

# Oklahoma Hectares? Si! Si!

By Ferdie J. Deering

Two years ago I made a trip to Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, Mexico, with a group of farmers from the Oklahoma Wheat Commission to review research with wheat and triticale being done under supervision of Dr. Norman Borlaug, Nobel peace prize-winning scientist.

We also were interested in the tremendous production achieved on former desert land under irrigation from the Yaqui river. Farmers operate their own experiment station, in addition to the big Rockefeller-financed institution, and they have a large marketing co-operative.

It was here that I ran into a minor "international problem" with the metric system. A member of the board of directors asked me how many tons of wheat per hectare is produced in Oklahoma. Mexico uses the metric system, like nearly every other country in the world except the United States.

The question was a tough one, considering his limited English and my limited Spanish, but with my pocket Spanish-English dictionary and a lot of gesturing, we managed to communicate.

The answer wasn't easy.

I had never seen an Oklahoma hectare, nor had I ever tried to calculate our crop yields in tons — metric tons at that. We finally arrived at an answer that seemed to be acceptable in both languages.

In a few weeks Oklahoma wheat growers and elevator men will go through



their annual business of weighing the harvest in pounds, converting it to bushels to determine yields per acre, harvesting costs, and government marketing certificates. Then the grain will be weighed again in pounds when it is shipped to terminal markets, and eventually converted to metric tons (2,205 lb.) for export.

Most of these conversions would be simplified

or eliminated if we used the decimal-based metric system.

days, about 1984, the United States may shift to the metric system. Congress has been talking about it since Revolutionary days. Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams each reported to Congress on it while he was president, but neither recommended it. So we stuck with the once-familiar bushel basket and peck measure.

Now Congress has another passel of bills before it, any one of which might change our measurements from inches to millimeters, from miles to kilometers, from pounds to kilograms, and from quarts to liters. Hearings have been started to try to combine the proposals into a single workable bill.

The Department of Commerce recommended in 1971 that the U.S. change to metric "deliberately and carefully" over a period of 10 years or more. Last year, a Department of Agriculture publication said "It's no longer a question of whether Twentieth Century America is going to go metric — it's simply a question of when."

And that is quite a question.

The metric system was developed at the time of the French Revolution. From it has evolved the International Metric System, founded on six base units.

The unit of length is the meter, the unit of mass or weight is the kilogram, the measure of time is the second, and of electric current the ampere. The unit of temperature is called the kelvin, also known as the degree celcius, formerly centigrade. The unit of luminous intensity is the candela.

Parts of the metric system are fairly familiar to Americans but others are new. Motorists know that foreign cars are built on metric measurements and that our wrenches don't fit, but U.S. car manufacturers want to take their time in changing over.

In many cases, it will cost a lot of money to switch to metric, and support has developed in Congress to help companies meet conversion costs through faster tax write-offs for metrically-dimensioned equipment and by special loans to small businesses. The administration opposes, subsidy, leaving the issue to be settled.

Washington observers say that chances are some kind of metric-conversion will be passed this year, but that it very likely will provide for a 10-year change-over. This will give us time to learn the new dimensions. It might take longer for us to make the results of switching the metric system and our present system simultaneously.