

## OPENING ADDRESS

D C SINCLAIR, President Natal Agricultural Union

It is a great honour and a pleasure for me to be here with you today and to have been invited to deliver the opening address at your annual general meeting. I feel this particularly since I am here as a farmer and a representative of Organised Agriculture. I have been farming for many years and my recollections go back to the days when a fertilizer salesman, or in fact anyone connected with the fertilizer industry was regarded with the greatest suspicion. The average farmer had the feeling that the blighters were just trying to sell him as much fertilizer as possible whether it helped his crops or not, but I am glad to say that this attitude has gone, except perhaps in a few isolated instances. The farmer today has become fully alive to the need to use fertilizer to increase his yields and he looks to the members of your Society, Mr Chairman, to advise him what to use, when to apply it and how to apply it. I am sure that the activities of your Society have contributed very greatly to this improvement and it is something which you and your members can view with pride. A vast amount of research has of course been done in this direction, both by the Department of Agriculture and by the fertilizer industry, and sound advice can be given but there remain many avenues still to explore, and here your Society can play a very important part, and I am sure will do so in the future.

There exists a slight division of opinion in Organised Agriculture as to whether research should be undertaken solely by the Department or by a combination of the Department and private enterprise. I think again that this is due to a lurking feeling that the research done by private enterprise may not be completely objective, but be biased to produce results which will help to increase sales of a particular commodity, whether it be fertilizer or any other farming requisite. Let me hasten to add, Mr Chairman, that I personally do not subscribe to this idea, nor, I am glad to say, have I come across any but a very small minority who think in this way. We must be realistic and face the fact that the Department of Agriculture will always face problems in trying to keep its scientific staff. It is not just a question of salaries because, whatever increase may be obtained by the Civil Service, private enterprise will always more than match the figure. This means that private enterprise and the Department must live together and if their desire is to improve the agricultural conditions in this country then they must co-operate in their research work. It is an interesting development that many co-operatives are now beginning to supply advice to their members by means of qualified extension and research staff, and this trend will grow. After all the co-operative is but the farmer combining with his fellow farmers to produce and market his crop. If he expects his co-op to supply him with the means of producing his crop in the form of machinery, fertilizer, seed, etc., then it is quite obvious that he should go further and obtain advice on how to produce as efficiently as possible.

It is a well-known fact that the results of research take many years to percolate right through to all farmers. I have heard quoted a figure of fifteen years, and this emphasises the importance of extension work. This is the dual task which the members of this Society face, Mr Chairman, not only to do research on the use of fertilizer but also to see

that the results are passed on to the consumers of fertilizers as quickly as possible. I had a very interesting discussion with a young economist in the Faculty of Agriculture at Natal University the other day. He has just done a thesis on the demand for fertilizer and he discovered a very significant fact, that the use of fertilizer by farmers increased considerably when the price was lowered. As a consumer myself I leave this very important fact with you and your members, in the hope that you will be able to persuade the boards of your various companies that there exists a very strong scientific basis to justify a reduction in the price of fertilizer!

To come now, Mr Chairman, to the subject which has been made the theme for this meeting, viz 'Fertilizers and Animal Production'. I have no intention of making any deep, scientific observations, and I would be foolish to do so in such a distinguished gathering, but I would like to make a few remarks as a very ordinary farmer. Here I would like to say that one of the privileges I find in this present job of mine as President of an Agricultural Union is that it gives me the opportunity of giving advice to my fellow farmers on what they should do even though I don't do it myself. It is often a case of do as I say not do as I do!

I think that the research scientists have gone a very long way in their experiments into the fertilization of crops, particularly maize and it is very interesting to see the results which are now being achieved by farmers. Even in my part of the country, the midlands of Natal, which has never been regarded as a maize-growing area, it is most exciting to see the yields which are being obtained by proper fertilization methods. The work which Professor Orchard and others have done show what can be achieved in this high-rainfall area.

Now it is the turn of the livestock farmer. This eastern area of the country, with its reasonably stable rainfall, must produce an ever greater share of the food which the growing population of this country is going to need in an ever-increasing measure. The amount of land which will be available for this purpose will not increase, in fact it will dwindle as more land is used for non-agricultural purposes. This means that more food will have to be produced per hectare and this can only be done by the increased use of fertilizer. The day of the trek ox has gone and land is too valuable to keep cattle on it for long periods unless they are producing calves, meat or milk. Our meat must come from younger animals but this can't be done without supplementary feeding, whether of artificial food or on improved veld or pastures and this is the field in which your members must intensify their efforts, so that farmers will be able to produce the increased yields of meat and milk per hectare which they are now beginning to achieve with crops like maize.

May I wish you, Mr Chairman, and the members of the Fertilizer Society all good wishes for the future and a rewarding meeting today, which I am sure will be the case and may the Society grow and continue to play the very important role in the agricultural industry which it already does.