

**Ferdie J. Deering**

## **DDT Banning Could Set Precedent For Restriction of Useful Chemicals**

**A** RECENT television program on wildlife presented Lorne Greene, actor, in the role of expert on decreases and increases in the numbers of pelicans hatched on the California coast. Perhaps he is.

Greene's comments could lead to the superficial conclusion that such fluctuations are due to farmers and their use of DDT and even seemed to imply both should be abolished.

DDT has been banned by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Greene cited this as a great victory, although many scientists and agriculturists might not agree.

More to the point is the likelihood that environmental programs of this type may be background propaganda for further arbitrary banning of chemicals beneficial to humanity.

Look at the other side of the debate. Norman Borlaug, noted agronomist and recipient of the 1970 Nobel Peace Award, had something to say on this subject in a nationally syndicated article last summer. His opinions as a scientist who has had long experience with DDT ought to carry at least as much weight as those of an actor doing "scientific commentary."

"We either use the pesticides and fertilizers at our disposal or we starve," Borlaug wrote. He said also that "without thinking" conservationists and partially informed people in the communications media have embarked on a crusade to end the use of agricultural chemicals. He estimated that if we abandon use of these tools, consumer food prices could "easily double."

Claims and counterclaims by the

scores have been made as to good or bad effects of DDT, but benefits still outweigh unproved claims of detrimental effects.

A significant victory for defenders of DDT came last June when three college scientists won damages in a libel suit against The New York Times and a National Audubon Society executive who accused them of lying to cover up harmful effects of DDT on bird life. The suit was filed by Dr. J. Gordon Edwards and Dr. Thomas H. Jukes of California, and Dr. Robert White-Stevens of New Jersey.

The National Academy of Sciences in 1971 said it was estimated that "in little more than two decades DDT has prevented more than 500 million deaths." That's a lot of lives.

On the other hand, statistics published by National Agricultural Chemicals Association show there were only 13 fatalities from pesticides in 1971; 17 in 1972; and 10 in 1973. None of these was attributed to DDT, and not all were accidental.

Dr. Ray F. Smith, chairman of the Entomology Department of the University of California at Berkeley, points out that side effects of potential replacements of DDT "have been far worse than those of DDT on the natural biological enemies of pests treated and on people applying the chemicals."

Rationalizations offered for many of EPA's actions caused Malcolm S. Forbes, editor-in-chief of Forbes magazine, to comment: "And the other day I heard of something that doesn't cause cancer, and of a mouse that died of natural causes."