



# AGRI-BRIEFS

## AGRONOMIC NEWS ITEMS

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## SIX BILLION AND CLIMBING

**Do you feel crowded...hemmed in?** Are the streets in your town crowded with cars and trucks...sidewalks and shops full of people? Well, in the so-called "good ol' days" that many of us talk about there were, in fact, fewer people... a lot fewer. Last year world population surpassed 6 billion people. In itself, this number doesn't mean much to us. There are just too many zeros to comprehend. But consider this: World population has more than doubled since 1950.

**Six billion is a lot of people to feed.** Yet when we go to the grocery store the shelves are full of food. There is a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables to choose from every single day of the year. And how about cereal? There must be several dozen different kinds made from oats, wheat, barley, and corn with and without sugar, cinnamon and honey. And on it goes.

**Food is not produced by accident.** It comes from a dedicated farm community that is becoming ever more efficient to meet the demand of an ever growing population. This efficiency is essential because not only does an increasing population require more food, but it also requires additional space. So each year arable land is lost to construction of homes, roads and shopping centers. In 1950 there was about a half acre of arable land per person in the world. Today there is slightly more than a fourth of an acre. High yields allow us to produce more food on less land, thereby protecting fragile areas and preserving wetlands, forests and scenic areas.

**Efficient, high yield crop production utilizing the latest technology is key to continued success.**

Examples are:

- Precision farming utilizes computers and satellite tracking to aid growers in precisely applying fertilizers and chemicals where they are most needed.
- Conservation tillage minimizes soil disturbances and helps protect land from erosion.
- Sophisticated weather monitoring assists growers with irrigation scheduling.
- Transgenics produces new crop varieties with value-added characteristics.

**Fertilizer is an essential ingredient in the production of high yielding crops.** It is estimated that at least a third of our production in the U.S. is directly attributable to fertilizer. In countries with highly depleted soils from intensive geologic weathering, such as in the tropics or from more recent mining of nutrients caused by under-fertilization, the contribution from fertilizer is even greater.

**Of course, yield is only part of the story.** Quality is also important. So our objective must be the production of high yielding **and** nutritious crops. Fertilizer programs supplying balanced nutrition in adequate amounts for production goals will accomplish this. For example, nitrogen ensures grains and

forages will be high in protein. Phosphorus supports seed quality, and potassium encourages carbohydrate formation and increases the plant's resistance to disease and insects.

**Yields of many crops produced today have doubled or more than doubled compared to the 1950s.** So crop production has kept pace with population growth...so far. The question is, can we continue to increase production? The answer must be yes. Right now we are at six billion and climbing. Before you know it, we will be at seven billion and climbing.

—AEL—

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