

FERTILISER INDUSTRY IN THE SERVICE OF FARMERS

THE INDIAN FERTILISER INDUSTRY HAS come a long way since the establishment of the first superphosphate factory with a capacity of 6,400 tonnes P_2O_5 per annum at Ranipet (Tamil Nadu) in 1906. The growth in fertiliser production and consumption remained very slow in the first 50 years due to lack of awareness about the benefits of fertiliser use. The Bengal Famine in 1943 and acute shortages of food immediately after the Second World War necessitated increasing foodgrain production and consequently fertilisers consumption. The introduction of fertiliser responsive HYVs (High Yielding Varieties) of wheat and rice in the mid-sixties proved to be a turning point in Indian Agriculture. The expansion in area under irrigation and increasing coverage of HYVs led to a remarkable growth in fertiliser use and crop production. India became self-sufficient in foodgrain production and has emerged as the third largest producer and user of chemical fertilisers in the world. Adoption of an imaginative and innovative approach by the Government of India and the fertiliser industry also contributed significantly towards this achievement.

In the initial years, the farmers were reluctant to use fertilisers. The fertiliser industry had to put in considerable efforts to convince farmers regarding the benefits of fertiliser use in crop production. The fertiliser industry also improved the availability of fertilisers at the farmers door by strengthening its dealer network. Conscious of the fact that making fertiliser available alone would not be enough to increase fertiliser consumption and keeping in view that "Seeing is Believing" and "Doing is Learning", the industry conducted a large number of demonstrations at the farmers' fields. Even today thousands of fertiliser demonstrations are conducted every

year. Group communication methods like field days, crop seminars, kisan melas, etc., are undertaken by the industry to increase the level of awareness among farmers.

Soil testing is a vital tool to assess the fertility status of the soil and ensure balanced and efficient use of fertilisers. Accordingly, to enable farmers to use fertilisers in balanced proportions, the industry has set up 40 soil testing laboratories (28 static and 12 mobile) and more than 4 lakh soil samples are tested annually. Intensive efforts are being made by the industry to make the farmers understand the need and importance of soil testing. Due emphasis is also laid on conservation of natural resources through watershed development; farm level water management; soil conservation; afforestation and soil reclamation/amendment.

THE FERTILISER INDUSTRY INTRODUCED the concept of village adoption for overall socio-economic development of the village way back in 1968 in Patrenahalli village in the state of Karnataka. Since then village adoption has become a very effective mode of socio-economic development and now hundreds of villages are being adopted by the industry every year. Besides transfer of improved technology farmers are trained in scientific cultivation, fertigation and post-harvest technology. The fertiliser companies are encouraging farmers to go for crop diversification like horticulture, floriculture and off-season vegetable cultivation to make farming a profitable venture. Social services like empowerment of women, distribution of school bags to primary school students, girl child's education, camps for medical and veterinary check up, rural sports, debates, entertainment, agri-club, hand pump installation, etc. are also provided for

the benefit of farmers and their families.

The extension strategy adopted by the fertiliser industry has been flexible and undergone change as demanded by the situation from time to time. In the beginning of the era of planned development the emphasis was on creating awareness about fertilisers. The focus shifted to enlarging the fertiliser consumption base during the 1970s and 1980s. The distortion in the consumption ratio of N, P and K consequent to the decontrol of P and K fertilisers in August, 1992 underlined the need for promoting balanced fertiliser use. Further, with the depletion in soil fertility and emergence of multi-nutrient deficiencies, the extension strategy shifted to promoting balanced, efficient and integrated use of plant nutrients to maintain soil health. Fertiliser industry is very much aware that no single nutrient source, be it fertilisers, biofertilisers or organic manure can meet the entire nutrient requirement of the crops, more so with intensive and multiple cropping. As a consequence many fertiliser companies have also gone in for production and marketing of biofertilisers and vermi-compost and emphasise the combined use of all three categories of fertilisers as may be appropriate.

To highlight the contribution of the fertiliser industry in educating the farmers and faster rural development, FAI has brought out this special issue of the *Indian Journal of Fertilisers* on "Fertiliser Industry in the Service of Farmers". This issue contains seventeen papers covering the various services being provided by fertiliser companies to the farmers. We hope that our esteemed readers who share our concern for agricultural services and rural development will find the issue informative and useful.