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# The non-farm fertilizer market today

The specialty or non-farm fertilizer industry today comprises only about two and a half to three and a half percent of the total U.S. fertilizer industry and because of this it is a unique situation.

Unlike farm fertilizers, very little is exported. And, because of the limited volume sold, supplies for spring have already reached distributors so there is little chance of transportation problems affecting supply. Prices are relatively stable and should not change for spring buying, except perhaps for a slight increase because of increased demand.

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## Demand is there

"Today the non-farm fertilizer supply situation looks very good," says Don Collins, vice president for communication for The Fertilizer Institute. "U.S. production of nitrogen and phosphate have increased to a point where we are adequately situated to produce what the U.S. market needs," he says. But he does warn the severe winter could increase curtailments of natural gas to ammonia plants which would affect the fall 1977 supply.

Although the short-range phosphate supply looks good, Collins says, the situation is continually dependent on environmental concerns as more emphasis is placed on regulations governing mining and surface mining, especially in Florida. This, he says, keeps expansion of phosphate mining on a very moderate level, but it should have little affect on supply until after 1980. "At this time," explains Collins, "it has been forecast that the world demand for phosphate will have increased to a point where there will be tight periods of supply."

The potash picture is quite dif-

ferent. Two-thirds of what we use in this country comes from the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. Within the last year two of the approximately ten U.S. owned mines have been nationalized and the Premier has indicated he intends to have at least 50 percent of the province's mines controlled.

"He has said he intends to proceed on an orderly basis, but he hasn't really defined what that means," emphasizes Collins, and adds that the threat of nationalization has brought a great deal of uncertainty to the potash industry. "Until now it has been economically unfeasible to mine our own supplies of potash in the Dakotas and could change."

The non-farm fertilizer market has changed considerably in the past few years. "Fifteen years ago the principal formula was 10-10-10 or 5-1-5. Today we have gone to higher ratios of nitrogen and higher analysis, such as 18-14-10," Collins points out.

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## Bulk buying

There is also a trend toward bulk buying. "Turf managers are more sophisticated," Collins explains. "Now maybe he or someone on his staff may have an agronomy background and can determine this fertilizer needs. The turf manager then can have it custom blended. Also there is considerable interest developing in micronutrients as the needs for higher plant quality increases."

An interesting fact about micronutrients is that if claimed by the manufacturer, they must be guaranteed on the label along with the micronutrient ratios. Each state regulates fertilizers. The Fertilizer Institute along with the American

Institute of Plant Food Officials have written uniform farm and non-farm fertilizer laws and have been urging states to adopt laws as closely as possible to the ones recommended. Florida, says Collins, has deviated the most from the uniform bills. "This isn't necessarily wrong," he says. "It is trying to protect its own fertilizer industry. But it does make it difficult for interstate marketing."

Looking ahead, Collins sees the Clean Water Act of 1975 as perhaps having the most effect on the fertilizer industry.

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## Clean Water Act

"Section 208 of that act governs non-point sources of pollution such as agricultural run-offs and run-offs from municipal lasts. Under section 208 each state must formulate its own clean water regulations for non-point source pollution. "It is conceivable, he says, "that a state could set up its regulations in such a way that it could restrict or control the use of specialty fertilizers."

Basically fertilizer is far from a water polluter. Potash has little if any affect on water. Phosphate which attaches itself to the soil, only reaches water with soil run-off. Nitrogen must leach down to through the soil profile to ground water level to become a pollutant. But before these situations develop, the applicator has already seen the effects on his plants.

If manufacturers' recommendations are followed, and there is a wide margin for error, fertilizers are one of man's most beneficial substances. They promote green growth which cuts down on erosion and noise, and saves energy. And they make any physical environment far more pleasant. □