

monium bisulfite is used widely in the western part of the country, where it is produced as a byproduct from smelter operations.

The principal micronutrients of interest are boron, iron, zinc, copper and manganese. Boron is supplied usually as sodium borate and the others as metal sulfates. These are all soluble in water and therefore soluble to some extent in nitrogen solutions. However, except for boron, none of the micronutrient compounds has appreciable solubility in liquid mixed fertilizers. For example, only 0.01 to 0.04% of the elements (added as the sulfates) can be dissolved at room temperature in a 9:9:9 liquid fertilizer made from orthophosphoric acid.

The solubility of micronutrients in liquid mixed fertilizer can be increased by using superphosphoric acid rather than standard orthophosphoric acid. The polyphosphates in the superphosphoric acid sequester the micronutrient metals in the same way that iron and aluminum are sequestered when the superphosphoric acid is used to make a clear product from wet-process acid. Solubility at atmospheric temperature in a 9:9:9 solution made from superphosphoric acid is as follows (elements added as the sulfates):

Micronutrient	Solubility, wt. %
Iron ( $\text{Fe}^{+++}$ )	0.56
Copper ( $\text{Cu}^{++}$ )	0.53
Zinc ( $\text{Zn}^{++}$ )	0.64
Manganese ( $\text{Mn}^{++}$ )	0.07

The low solubility of the manganese salt probably is due to the relatively low stability of manganese complexes as compared with those of the other metals. The polyphosphates in superphosphoric acid apparently do not form sufficiently stable complexes with manganese, probably because of the short chain lengths of the polyphosphates. Tests are being made with superphosphoric acid containing 78 to 79%  $\text{P}_2\text{O}_5$ . At this high  $\text{P}_2\text{O}_5$  content, the average chain length of the polyphosphates is greater and stronger complexes may be formed.

#### Suspension fertilizers

Most of the problems associated with liquid fertilizers arise from the effort to make a clear product, free of solids. If a load of solids could be tolerated, then difficulties such as low concentration, «salting out», precipitation of impurities from wet-process acid, and incompatibility of micronutrients would be reduced or eliminated. To realize all these advantages it would be necessary to carry a load of soluble crystals of nutrient salts in addition to insoluble solids such as impurities from wet-process acid and micronutrient phosphates. This complicates the problem because the soluble salt crystals may grow during storage.

To make such a product acceptable, it would be necessary to prevent settling, at least to the extent of keeping crystals from settling rapidly and caking to a solid mass on the bottom of the container. It would be necessary also to prevent crystals from growing to such a size as to cause stoppage of flow in application equipment.

A considerable amount of interest in this approach has been shown by liquid fertilizer producers, and some development work has been done (14, 19, 23). Most of this has been centered on use of a suspending agent to increase the viscosity of the crystal-solution mixture and thereby delay settling and crystal growth. The suspending agent that has received the most attention is an attapulgite clay mined in the southeastern section of the United States. This material has the property of increasing the viscosity of an aqueous system, and a small amount can impart stability to a suspension. The clay not only delays settling and crystal growth but also improves the situation when settling eventually occurs, by causing the crystals to settle in a loose, easily dispersed mass rather than a hard cake.

The product of the clay suspension technique is called «salt suspension» or «slurry fertilizer». At least four companies

are now making such suspensions as standard product. The amount of water in the formulation is reduced as compared with production of clear, noncrystallizing liquid fertilizer, with the result that nutrient compounds such as potassium nitrate and diammonium phosphate crystallize. In some cases, all the potassium chloride used may not go into solution. The resulting product is relatively high in nutrient content and carries a fairly heavy load of finely divided crystals in suspension. Usually about 2% of the clay suspending agent is used. Products such as 5:15:20, 14:14:14 and 18:18:0 are made; all of these are much higher in concentration than comparable clear liquids and compare quite favorably with the concentration of solid mixed fertilizers in general use. Wet-process acid is used in making the suspensions.

Best results in using the clay are obtained when it is predispersed in water or nitrogen solution before incorporation into the mix. This breaks down clay agglomerates and allows the full suspending effect to be developed. The clay is effective whether the ammonia is introduced after the acid or along with it. Except for preparation and feeding of the clay-water slurry, operation does not differ from the usual practice in making liquid mixed fertilizers.

The effect of the clay on properties of a 12:12:12 suspension is shown in the following tabulation. The suspensions were stored for a week with the temperature held at 0°C. and atmospheric temperature on alternate days. Such cycling of temperature is conducive to crystal growth as compared with storage at uniform temperature, thereby giving the equivalent of a much longer period under ordinary temperature conditions.

Per cent clay	Viscosity, centipoises	Settling * %	Crystals larger than 20 mesh, wt. % of suspension	Sprayed through 0.078-in. nozzle
0	54	31	0.94	No
1	244	9	0.20	No
2	534	0	0.03	Yes
3	846	0	0.01	Yes

\* Per cent of suspension as clear top layer.

The data show that for this particular suspension 2% clay was required to suppress settling and crystal growth adequately. The resulting viscosity was fairly high but the suspension could be pumped and sprayed without difficulty. At the 2% level, the proportion of crystals larger than 20 mesh was only 0.03% (expressed as per cent of the total product weight). Other tests showed that the amount of crystals of this size present is an important factor in determining sprayability of the suspensions. With more than about 0.1% of crystals larger than 20 mesh, the crystals usually plugged an 0.078-inch nozzle, which is one of the smallest sizes in general use for spraying liquid fertilizers.

