Three breakthroughs in three months: Celebrating Agcarm's achievements

Agcarm's summer conference was a time to celebrate three months of achievement as President Mark Christie championed three breakthroughs in the organisation's work with members and regulators.

“Since our annual conference in July, we have seen the completion of some significant pieces of work which will benefit Agcarm members. Many industry associations would be lucky to have one breakthrough a year, but we have had three since October”, says Mr Christie.

The first success was the completion of a veterinary medicine group standard which slashes paperwork around the regulation of veterinary medicines in small pack sizes.

Animal health companies no longer have to make an application for registration with the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). They can assess their substance and, if it fits with the group standard, can leave irrelevant statements off the label.

A second success also concerns labelling. In November, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) agreed to remove the requirements for labels of stable agrichemicals to have a 'shelf life statement'.

The shelf life statement meant that perfectly good product had to be sent back to the manufacturer for testing and relabelling. This added cost, time and hassle.

Agcarm's third success is an increase in data protection. In December 2012, the government agreed to change the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Act to give greater protection of privately-owned scientific and safety data prepared for regulators.

Agcarm members have pushed hard for data protection over many years. In recent years the campaign has been joined by significant user groups who wanted to access new technology, or add their minor crop to a label.

The key breakthrough is that the government will introduce three years protection for data submitted for new uses and reformulations of an existing compound. Currently there is no protection. Other parts of the announcement were less well received (see page 2), but Agcarm is pleased that the government has understood how data protection will benefit farmers and growers and therefore the New Zealand economy.

Agcarm sees itself as a partner working positively with government, and acknowledges these breakthroughs could not be achieved without the efforts of officials, mostly at the MPI and EPA. Agcarm would also like to thank members and stakeholders whose excellent input has been vital through the process of achieving change.

Nathan Guy, Minister for Primary Industries, speaking at the Agcarm conference in Auckland on February 20, said Agcarm's achievements were “tremendous”, and he acknowledged Agcarm's role in increasing the productivity of the agricultural and animal health sectors, as well as protecting New Zealand from pests.
Innovative products get more protection

Growers and farmers of niche foods are the winners from government plans to boost access to crop protection and animal health products.

A law change increasing the protection of scientific information or data will mean that some products will get protection for information supplied to regulators.

Assembled from laboratory tests and field trials, data is required by regulators to assess how a product is made and works, and its impact on humans and the environment. This must be done before a product can be sold in the New Zealand market.

New Zealand has one of the worst data protection regimes in the developed world, which results in a myriad of problems for farmers and growers who cannot access fit-for-purpose products they need to farm productively. The problem stems from the fact that no one wants to foot the bill of registering a product, including conducting field tests and trials, when a competitor can copy the first registration at minimal cost.

A lack of protection also removes the incentive for manufacturers to update old labels with new information, because the information is quickly copied at no cost to competitors.

After four years examining the issue, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has proposed a mix of changes for data protection, including retaining the status quo for reviews of older products (see table).

The changes do nothing to encourage the registration of new products, essential to raising productivity in mainstream agriculture. Increasing data protection for new actives to 10 years, from the current five years, would encourage these products.

Agcarm will work with the government to ensure that the proposals get through the legislative process as soon as possible.

“The don’t go far enough, and sadly won’t correct all the problems that the government is trying to solve, but Agcarm will support the bulk of the proposals when they reach the select committee. Opposing them could result in the government putting them in the ‘too hard’ basket with other troublesome legislation, meaning we will have to wait a further four years,” said Graeme Peters, chief executive of Agcarm.

What is data protection?
Before any agrichemical or veterinary medicine is used in New Zealand, approval must be granted by two regulators: the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and MPI.

The approval process requires applicants to supply supporting information or data on a range of product features including chemistry, manufacture, toxicology, efficacy, and likelihood of residues remaining after use.

Why should it be protected?
Greater protection would give a greater incentive to bring new technologies into New Zealand. These technologies are safer and more effective forms of chemical or biological compounds, or new ways for existing products to be used. To remain competitive, New Zealand agriculture needs to access the latest innovations in crop science and crop protection.

