A GENERAL LOOK AT THE WEED PROBLEM

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The war has brought changes in the weed picture and new problems that must be faced in post-war agriculture. Many of these changes are readily apparent to those who have the responsibility for carrying on weed projects, either research or regulatory, during the war period. Other changes may not now be recognized, but will show up later. The shortage of labor has made it impossible for the farmer not only to maintain the clean-up programs already started, but also to prevent reinfection of lands once cleared. It is hard to know the total loss in headway resulting from this cause in the Central States, but more than one county weed supervisor has been deeply discouraged on seeing the efforts and productive results from many years' work almost nullified. The shortage of chemicals, especially sodium chlorate, which came just when more chemicals could have been used to make up for the labor shortage, has added to difficulties. Again, the shortage of new machinery has hurt weed programs as it has every other farm activity, though farmers have shown extraordinary ingenuity in getting along with what they have. Correspondingly, in weed control research it has been necessary to curtail all along the line, and it has been possible to keep going only those projects most productive of immediate results and which the research men could carry forward with their own labor.

Another most serious item handicapping weed control has been a general slackening of controls on the dissemination of weed seeds in grain and forage feeds and in seed for sowing. Under the compulsion of feed shortages, scarcities of seed stocks, high prices, and pressure for maximum production, it has been all too easy to persuade most sincere folks to accept almost anything that looked like seed or that had the appearance of a livestock feed. This has been true even of agencies normally expected to guard against such lapses in good agriculture. In some areas, there have been extremely serious results from bringing in low-quality feed grain full of weed seeds, without any regard to the future dangers involved. More than 450 cars of low-grade feed grain badly infested with Canada thistle, quackgrass, and other weed seeds were brought into this country from Canada, and in many cases the grain was fed on farms without grinding or otherwise devitalizing the weed seed. It is difficult to believe that this disregard of our future agricultural welfare was necessary when such feed could have been made innocuous by readily available means, granting as we do that the feed itself was badly needed. The evil consequences of this careless disregard of good agriculture will be felt beyond our lifetimes.

Recognizing the many ways in which the war has affected weed control adversely, one cannot but be impressed, on the other hand,