



Healthy crops : Healthy animals : Healthy business

Speech

Agcarm President Mark Christie to the 68th Agcarm Annual Conference

CQ Hotel, 213-223 Cuba Street, Wellington

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Like all well run organisations, Agcarm has a clear vision.

“To protect and enhance the health of crops and animals through innovation and responsible use of quality products.”

From this, our objectives focus on sustainable, science based innovation, where high quality products result in high quality produce for local and global consumption.

They also focus on the strong need for stewardship and responsible use, while ensuring user and environmental safety.

Our strategies, tactics and activities naturally follow.

At each board meeting, as we review the work relative to these strategies, I often reflect that the broad issues we face are common to all our communities – both rural and urban.

This includes water quality, bee health, waste disposal, food quality, legislation changes, sustainability of production, and changes to regulatory requirements. It's a long list, which requires a consistent and trusted voice in order to be heard.

Trust is built up over time and through a thorough understanding of the values and needs of all and, most importantly, by listening to the people who use our products.

Agcarm was formed 67 years ago, so we have had the time. But, most importantly, it is Agcarm's collaborative approach and relationship building that ensures our voice is heard.

What I would like you to take away from today is the understanding that Agcarm is the recognised peak voice for the animal health and crop protection industries in New Zealand.

The few examples I will speak about today show that:

- Agcarm is a credible source of information to support our decision makers;
- That Agcarm works with regulators and other stakeholders to reach sensible solutions;
- And that our priorities are food safety and ensuring environmentally sustainable production.

My first example involves our politicians.

Agcarm has been active in developing relationships with our key politicians.

Recent meetings with Ministers, Primary Production Select Committee members, and opposition MPs have allowed us to build important relationships. And to tell them what Agcarm is all about.

This ensures our industry issues are heard and that Agcarm is seen as the 'go to' organisation for politicians wanting interaction on our industry.

We also work closely with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). Indeed, the recent outgoing chief executive of the EPA, Rob Forlong touted us as his 'favourite industry group' at his farewell ceremony.

Why?

Because we are willing to talk through issues, technically competent and always available to help. These are his words, not ours.

A vote of confidence like this is not easily obtained. It is much easier to break. Often these are contentious and fragile relationships.

Our approach is to work together to build solutions together.

A recent example was speeding up the application approval process of the ACVM Group.

Agcarm worked hard to get MPI to commit to a faster and more consistent service for applicants. This resulted in a fee increase to employ more staff for the group.

We are happy to support an increase in cost if it results in an increase in efficiency. But this support is based on trust - the trust being ACVM accountability in return.

Again MPI was responsive and is developing performance standards and industry reporting templates to monitor application processing.

Another example of collaboration is with the EPA on New Zealand native species.

In an effort to get more data on native species from applicants, the EPA developed a scheme based on the US approach to endangered species. This came out of the blue and Agcarm lobbying saw this put on the backburner.

To work through the issue, a workshop was held between EPA, Agcarm, the Department of Conservation and Iwi earlier this month.

At the end of the day, it was apparent that we are all after the same goal of environmental sustainability. But we were taking different roads to get there.

So a joint working group is being set up to work towards the end goal of environmental sustainability.

This is a classic case of "if you are not at the table then you could well be part of the lunch menu".

Another example of collaboration is with the bee industry.

The health of bees is a contentious issue and we've had our fair share of bashing from the bee-loving community - neonicotinoids bearing the brunt of this attack.

It's not as well-known as we would like, but we too are bee lovers. We are aware of the need to support our bee population. Our bee colonies are hugely important to our agriculture, environment and our economy.

We are 100 percent behind the unification of the bee industry and are supporting the National Beekeepers Association and Federated Farmers Bees to work together to move forward.

After all, a united industry is one that will be heard.

Agcarm is also helping to fund a bee health survey. The survey will investigate what is happening to the New Zealand bee population and how healthy our bees are. We welcome the facts around what is an emotional and sometimes an anecdotal topic.

Another example of bringing industry experts together has seen the progression of an Agcarm initiative regarding Resistance Management.

There are only minor indications of it being an issue in New Zealand. But being forward-thinking, we refuse to let adopt a laissez-faire attitude. So Agcarm and the New Zealand Plant Protection Society hosted a workshop on pesticide resistance in weeds, insects and fungi.

The workshop resulted in the agreement of six strategies to manage resistance. They include resourcing, research, testing, and biosecurity measures. A co-ordinated national strategy needs to be developed and maintained. Communication and education is also needed to deliver findings.

On the animal health side, Agcarm has been working alongside the NZ vets and MPI to look at the issue of antimicrobial resistance and agree on a way forward.

Again, it's not a problem here yet, but we need to be prepared. We want to work with Government and be proactive, to ensure that antimicrobial resistance doesn't become a major problem.

We also need to co-ordinate surveillance, along with research to identify where and when resistance is most likely to occur. Only then can we work out how to manage it.

I think this shows how our vision is forward-focussed. At Agcarm, we also like to support others who are forward-thinking.

Agcarm annually provides scholarships to support education and raise awareness about careers in Agcarm-related industries.

This year's entries were all of exceptionally high quality and picking a winner from the two categories was especially difficult.

Despite the challenges of a growing population, climate change and the geographical imbalance of food supply, our horticulture scholarship winner, Leander Archer, sees the next 50 years as an exciting time to be involved in horticulture.

Hard not to agree.

Our veterinary science scholarship winner, Calum Linton, believes that it would be almost impossible to be a vet without the animal health industry. Vets rely on manufacturers to develop treatments to ensure a healthy national flock and a healthy economy.

We like his big picture thinking.

Indeed, agrichemicals and animal health products are essential to New Zealand's continued drive for safe, sustainable, and high-yielding agricultural production systems.

New Zealand's farmers, growers and production systems have an international reputation as a safe and secure food supply source.

As agricultural leaders, we recognise that the impacts on New Zealand's exports and the environment are minimised by the agrichemical and animal health industries working successfully with government on safe food production.

And having the right crop protection or animal health products available is critical.

So it wouldn't be right to end this talk and not mention data protection. I recall I have been promising this as being just around the corner for the past three years. But there is no doubt that one way of getting more choice and better agrichemical products to market is to improve data protection.

We hope that the ACVM Amendment Bill will come before the house shortly. This has been a long process and we look forward to working with the Primary Production Select Committee to get it right.

It will be good for New Zealand – for the end goal of more products, more choice and more environmentally friendly products.

Our members will also benefit.

Just before I hand you over to our next speaker, I have a few more comments to make.

Firstly, I would like to welcome our new members.

Zelam have joined Agcarm as a manufacturer member and Horticulture have joined as a distributor member.

I'd also like to thank the board for its hard work during the year. I thank especially our two resigning members, Patrick Dorahy and Brendan Morahan.

I'd also like to thank the members who attend our sub-committee meetings where some of the most important work for our three industry groups is examined in detail.

Finally I'd like to thank you, the members, for your support of Agcarm during the year.

I can assure you that this support is never taken for granted.

Your board and our secretariat will continue to work hard for you, your business, and the wider industry.

On that note I'd like to introduce our next speaker, the Honourable Jo Goodhew.

ENDS