, and its comparative safety, was Dr. Wayland J. Hayes, former chief of toxicology of the U. S. Public Health Service, who testified that "DDT still remains the most important single tool for control of malaria." There undoubtedly would be a resurgence of malaria in many parts of the world if DDT is banned, he asserted.

Regarding the safety of DDT, Dr. Hayes reported on clinical studies made on a group of volunteers to measure the effect of DDT on man, in which doses were ingested hundreds of times the amount that people would normally get in their daily diet. The studies showed no effects. Also, he noted, studies of workers in DDT manufacturing plants, where intake would be much greater than in the population at large, failed to reveal "any harm in any way" to these workers. Dr. Hayes testified that "you can eat Coho salmon containing 19 ppm DDT morning, noon and night as your total diet for at least 19 years without any harmful effect."

Dr. R. Keith Chapman, professor of entomology at University of Wisconsin, testified that DDT is the most effective control for insects attacking vegetable crops and that there are "no feasible substitutes for DDT" on some crops. In the case of the carrot crop, which he cited as an example, the use of substitutes for DDT could bring the grower's cost up to $100 an acre, which would make it impossible for Wisconsin's carrot growers to compete with those in other states.

Mr. Chapman stressed the importance of the farmer having a wide variety of insecticides from which to choose to cope with changing insect conditions. He recalled that a change in the feeding habits of the cabbage looper back in 1968 caused them suddenly to attack lettuce. DDT was needed to achieve control, for other materials were ineffective. He also said that DDT is the most effective pesticide for control of striped or spotted beetles in cucumbers.

Another witness, Dr. Frank Cherms, professor of poultry science at Univ. of Wisconsin, reported that in experiments he conducted on DDT-fed pheasants there was "no difference in fertility rates or hatchability rates of the birds." And, he added, in tests on turkey and quail which were fed 200 ppm of DDT no changes were noted in the thickness of their egg shells. There are many factors, he asserted, that could cause thinner egg shells, including genetic, disease and environmental factors, and these would have to be ruled out before charging major responsibility for this problem to DDT or other pesticides.

NEW ANTI-PESTICIDE LAWS PROPOSED IN CALIF., MICH.

A bill has been introduced in the California Senate (No. 1140, introduced by Beilenson) which would authorize the Director of Agriculture to cancel registration or refuse the registration of any economic poison that has demonstrated "serious defects."

In Michigan two bills have been introduced in the House (House Bills No. 3530 and 3531, introduced by Kok) which would ban the sale, purchase or use of DDT or other related insecticides in fertilizers.

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