

Agcarm - Ensuring safe sustainable food

By Mark Ross

Agcarm plays an important role in ensuring the production of safe and healthy food.

We are the peak representative for crop protection, animal health remedies and rural distributors.

It is satisfying to me that the animal health and crop protection industries are one where the key manufacturers assert a strong focus on safety, innovation and environmental stewardship.

This is refreshing as agrichemicals are often placed in a negative light, when in fact they are an essential input to New Zealand's continued drive for safe, sustainable and high-yielding agricultural production systems.

As one of its key policies Agcarm is focussed on raising public awareness that the products our members produce are beneficial to New Zealand, safe, and are important to the sustainability of our natural environment.

From a primary sector perspective this involves Agcarm working proactively with the government regulators to ensure that the right decisions are made on the approval of products available for use within New Zealand.

Being part of a global food production system the regulators making the approval decisions must consider our trading partners' requirements for effective pest and disease control. Exporting a disease or unwanted pest on our food products is not an option, so having the right crop protection or animal health product available is critical. With the majority of New Zealand's agricultural production being sold in markets overseas, we must also be at the forefront of safe food production.

A model of how the agrichemical industry works successfully on safe food production with government, would be on the animal disease front.

In this area any major diseases are quickly contained and controlled, minimising longer-term negative impacts on New Zealand exports and environment.

Take for example the TBfree disease management programme. With a reduction of Tb within New Zealand cattle and deer, this is viewed as a successful government-industry partnership.

Farmers and industry groups work together with the government to make it one of the world's leading disease control schemes.

We are fortunate that New Zealand's strict biosecurity controls, quality control processes, use of innovative products and geographic isolation allows our country to obtain an animal disease-free status.

This is an important factor in our agricultural success, which is recognised by the World Organisation for Animal Health.

When it comes to food safety what people might not realise is that New Zealand is also a significant importer of food, with our proportion to exports being one of the highest in the western world.

This is a reflection of our climate (which limits the foods that can be grown domestically), seasonality of production, and economies of scale in the production of pre-processed foods.

Due to the large amount of food that we import it is essential that we link into international decisions on food quality.

This includes making sure that our stringent maximum residue limits in imported agricultural products are adhered to, and that no unwanted substances or organisms are contained within the imported food.

The New Zealand legal requirements on imported food are overseen by the Ministry for Primary Industries..

Given this, it is satisfying to know that New Zealand's farmers, growers and our production systems have an international reputation as a safe and secure food supply source.

Through the Ministry for Primary Industries, and by working with industry groups like Agcarm, New Zealand sets the highest standards for its food producers to ensure that the country remains a world leader in producing safe and healthy food products.