



Healthy crops : Healthy animals : Healthy business

Speech

Agcarm President Mark Christie to the 70th Agcarm Annual Conference

Te Papa, 55 Cable Street, Wellington

EMBARGOED to 9.05am, Thursday 27 July 2017

As I mentioned earlier, it's our 70th annual conference.

Very few organisations have a history this long and it is perhaps a reflection of our times that Agcarm is continuing to grow its membership and, most significantly, its industry representation.

This despite massive ongoing industry changes, primarily consolidation, over the past ten years.

Members will attest that the annual fees have changed from the original 2 pounds and 2 shillings. But, Agcarm's original focus of 'building a sound industry that is closely connected with, and has a full understanding of, the primary industries of this country' – remains pertinent today.

Our mission statement reflects this goal, and that is:

'To protect and enhance the health of crops, animals and the environment, through innovation and the responsible use of quality products'.

When reviewing issues for this speech, it was somewhat disheartening that the same issues are being discussed 70 years later. But, it is also rewarding to see how far we have come.

Legislative changes and regulator performance have always been top of the issues list.

From the original 'Stock Remedies Board' in 1949, to more recent changes with, the then, Environmental Risk Management Authority and now the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and ACVM. The debate topic may change, but the intent remains - to ensure that members are well represented and that science-based evidence is used to support decisions.

For example, Agcarm is actively and collaboratively working with the EPA on its native and endangered species policy. A very significant policy that we all need to contribute to and align with. The EPA committee working in this area has been very open to input from Agcarm members - for which we thank them.

Over the past 70 years, the speed of change has certainly increased markedly. This is largely due to the speed of communication and increasing globalisation.

Especially over the past two decades when Agcarm has devoted significant resources to major legislative and government policies. These include the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act 1996 (result of the 1984 ICI warehouse fire); the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines (ACVM) Act 1997; the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification 2001; and, of course, the recent major - data protection legislation – the ACVM Amendment Bill.

We haven't always won all the battles, but Agcarm has always advocated for good science, the need for innovation, and the need for strong stewardship.

Depressingly, other issues never seem to go off the agenda.

At an industry meeting in February 1956, it was decided that a brochure on the aerial application of herbicides, to protect bee health, be developed. More than 60 years later, we are launching a similar campaign with the Agricultural Aviation Association and Rural Contractors later this year.

We all know that bees are critical to agriculture and horticulture in New Zealand and, as an industry in itself, for export earnings. Bee numbers continue to increase. Their health also continues to improve with remedies for tackling the varroa mite. But we continue to have isolated instances of pesticides impacting bees through misdirected application. Is it arrogance or ignorance that is causing these incidents? Our campaign is designed to address both.

Another common theme has been management of pest and disease incursions.

In 1955, it was a black beetle outbreak. Today it's the risk of the brown marmonated stink bug, black bean aphid and fruit fly. If established in New Zealand, any one of these pests could have a devastating impact. The brown marmonated stink bug has been caught at the border many times, hitchhiking on passengers and imported goods. Vigilance and collaboration, prior to an incursion, is a sensible approach. Unfortunately, despite many repeated offers of assistance, our offers go unheeded.

It is our opinion that in 1955, co-operation and intelligence-sharing is needed to manage biosecurity issues.

About 10 years the focus changed from legislation to stewardship.

In this time resistance management programmes, Growsafe training, and Agrecovery container recovery programmes have been strongly supported and championed by Agcarm.

I strongly believe that these are the areas we will need to lift our focus in even more in the future as well.

This is highlighted by the words of the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan: “Antimicrobial resistance and climate change are the world’s biggest threats right now. Science has to be part of the solution.”

“Current UN predictions are that deaths attributable to AMR will be as high as 10 million people by the year 2050, surpassing even cancer as the cause of death.”

These words are deeply haunting, and we must all play our part in managing this. It’s no use pointing the finger and saying that this is a farming issue, or a human health issue, or that a certain continent is to blame. Managing these issues lies with every single one of us and will require heightened awareness, innovation and collaboration.

For example, our animal health manufacturers are dedicating huge resources researching new treatments. Our members also play a vital role in ensuring that not only are there new antimicrobials, but there are alternative medicines as well including work to develop vaccines for disease prevention.

