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CHEMICALS IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

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We welcome the opportunity to discuss chemicals in agriculture. This subject has attracted continuing attention for several years. Regulatory legislation dates from the first pure food and drug law of 1906.

Other landmark legislation was passed by congress in 1947, 1959, 1964, 1970, and 1972. Numerous judicial and regulatory decisions have been made, both at federal and state levels, establishing long-standing guidelines for our industry.

Today this legislation and these regulations embrace virtually every aspect of the development, manufacture, handling, distribution, and use of agricultural chemicals. Our industry is indeed regulated.

It is inevitable that substantial attention is generated by any oversight or abuse that involves these regulations. Certainly the regulations have been carefully developed to meet public needs. Where regulations may be breached, it usually seems that someone has placed personal or private gain ahead of the public interest. And that situation stimulates headlines in the press.

The idea spreads that an unfortunate isolated incident represents normal practice or experience. Pressure builds for still more regulation. We should hardly be surprised, then, that our legislators and regulators strive for methods to check similar incidents. We live in an age in which zero risk has for some become a major goal or expectation.

My objective is to stimulate some new concepts, related not only to agricultural chemicals and food but also to regulations and to the attention these subjects receive in our daily press. We need new perspective.

Let me remind you of the dramatic gains in nutrition, in farm and food production, and in health that have occurred within our lifetimes. It is important to recognize America's farm and food record as one of the major success stories of the 20th century. Food is abundant and dependable in terms of safety and quality. Food is a bargain, shared by our entire nation. These basic facts have established a solid foundation for social and human progress.

Specific farm and food gains are rarely highlighted in the news. It is easy to overlook the positive aspects of our food story. When more people were directly involved in farm operations, the impact of new production ideas seemed to focus on food supply or food variety.

Today, however, the supermarket is often regarded as "the place where food comes from". Abundance and variety are year-round characteristics of today's market. Farms, fields, and orchards seem a distant supply point. We need better understanding of what is happening on those farms, if we are to measure food progress.

Actually, observers know that introduction of new technology has quickened in the last quarter century, both on the farm and in industry. Agrichemicals represent a segment of this new technology, providing farmers with new tools for controlling weeds, plant disease, and insects. Each successful new chemical has involved careful study, evaluation and trial—not just by a small handful of laboratory scientists, but also by a very large number of technical and practical people in industry, education, experiment stations, independent laboratories, on farms, and in government.

Altogether the investment of six to eight years of time and up to \$12 million is needed before a major new agrichemical is introduced. This is a very substantial commitment for industry, which naturally seeks to improve sales and earnings through new products.

But the most important gains are realized by those who apply new farm technology, and by the consumers who benefit. These gains are evident when a farmer invests \$8 or \$10 per acre in a crop protection chemical, thereby boosting yield or quality. His crop may then be worth \$30 to \$40 more per acre at harvest.

Not so evident, yet even more important, are the consumer dividends. They come in terms of food abundance, food quality, and food costs. The bounty so evident in our supermarkets depends on farm productivity, technology, and new ideas (including new agrichemicals) that have emerged in the last quarter century.

How can we get these ideas across to the public? How can we build needed understanding on food and agricultural chemicals? Some months ago when population growth, food supply, and hunger were very much in the news, we developed a picture to demonstrate that the American family indeed has a big appetite for good food and that the family benefits from the farm and food gains of recent years.

We published the picture in our Du Pont Magazine and developed a wall-sized food poster which we offered to science and home economics teachers for classroom use. Our interest was in telling the farm and food story to teachers and to students.

We have certainly made a start in realizing this objective, because the poster has been and continues to be a very popular teaching tool. Thousands have been distributed on a request basis. We expect teacher demand for the poster to continue over the next two to three years.

The food poster and picture attracted other widespread attention. We released the picture to the farm press, and it was published in newsletters, farm papers, and farm magazines. We began to ship our poster on request to county fairs, civic and women's groups, dealers' warehouses, roadside markets, youth organizations, farm policy groups, and countless others.

We reprinted our original two-page article in the Du Pont Magazine. One of our salesmen turned it into a placemat for a meeting. Others picked up the placemat idea and so our picture has highlighted farm and food progress for thousands of people at farm and urban meetings. We look for still broader use through the Farm-City Council program during the coming year.

Daily newspapers and big-circulation weeklies ran the picture in food stories. The World Book Encyclopedia used it to cover the story of food in 1975-76. To reach other audiences, we developed a short television feature on our food picture. This was warmly received and broadcast by scores of stations.

Our aim has been to help tell the story of food and science and farm technology to various audiences. We hope you share our interest in the positive reaction to this story by editors, broadcaster, teachers, farmers, and businessmen.

Recently a television network broadcast a food documentary—still another in a series of questioning or critical commentaries on food, health or related topics. There seems to be a standard guideline for many programs like this. It says: "Accentuate the negative". Viewers may be concerned about possible added regulatory activity needed to provide safeguards for food quality or personal health.

Zero risk is often an implied need in such broadcasts, but zero risk is based on a negative quicksand premise. Zero risk implies total control by some central authority over a particular aspect of life.

People and TV broadcasts that promote zero risk as desirable or inevitable are simply pushing the concept of more central decision making and therefore less individual responsibility. This is hardly in the tradition of our American democratic ideals.

May I therefore suggest an alternative approach?

When farm and food topics are being discussed, we in agribusiness hope there is time to listen to the positive story, and to accept the idea that risks and benefits must be kept in balance, as we measure new technical inputs in modern life.

Science and technology have helped deliver dramatic gains in farm productivity, in food bargains, and in personal health. Today's U.S. consumer spends less of his disposable income on food than a quarter century ago. Today's children in America have an average life expectancy of 73 years, compared with about 47 years in 1900.

These are some of the food and health data that can be related to agriculture and agrichemicals. We can underscore their meaning with food pictures and food posters and food placements.

We need to broaden our educational reach through all kinds of individual efforts. Teaching, writing, speaking, advertising, and broadcasting are some of the tools. Let us apply them to the need. Let us build public understanding of the positive contributions of technology.

PART IV
ENERGY POLICY