Is there an example?
2,4,D is a common off-patent selective weedkiller sold by a number of companies. The EPA plans to reassess the chemical – which requires the original manufacturer to provide data. The data is unlikely to be provided because of the significant cost, which cannot be recovered. If the data is not provided, 2,4 D could be banned – depriving farmers and growers of a valuable tool for controlling broad leaf weeds. Data protection would ensure that the data is provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Agcarm asked for</th>
<th>Government proposal</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New actives - one use</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>5 years protection (no change)</td>
<td>C. More effort required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New actives - multiple uses</td>
<td>Not requested</td>
<td>Three years in addition to five years = 8 years (currently 0 years)</td>
<td>B minus. Interesting idea but didn’t work in Aussie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New uses and new formulations</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>3 years (currently 0 years)</td>
<td>B plus. Good but most of industry wanted more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews of older products</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>0 (no change)</td>
<td>D. Short sighted. Will lead to problems</td>
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Regulators get mud on boots

Learning more about the practical reality of day-to-day agriculture was the goal of an Agcarm field trip for regulators. The two-day visit to Canterbury included a 1500 cow dairy unit, vet practice, spray contractor and an arable farm. Regulators from the Environmental Protection Authority, Ministry for Primary Industries, and the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment also visited Lincoln to hear about the latest innovations in spraying.

Regulators get mud on boots

- Compliance manager Peter Jacob explains how regulations on storage, signage, segregation, and approved handlers are implemented by Ashburton Trading Society.

- In a field of blackcurrants, Mid Canterbury grower Daniel Lovett (left) speaks about the challenge of controlling pests on a mixed farm of about 1000 hectares. The Lovett family business grows and packs onions for export to Europe and Asia and the local market. They also grow potatoes, carrots, wheat, barley, grass seed and small seeds, and have 200 breeding hinds.

- Regulators on a visit to a Rolleston seed facility, the largest operational site for PGG Wrightson Seeds in New Zealand, with functions including storage, seed treatment, seed mixing and distribution.

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GM - it’s time for a sensible debate

For thousands of years, farmers have been using breeding techniques to ‘genetically modify’ crops to improve quality and yield.

Modern biotechnology allows plants breeders to select genes that produce beneficial traits and move them from one organism to another. Plant biotechnology is far more precise in producing desired agronomic traits.

Plant biotechnology has been adopted by farmers worldwide at rates never before seen by any other advances in the history of agriculture. A recent report found that biotech crops were grown by 17.3 million farmers on 170 million hectares in 28 countries (see Did you know).

The reason for such impressive adoption rates is simple - plant biotechnology delivers significant and tangible benefits, all the way from the farm to the fork. Plant biotechnology has helped improve farming techniques and crop production around the world by increasing plants’ resistance to diseases and pests, reducing pesticide applications, and maintaining and improving crop yields.

Agcarm supports science-based regulations that maximise the benefits of plant and animal health technologies and enable continued research, while taking a lifecycle approach to stewardship of these products, from gene discovery through product phase-out.

Since the first commercial biotech crops were grown in 1996, plant biotechnology has been rapidly adopted by farmers outside New Zealand. Increasingly, farmers are planting biotech seeds because of the clear benefits they bring.

Through crossbreeding and hybridisation, scientists are able to produce a plant with new, advantageous characteristics. Commercialised crops have been modified to improve agronomic traits like insect and pathogen resistance, herbicide tolerance or a combination of the three.

Fruits and vegetables fortified with vitamins are close to coming to market. Golden Rice (rice fortified with Vitamin A) is about to be grown in the Philippines. Promising work with genetically modified (GM) animals (to provide health benefits to consumers and reduce food input costs) is also being pioneered in New Zealand.

Foods derived from approved biotech crops are the most extensively tested food crops available today.

Their safety is endorsed by scientific and regulatory agencies around the world - including the World Health Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, the US National Academy of Sciences, as well as national academies in the EU, China, Brazil, India and Mexico.

Biotech crops are tightly regulated both before and after they reach the marketplace. To date, there have been no scientifically-proven cases of biotechnology adversely impacting food safety or human health.

However, despite all of this, there are currently no GMOs available for use by New Zealand farmers – even though we have one of the world’s best regulatory systems and a high percentage of the world’s best scientists.

