

Check fertilizer claims

FORT COLLINS, Colo. — If a sales person pitches the line that a gallon of 10-10-10 liquid fertilizer contains 30 pounds of nutrients, throw it back," says Hunter Follett, Colorado State University Extension agronomist.

One gallon of liquid fertilizer weighs only about 12 pounds, he explains.

Fertilizer can't be more than 100 percent efficient, Follett says, adding that the analysis printed on the fertilizer package gives the nutrient percentage of the total weight.

For example, 100 pounds of 10-20-10 (10 percent-20 percent-10 percent of 100 pounds) dry or liquid fertilizer contains 10 pounds of nitrogen, 20 pounds of phosphate and 10 pounds of potash. One gallon of a 10-20-10 liquid fertilizer contains 1.2 pounds each of nitrogen and potash and 2.4 pounds of phosphate.

"Most fertilizers farmers use today are similar in efficiency and availability as far as the growing crop is concerned," says Follett. "Almost any way you slice it, a pound of nutrient is a pound of nutrient."

However, the agronomist

sympathizes with farmers who become confused about fertilizer costs, especially when a salesperson gives them several figures.

He recommends a per-pound-of-nutrient basis for comparing costs and gives an example. One "miracle" liquid fertilizer retails for \$4.20 per gallon for a 10-20-10 grade. If the nitrogen-phosphate-potash is averaged together, it would cost about 88 cents per pound of nutrient. A dry fertilizer of 10-20-10 grade would sell for about \$180 per ton and the average nutrient cost per pound would be about 23 cents.

Follett is concerned that higher fertilizer prices will encourage some farmers to use non-conventional products touted as commercial fertilizer replacements.

These substitutes are called amendments, activators, conditioners, stimulators, wetting agents or surfactants. They may contain such substances as seaweed, fermented manures, crushed mineral materials, humic materials and even coal-like materials.

Follett says, "These products

sometimes are billed as cure-alls and are supposed to improve the soil and hike yields. Sales promotions may be based on testimonials from farmers, but seldom is scientific research mentioned.

"Some of the products," he says, "may serve a beneficial role other than as a fertilizer, but frequently additional claims are made that are not justified."

He lists some claims typical of these products. They have low application rates compared with fertilizers, they may be applied as foliar sprays or to the soil directly, they may increase available nutrient level, or they may provide natural weed and insect control.

Other possible claims could be that the products are natural, organic, work with nature, do not cause cancer, do not kill bacteria or earthworms, provide an environment for bacteria and earthworms to grow, increase crop yields and quality, or increase water availability.

Reasons for claims usually are a "trade secret," and testimonials most often are based on unreplicated field-size "trials," says Follett.

He cautions farmers to be extremely wary of these claims and to require proof of the claims through substantiated research from a source outside the company.

Farmers also should compare the price per pound of actual nutrients in the products to those of conventional fertilizers. Many of these products recommend a rate of application so small (1 pint or more per acre), they would be

ineffective. A rate several hundred times that which is recommended, and at excessive costs, would be required to supply adequate nutrients for maximum crop yields, he explains.

Follett's advice to farmers who want to use non-conventional products: "Obtain only a small amount and use it on only a few acres. If the product flops, little money has been lost."

Thompson gets Limestone post

SPARTA, N.J. — John L. Thompson, Blairstown, N.J., was elected president and director of Limestone Products Corporation. This announcement was made recently by the Board of Directors of Limestone Products Corporation.

Thompson, a Rutgers University graduate, has been associated with Limestone Products Corporation for the past 35 years. A resident of Blairstown, he is a member of Blairstown Environmental Commission and the Warren County Solid Waste Advisory Commission.

Thompson succeeds Thomas K. Henritze, who has been named president of Penn-Virginia Resources Corporation at Duffield, Va.



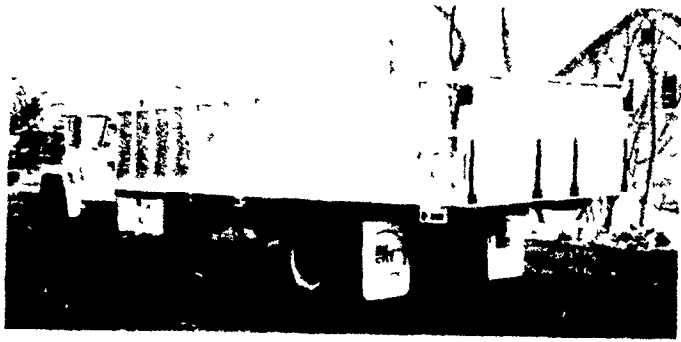
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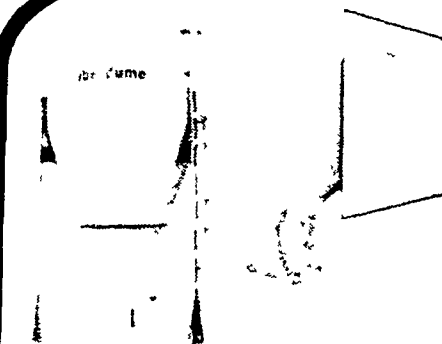


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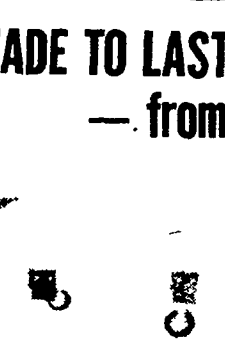
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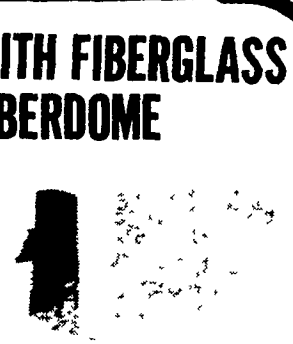
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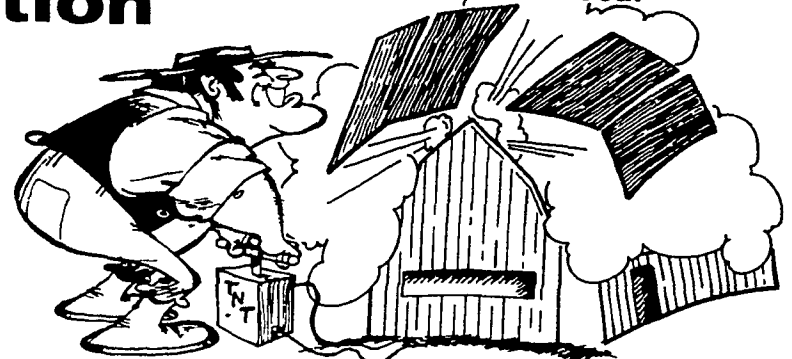
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