

## **Improved technology and products for farmers on the way**

By Mark Ross

New Zealand farmers and growers are one step closer to accessing new and improved technologies and products to keep them internationally competitive.

A new Bill has been introduced to Parliament that will address New Zealand's woeful data protection regimes – one of the worst in the developed world - which results in a myriad of problems for farmers and growers who have not been able access fit-for-purpose products needed to farm productively.

Farmers of minor species, such as goats and growers of minor crops are most affected by this. The change will also go a long way to replacing older chemistries with more environmentally-friendly options.

With the phasing out of some products, the pressure is on farmers and growers to find alternative 'softer' chemistries. In many cases these chemicals exist but are less likely to be marketed in New Zealand. Diazinon is one example. The insecticide is used to control grass grub and is due to be phased out in 2028.

Grass grub attacks the root system of a plant and is estimated to affect almost half of New Zealand's productive land – about 17.5 million hectares. The management of grass grub costs up to \$90 million a year in lost production.

If there are no registered alternatives to Diazinon by 2028, many hectares of pasture could be lost, or unregistered chemical products could be used instead. Extended data protection will go a long way to encouraging the development of replacement insecticides.

In the goat industry, the most commonly used veterinary medicines are drenches. Many anthelmintics have to be used 'off label', because there is no registration for these products to be used for goats. They have been tested and registered for use on cattle, sheep or horses – but not goats.

Growers of minor crops - including citrus, squash, sweet corn, kumara, tamarillos, field tomatoes, avocados, berry fruit and stone fruit - have often asked Agcarm members to introduce products to New Zealand, that they have available overseas.

Despite the demand, these products aren't being introduced because our market is very small and developing new technology is expensive due to the cost of assembling thousands of pages of data proving that a product works, is safe for people and the environment, and residues in produce are well within acceptable limits.

Manufacturers need to provide this information in order to get approval from two regulators: the Ministry for Primary Industries and the Environmental Protection Authority. The data package supplied in support of an application represents a significant investment – costing hundreds of thousands of dollars to assemble.

Often this data is not protected from competitors. So there is no incentive for companies to invest in researching solutions for New Zealand pest and diseases.

Ten to 15 years of data protection is common in other developed countries. So while the government is making a step in the right direction with an increase to eight years, 10 years

protection would enable New Zealand farmers and growers to access products similar to their international counterparts.

### **Comparison of global data protection regimes**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Years</b>
Japan	15+
Korea	15
EU Members	10 + 5
Chile	10
Colombia	10
US	10
Brazil	10
Singapore	10
Australia	10
China	6-10
New Zealand	5
Mexico	5

It was pleasing to see cross-party support for extending data protection during the First Reading in Parliament. Agcarm is now working with the Primary Production Select Committee, agricultural and other stakeholders to further data protection to a 10-year regime.

After all, in an agricultural nation like New Zealand, farmers should have access to the best products available for the job.

- Mark Ross is chief executive of Agcarm, the industry association for companies which manufacture and distribute crop protection and animal health products.