Activist activity and an anti-GM influence in government policy have resulted in New Zealand farmers being denied access to this technology, putting us at a severe disadvantage compared to other major agricultural exporters.

It is time for sensible debate about this agricultural technology - 17 years after its first commercial application.

Agcarm member companies are at the forefront of this research and development and, as such, want to be heavily involved in the discussion.
Did you know

- The global area of GM biotech crops has increased one hundred fold* since they were first commercialised in 1996.
- Global adoption of GM crops is 170 million hectares - more than six times New Zealand's total land area.
- Australia has the 13th largest area of biotech crops in the world, with 700,000 hectares planted.
- Brazil planted an extra 21 percent of GM crops last year and now has 36.6 million hectares. Argentina follows with 23.9 million hectares.
- Sudan and Cuba planted GM crops for the first time in 2012.
- African countries with commercial planting of GM crops include South Africa, Burkina Faso, Egypt and Sudan.
- Biotech crops were directly responsible for reducing CO₂ emissions by 23 million kgs in 2011, equivalent to removing 10.2 million cars from the road.
- There are no GM crops grown in New Zealand and none are on the horizon.

* According to the latest annual report of the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri biotech Applications.

Industry provides cutting edge e-solution for safer work places

New Zealand’s largest agricultural retailers are adopting a one stop solution for agri-business product safety information.

A database, developed by farm product distributors, contains information about hazardous substances sold at 250 agricultural retailers. The database went live in March.

The database includes more than two thousand controlled substances which are regulated under the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act. These include agrichemicals, animal health products, paint, batteries, lubricants, ammunition, pool chemicals, and fertiliser.

Subscribers can search the database for any hazardous substance sold through these rural retailers. They can also access the product’s comprehensive safety data sheet (SDS), which covers 15 topics including personal protective equipment and disposal, and the Haznote, a concise document with information on transport, storage, and emergency response.

Up-to-date links to SDS and Haznotes are listed on the database, which will eventually be networked to point-of-sale systems, or tills, in each store. The database is also accessible through a web portal.

“The demands on retail staff to provide two types of up-to-date safety information for many hundreds of products was a time-consuming routine which had to be streamlined,” said Graeme Peters, chief executive of Agcarm.

Distributors are required by law to offer product safety information to purchasers of hazardous substances. They’re also required to have the information accessible to employees in the workplace and emergency services.

The database replaces the need to keep a physical hard copy of each product’s SDS at the point of sale. It also removes the need to continually review and update the physical records held on site.

PGG Wrightson, RDL, Farmlands Co-operative Society (including Combined Rural Traders), and Ashburton Trading Society partnered with AgriMedia, the publisher of the New Zealand Novachem agrichemical manual, and Agcarm to develop the database and web portal.

Funding is to be spread proportionately reflecting distributors’ sales outlets and includes $10,000 of seed funds from Agcarm.

In most circumstances, the safety information is linked directly to the manufacturers or distributors website, ensuring that it is the most up-to-date information available from that company.

Retail team members have the option to print the safety information for the customer or forward it by email.

Mr Peters said while switching on the web portal was a significant step forward, more work lay ahead to link the database to point-of-sale equipment.
Review of agrichemical disposal on farms

Mandatory participation in a product stewardship scheme and encouraging farmers to get rid of waste without burning or burying are two recommendations from a joint review of agrichemical disposal options.

The Agrichemical Review Project is nearing completion, with a final draft report expected to be signed off by an industry working group in April.

After consultation with industry, a recommendation will be made to the Minister for the Environment proposing a national approach to legislation, similar to the National Environmental Standard on Air Quality.

Participation in a product stewardship scheme would be mandatory for brand owners, and include stronger incentives for farmers and growers to return unwanted chemicals for disposal, and their plastic containers for recycling.

The draft report will recommend that government declare agrichemicals and their associated packaging as priority products under the Waste Minimisation Act, supporting this with regulatory and legislative action.

Agrichemical manufacturers would pay a levy, which would be managed by a product stewardship organisation.

A legislative solution is sought for collecting data to calculate levies.