Then there is stewardship.

Our members develop agreed industry standards about the prudent use of antimicrobials.

Agcarm is also on the Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Action Planning Group which aims to minimise incidences of antimicrobial resistance across New Zealand. The AMR plan was developed by this cross-agency group and submitted to the World Health Organisation’s world assembly on May 22.

Agcarm also plays its part in managing anthelmintic resistance through Wormwise – which provides industry agreed guidance to farmers on managing worms.

Likewise, Agcarm has a critical role to play in ensuring a balanced view is taken, actioned and regulated regarding environmental stewardship.

Driving for improved used container recycling, Agcarm sits on the board of rural recycling programme, Agrecovery. Collection volumes reached 304 tonnes of plastic in the year to June 30 2017. Representing 42 percent of member’s plastic placed into the market. A significant improvement on 2015 where 256 tonnes, or 35 percent, of plastic was recovered. But we can do much better than that. We have to do much better than that.

This year, with Agrecovery's new collection partners - EnviroWaste, their goal is to recycle 350 tonnes, just below 50 percent.

This is despite a transition in contractual and management arrangements which the Agrecovery Foundation finalised this month.

The Foundation is now managing all aspects of the rural recycling programme and has been working hard to organise this transfer from 3R.

Visiting Agrecovery will also be a lot easier too – as they've moved into a new office with the Agcarm secretariat. This is a win-win for all involved.

Looking ahead, it's clear that the world is changing incredibly quickly – in food, farming and our interaction with agriculture.

A farmer can work from a phone, as much, if not more, than on the farm. We have robots milking cows and drones monitoring livestock and crop production.

20 years ago, this might have seemed surreal, but now it's part of everyday life.

Lately we've also seen the advent of artificial meat. One of our key note speakers, Rosie Bosworth, will talk more about artificial food later today.

There will also be a continued drive to reduce our environmental footprint and increase our sustainability – all the while improving the crop yields and quality off reducing areas of productive land. A tough ask.

This will bring a lot of change and challenges for our industry.

I am heartened looking back over the last 70 years as we have clearly evolved to meet our challenges and changes in the past.

Indeed, Agcarm has been at the fore front of leading progressive changes – the work that Agcarm does is often not recognised by members so I have asked Mark and Dominique to prepare these slides with Agcarm's activities and achievements this past year. An impressive list I think you will all agree.

We can only speculate what might be coming in the next 70 years, but I am confident that as an industry we will have the innovation, the technology, the knowledge and most importantly the passion to adapt, evolve, and in fact continue to lead positive change to ensure New Zealand remains clean and green and our primary industries highly productive.

We can only achieve this if we continue to work together, to network, to educate, to advocate – in other words - to communicate and inform. This is what Agcarm has done and will continue to do.

Agcarm has evolved significantly over the last 70 years to overcome the challenges our members have faced. I am very confident it will continue to do that in the future.

So I ask you to stay with us on this journey.

Buckle up and enjoy the ride.

Now, before I hand you over to our next speaker, I would like to welcome new members and acknowledge a few people.

New members since our Summer Conference in February – a special welcome to

- Kiwicare – Manufacturer
- Rainbow Chemicals – Corporate Associate
- Stephen Parker (IPPC) – Individual Associate
- Murray Beare (Educhem) – Individual Associate

A big thank you to my fellow board members, who are your voice at the Governance level, many of whom you will meet through the day so please make yourself known to them. And of course our very hard working secretariat for their hard work during the year of major disruptions caused by the Kaikoura earthquake. Two office shifts and two conferences, plus a huge list of other achievements through the year. I'd especially like to thank our conference organiser, Lee Sheppard, who has organised this conference, while organising an office move or two as well.

But I also want to acknowledge the Leadership and networking that our CE Mark Ross has provided through this past year. Truly exceptional. Thank you Mark, Jan, Dominique, Lee and Vanessa.

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. We've achieved a lot this year, a lot of this is due to your work and involvement.

Rest assured that your board and secretariat will continue to work hard for you, your business, and the wider industry.

Turning to the conference, I think you'll agree that as always we've put together a very interesting programme, as you will see in your conference papers.

On that note I'd like to introduce our next speaker.

Thank you.

ENDS