

FERTILIZER OUTLOOK FOR 1947

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The fertilizer outlook for this year has both a bright and a gloomy side. Reason for encouragement is found in the fact that there will probably be available the largest tonnage of fertilizer ever sold in the state although supplies may be short if we have an early spring. The rapid increase in fertilizer use in Michigan, in our neighboring states of Ohio and Indiana, and in the country as a whole, is shown by the following figures:

Fertilizer Consumption In Ohio, Indiana, Michigan
and The United States. (short tons)

	5 year average 1935 - 1939	1940	1943	1945
Michigan	131,799	166,564	263,899	340,066
Indiana	216,976	257,658	396,180	567,936
Ohio	335,135	366,211	528,388	635,325
United States	7,337,631	8,249,156	11,462,821	13,201,703

It is evident that the fertilizer companies have done an effective piece of work in increasing their production more than 60% since 1940. The increase would have been even greater had raw materials been available. It is this shortage of raw materials which will be primarily responsible for less fertilizer in 1947 than farmers will wish to buy.

Now let us consider probable supplies of raw materials for 1947. The indications are for more superphosphate than was ever produced before. Unfortunately, however, the increased production will be largely in the western states and, hence, will be of no benefit to us here in the central west. In this area production of superphosphate will be no greater, if as large, as it was last year. A scarcity of sulphuric acid is the primary cause for this situation although a shortage of cars for transportation of acid, and of rock phosphate from the mines to the factory has some influence. Supplies of acid are inadequate because manufacturing plants were run to capacity during the war without the opportunity for needed repairs. Repairs are now essential and materials for repairs are scarce. Strikes have also curtailed acid production in several plants. Another factor is the discontinuance of supplies of acid used in munitions plants and then reused in making fertilizers.

From all indications there will be little superphosphate sold as such as most of it will be made into mixed fertilizers. One thing that is seriously needed is more factories to make treble superphosphate; that is phosphate containing around 45% phosphoric acid. Most sugar beet growers want a fertilizer containing 16% phosphoric acid such as the 2-16-8 and this fertilizer cannot be made without the use of some 45% superphosphate. If the program of use of fertilizers containing higher percentages of plant food is to continue more treble superphosphate must be manufactured.

The potash situation is somewhat more encouraging in some respects at least. Potash production promises to reach an all-time high, although much of the potash to be used this spring is not yet out of the mines. The central west is scheduled to get more potash than it had last year. There is also some ground for hope that imports of potash will be resumed during the spring. Whether this hope materializes and to what extent potash will be imported, remains to be seen.

Turning to the gloomy side again, we find the nitrogen situation decidedly confused. Nitrogen solutions, made from nitrogen taken from the air, are supposed to be available in quantities at least equal to the supply last year. However, for some reason some fertilizer factories are not receiving as much as they need. These solutions are suitable for making fertilizer containing 2% to 3% nitrogen. When higher percentages of nitrogen are needed it is customary to add sulfate of ammonia. The supply of this material has been seriously curtailed by strikes in steel mills and coal mines. There seems little hope of making up the deficiency and apparently supplies of mixed fertilizer containing more than 3% of nitrogen will be limited. Nitrogen fertilizers used for side dressing crops during the growing season are not of particular interest to sugar beet growers but they are highly important to fruit and vegetable growers. Indications are that supplies of these materials will be entirely insufficient to meet the needs.

Looking at the fertilizer situation in general, we foresee a somewhat greater total tonnage than has ever been available before. Nevertheless, there will not be as much fertilizer as farmers will want to buy.

Indications are that available superphosphate and potash will be used in making a greater tonnage of mixed fertilizers but that these mixtures will average lower in phosphate and potash content than in previous years. For example, we may expect an increased tonnage of such grades as 2-12-6 and 0-14-7 but less 2-16-8, 3-12-12 and similar grades. Apparently there will be very limited supplies of high potash grades such as 0-9-27 and 3-9-18 which are used extensively on muck soils. Although such a program may mean that some farmers can buy fertilizer who would not otherwise get any, and that individual farmers may buy more tons, it means a larger production of low grade fertilizers which is a step backward.

Users of high potash fertilizers, primarily muck soil farmers, and users of straight nitrogen fertilizers and high nitrogen mixtures are apparently in for a tough time unless conditions change.