Viscosity is one of the distinctive properties of salt suspensions. A medium high viscosity, on the order of 200 centipoises, was found essential in most cases for obtaining the desired suspension properties. The rheological properties of various suspensions (each containing 2% attapulgite clay) are shown in Figure 4. Rate of shear (in terms of revolutions per minute of the viscosimeter disc) is plotted against shearing stress. For true Newtonian behavior, the curves should have been straight lines starting at the origin; all of them depart from this somewhat. Suspensions made with urea as the source of supplemental nitrogen gave a line that is straight over much of its length and that intersects the stress axis somewhat above the origin, which is typical of plastic flow. The other two curves indicate pseudoplastic behavior, that is, the ratio of stress to shearing rate (apparent viscosity) decreases as the shearing rate is increased.

Although a fairly high viscosity was required to control settling and crystal growth, no difficulty was encountered in pumping and spraying the products. The viscosities were not high enough to affect flow through orifices significantly; published data (18) show that liquids with viscosities as high as 700 centipoises may actually flow through orifices faster

## Utilisation des engrais azotés liquides

Institut pour la fertilisation et la pédologie de l'URSS (Moscou)  
par P. A. BARANOV



En URSS, le problème de l'utilisation des engrais azotés liquides est intimement lié au nom de l'Acémien de l'Agrochimie scientifique russe et soviétique D. N. PRJANISHNIKOV.

Au début de ce siècle (1916), développant ses recherches précédentes sur le métabolisme de l'azote dans la plante, il montre d'une façon définitive dans son ouvrage «L'ammoniaque, l'alpa et l'oméga du métabolisme des matières azotées dans les plantes» l'insuffisance de la théorie existante précédemment et disant que l'ammoniaque (ammonium) ne peut servir directement comme source de nutrition azotée des plantes, et qu'il est seulement le matériau destiné à former dans le sol des nitrates, unique forme de nutrition azotée convenant à la plante.

Il montre que l'ammoniaque est par contre excellent et physiologiquement meilleur que les nitrates en tant que forme de nutrition azotée des plantes.

Cette thèse de principe supprime la contradiction entre, d'une part, la théorie agronomique antérieure du grand avantage des nitrates, et, d'autre part, le développement de l'industrie azotée actuelle, basée sur la synthèse de l'ammoniaque avec production surtout de sels ammoniacaux, forme la plus économique des engrais azotés.

Cela devait donc conduire à l'étude de la question de l'utilisation de l'ammoniaque directement comme engrais azoté. Notre pays, placé après la Révolution devant la création d'une vaste industrie azotée, utilisant l'ammoniaque comme engrais direct, en présegea les grands avantages: grâce à la possibilité de réduire les investissements pour la construction des usines d'azote, il n'envisagea plus la construction d'usines transformatrices de l'ammoniaque en engrais azotés ordinaires, d'autre part il devenait possible d'obtenir une diminution de 30-50% du prix de revient de l'unité=azote.

Le premier essai avec une solution à 1% d'ammoniaque synthétique fut réalisé en 1925. Ensuite, après une série d'essais végétatifs, on fit au champ (1932) quelques essais sur sols podzoliques avec fertilisation de la pomme de terre et sur chernozem avec fertilisation de la betterave sucrière. Enfin, cette même année, en Asie centrale, au goskhoze «Pakhta Aral», sur sol gris une fertilisation du cotonnier avec essai d'ammoniacales. Ces essais ont montré la valeur fertilisante pratiquement pareille de l'ammoniaque et des ammoniacates d'une part, des ammonitrates et sulfate d'ammoniaque d'autre part. D'ailleurs, dans les conditions du chernozem, la préférence alla aux ammoniacates. De plus fut établie une remarquable inégalité de répartition des engrais liquides introduits dans les sillons (dans l'eau d'irrigation) sous cotonnier. C'est pourquoi, par la suite, nous ne fîmes plus appel à cette méthode de répartition d'engrais azoté liquides. Vu l'évident avantage économique des ammoniacates, et surtout de l'ammoniaque, leur utilisation à grande échelle posa en ce temps un problème technique très complexe pour l'agriculture, dû à la multitude des petites exploitations. Malheureusement, la guerre dévastatrice de 1941-1945 empêcha la création des bases d'organisation technique indispensables pour développer l'utilisation pratique des engrais azotés liquides. Nous pûmes retourner à la réalisation des problèmes de leur utilisation seulement après rétablissement du niveau économique d'avant-guerre, avec la croissance des ressources matérielles et du progrès technique, en moyenne 10 ans plus tard que les USA, où, du fait de la guerre par contre, furent créées des conditions favorables à un développement rapide pour l'utilisation des engrais azotés liquides.

Il faut de plus prendre en considération que l'ammoniaque anhydre contient 4 fois plus d'azote que la solution à 25%. Mais le poids spécifique de l'ammoniaque anhydre est seulement de 0,63. C'est pourquoi le volume des citernes pour ce dernier ne serait donc pas 4, mais seulement 2,5 fois moindre, que celui de la solution aqueuse, et la dépense en métal, par suite de la grande tension de vapeur de l'ammoniaque anhydre ne