Agcarm chief executive Graeme Peters said that mandatory participation would fix the problem of ‘free-riders’ who refuse to accept any responsibility for removing their waste chemicals or associated plastic containers from farms and orchards.

“Responsible companies who care about product stewardship support schemes to get rid of waste chemicals. But they are being penalised by the inactivity of companies which sell their products at the same price and pocket the levy. This is unfair.”

Agcarm would not support mandatory participation unless the government created incentives for growers, and more importantly farmers, to dispose of old chemicals and recycle their plastic.

“It’s no use setting up a product stewardship scheme paid directly by manufacturers if farmers don’t use it,” Mr Peters said. ■
Crowded planet underscores need for healthy people and animals

Of the nearly 1,500 infectious diseases we know affect people, almost two thirds can pass between animals and people. Those diseases are called zoonoses.

The graphic to the right, demonstrates how animal health, human health and ecosystems are inextricably linked.

Focusing on two zoonoses, the graphic illustrates the spread of H5N1 avian influenza, showing that disease knows no boundaries.

The H5N1 virus subtype spread out of the People’s Republic of China in 2003 into the rest of Asia, then Europe and Africa with cases reported in more than 60 countries.

It also pinpoints the areas in which rabies remains endemic despite the availability of vaccines. More than 55,000 people die of rabies each year, and about 95 percent of these deaths occur in Asia and Africa.

An increasingly crowded planet on which human and animals live in ever closer proximity has enhanced the ability of zoonotic infections to jump between species. Once present in human populations, the unprecedented flow of commodities and people across the world enables pathogens to spread as never before.

To achieve progress in the control of animal diseases and in the reduction of their socio-economic impacts, further investments and continued efforts are needed in capacity building, infrastructure development, governance of food safety, good veterinary legislation including appropriate regulation of animal health products, and consistent application of guidelines relevant to animal health and trade.

The global animal health industry is working with a range of stakeholders to promote the One Health concept.

For more information on One Health, see www.ifahsec.org
Agcarm welcomes three new members

Ross Shields, Agrisearch Analytical
Ross is an analytical chemist, specialising in the analysis of crop protection and veterinary medicine molecules in food and environmental samples. Ross started Agrisearch Analytical in Australia in 2000. In 2011, a laboratory was established in Hamilton and Ross migrated across the Tasman to grow and manage the business. Ross joined Agcarm for two reasons:
- Networking opportunities - most Agrisearch analytical clients are members of Agcarm.
- To expedite the registration of crop and animal health molecules in NZ, by providing a forum to work with the ACVM regulator.

Peter Blaikie, RxVet
It was the interface between business and science that led Peter Blaikie, a veterinarian, out of practice and into industry.
Peter co-founded veterinary pharmaceutical company RxVet in 2012, with former colleague Nick Gorman to “offer New Zealand vets niche and orphan products that may not otherwise be viable here”, said Peter.
“The decision to join was due to the good work that Agcarm does to promote the veterinary pharmaceutical and crop protection sector in New Zealand. We feel it is important to support such an organisation and to be actively involved in promoting our industry”.

Tim Beere, ISL Animal Health
Tim is general manager at ISL Animal Health, a company specialising in drenching, vaccination and pour-on applications with corporate animal health clients across the world.
Some members will know Tim from his previous roles with agribusiness recruitment company Rimfire and more recently Baillance.

New face for Agrecovery
Agrecovery, the plastic recycling and chemical recovery programme supported by Agcarm members, has increased its management resource to help increase recovery rates and recycling in the agricultural sector.

Jenna Leathley (pictured) has stepped into the business manager role. Jenna manages Agrecovery activities as well as relationships with trustees, operations managers, industry representatives and stakeholders. She also liaises with industry and brand owner representatives.

What is Agcarm?
Agcarm is the industry association which represents crop protection, animal health, and rural supplier businesses. Agcarm members distribute and sell the majority of veterinary medicines and crop protection products in New Zealand.
Agcarm members promote responsible use of products right through the product life cycle, from research to disposal.
Agcarm is also a positive voice for its members and lobbies for a progressive regulatory environment.
For information on joining Agcarm, go to www.agcarm.co.nz