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What Fertilizer Ignorance Costs Us In a Single Year

ACCORDING TO THE latest obtainable statistics, the farmers of six contiguous Southern States—Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia—spend over \$50,000,000 a year for commercial fertilizers. The total public school fund of these States amounts to \$11,000,000.

And of the \$50,000,000 paid for fertilizers, it is not too much to say that over \$11,000,000 is wasted through ignorance of crop and soil needs.

In other words, our Ignorance Tax on the one single, solitary item of commercial fertilizers alone is more than the total amount we are spending on public schools for increasing the intelligence of our children!

It may be worth while to examine the figures more in detail:

State.	Tons of Commercial Fertilizer.	Value at \$20 a Ton.	Total School Fund of State.
Mississippi	187,000	\$2,740,000	\$1,868,544
Alabama	312,000	6,240,000	1,475,000
Georgia	757,000	15,140,000	2,327,608
South Carolina	565,000	11,300,000	1,404,074
North Carolina	507,000	10,140,000	1,935,624
Virginia	240,000	4,800,000	2,377,624
Total	2,518,000	\$50,360,000	\$11,388,827

It is not the purpose of The Progressive Farmer and Gazette to protest against spending \$50,000,000 a year for fertilizers.

It is our purpose to protest against the ignorant use of this \$50,000,000 purchase.

If the \$50,000,000 spent by these States is profitable now, reasonable knowledge of fertilizer facts would make it twice as profitable. Or to put it differently: reasonably careful study of soil needs, crop needs, the functions of different fertilizing elements, etc., etc., would add \$50,000,000 a year to the profits of our Southern farmers.

And \$50,000,000 a year properly expended in bond issues, as interest and sinking fund, would put an eight-months' centralized graded school within reach of every farm boy and girl in these States; would put a macadam, gravel, or sand-clay surface on every important road in these States, and would carry on a campaign against tuberculosis, typhoid fever, malaria and hookworm disease that would probably increase by one-fifth the average length of human life.

How fearful the waste of ignorance on one despised commodity!

We must make up our minds to stop this waste—not to spend less for fertilizers, but to spend it more wisely.

And to do this, we must simply buckle down to learn the elementary facts about fertilizers as we would learn a hard lesson at school. Potash, phosphoric acid, nitrogen, ammonia, sulphate, muriatic, etc., etc.—there are only a dozen or so terms that we need to understand, and a little deliberate, hard thinking will enable us to master them.

Your boy, if he is studying agriculture—as he should—is learning these things in school, but you didn't.

You can read the excellent "Reading Course on Fertilizers," now running in this paper from the pen of Managing Editor Miller, however, and you can read the many other illuminating articles in this issue. You can also write your State Experiment Station and Department of Agriculture for their free bulletins on fertilizers, and a postal card addressed to "Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.," will get you free copies of Farmers' Bulletin No. 44, on "Commercial Fertilizers;" No. 77, on "The Liming of Soils;" No. 192, on "Barnyard Manure;" No. 257, on "Soil Fertility," and No. 278, on "Leguminous Crops for Green Manuring."

And you might also get your boy's text-book on agriculture and both of you study together the sections on fertilizers—and all the rest of it, for that matter. It would help both of you and put you into closer harmony in all your farm work.

Numerous other phases of the fertilizer problem are handled by experts in other parts of this issue. The big fact we wish to drive home on this page is simply that our Ignorance Tax on this item is enough to make the South a veritable Garden of Eden, if it were saved and properly applied.

1. We waste hundreds of thousands of dollars because we won't learn that names of brands mean nothing at all—as Prof. Massey illustrates in such telling fashion on our next page. It's only the analysis that means anything.

2. We waste other hundreds of thousands because we use little dribbles of low grade fertilizers, whereas the same quantities of potash, phosphoric acid and nitrogen could be purchased more cheaply in a higher grade fertilizer.

3. We lose enormously by trying to make commercial fertilizers alone pay a profit on thin, long-cultivated lands that are literally famishing for humus, vegetable matter. You might as well take a man dying of thirst and try to save him by giving him bread: he must have water or die. And these soils must have humus or die, so far as profits are concerned.

4. While it is often profitable to buy nitrogen as a commercial fertilizer, we have lost millions by the indiscriminate purchase of it for every crop, whereas scientists tell us there are 38,000 tons of nitrogen—\$11,000,000 worth—in the air above every acre of land you own, and you have only to set the legumes (cowpeas, clover, soy beans, etc.) to work gathering his nitrogen from the air and storing it in the soil free of charge.

But we cannot cover this big question on our first page. There are nineteen other pages of this issue and nearly every one of them has some big fact that should go far toward saving that \$11,000,000 and more now wasted annually through ignorance of a comparatively simple subject.