

EDITORIAL

## Statement on Agricultural Chemicals by Dr. Norman E. Borlaug

I have appeared in Washington today to do what I can to help place a serious problem in proper perspective.

Environmentalists today seek a simple solution to very complex problems. The pollution of the environment is the result of every human activity as well as the whims of nature. It is a tragic error to believe that agricultural chemicals are a prime factor in the deterioration of our environment.

The indiscriminate cancellation, suspension, or outright banning of such pesticides as DDT is a game of dominoes we will live to regret.

DDT, because it is a name popularly known to most segments of the public, has been the first target. Once that is accomplished, the so-called ecologists will work on hydrocarbons, then organophosphates, carbamates, weed killers, and, perhaps, even fertilizers will come under the assault of their barrage of misinformation.

If this happens—and I predict it will if most DDT uses are cancelled—I have wasted my life's work. I have dedicated myself to finding better methods of feeding the world's starving populations. Without DDT and other important agricultural chemicals, our goals are simply unattainable—and starvation and world chaos will result.

### THE NEED FOR WORLD HEALTH

Perhaps more than any other single factor in the world today, DDT has made a unique contribution to the relief of human suffering. I need not reiterate its vital importance in the control of malaria.

DDT critics will say, of course, that only domestic uses of the chemical are being reviewed in the hearings at which I appeared today. But I have spent my life working with the nations of the world to help them feed themselves. I know how they will react if

we terminate uses of DDT in this country and, in effect, label it "poison." If it is not good enough for your purposes, they will reason, then it shouldn't be used in our countries. The impact will be catastrophic. All the urging and reasoning by me and other scientists will fall on deaf ears. Cancel DDT in the United States and you will see a chain reaction of cancellations throughout the world.

### DDT AND WILDLIFE

Science without common sense is worthless, and environmentalists are not using common sense when they examine DDT and its effect on wildlife in this country.

To my knowledge, there has not been one shred of reliable evidence that DDT has put any species of wildlife in danger. Ecologists point to diminishing counts of such birds as the bald eagle and peregrine falcon. These smaller counts are a result of many factors, and a crowded habitat is perhaps the most important. Some species of wildlife simply cannot adapt to the spread of man into areas which were once uninhabited.

The argument that pesticides are upsetting the balance of nature is utter nonsense. Today we have 1 million to 1¼ million species of animals and 350,000 species of plants existing in the world. But throughout the history of the world, over 130 million species once existed. In other words, today only one per cent of the species is left. The rest have perished for a variety of reasons. People who blame DDT and other pesticides for the elimination of species are ignoring geological history. Is DDT, which has only been in existence for 25 years, to be blamed for this, too?

The agricultural chemical industry has been the whipping boy of environmentalists, whose views have been so short-sighted that they haven't bothered to examine some key facts:

1. To produce food for ourselves and other nations, we required 290 million acres of farmland last year.
2. To get the same yield while relying on the technology we used thirty years ago—when most of today's pesticides and fertilizers were nonexistent—we would have required nearly 600 million acres, or twice the amount used last year.
3. This would have resulted in a huge loss of forest and grass lands which not only would have further crowded some animal species toward extinction but would have caused other problems as well.
4. Pesticides, therefore, have actually helped prevent the development that environmentalists fear most—diminishing species of wildlife.

What we need in this country is a positive approach to the solution to these problems instead of the negative reactions that now prevail. Legislating against the problem will not make it disappear—it will only postpone the issue to a time when it will be insurmountable. Instead, let's take a positive approach. Let's allocate more money to research so we can find the best means to reestablish our wildlife for the future.

But even more important, let's get our priorities in perspective. As much as I favor wildlife, man must come first. We must feed ourselves and protect ourselves against the health hazards of the world. To do that, we must have agricultural chemicals. Without them, the world population will starve.

Washington, D.C.  
October 7, 1971

### Biographical Note

Dr. Norman E. Borlaug was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1970, for his efforts to ease world hunger through the development of high-yield wheat strains. He is the first scientist in agriculture to be so honored.

The U. S. agronomist was raised in rural Iowa and educated at the University of Minnesota where he received his doctorate in 1942. Dr. Borlaug held a number of federal, industrial, and educational positions before beginning his present work in 1944 in Mexico under the joint sponsorship of the Mexican government and the Rockefeller Foundation.

As director of the Cooperative Wheat Research and Production Program in Mexico, he conducted research in genetics, plant breeding, plant entomology, pathology, agronomy, soil science, and cereal technology.

In 1962 Dr. Borlaug was named to his present position, Director of the Wheat Program of the International Center for Maize and Wheat Improvement Center. During this period he has devoted most of his efforts to both wheat research and production problems and to the training of young wheat scientists on a global basis. Also, during the past nine years he has devoted a large part of his effort to assisting programs in six Latin American countries and eight Near and Middle East countries, including Pakistan and India. Under one aspect of this program, more than 140 young scientists from these countries have been trained in Mexico under his direction.

Since 1958, Dr. Borlaug has received almost two dozen citations for his work from grateful governments around the world.

A native of Cresco, Iowa, he now lives in Mexico City.