



Healthy crops : Healthy animals : Healthy business

Speech

Agcarm President Mark Christie to the Agcarm Summer Conference

Sudima Hotel, 18 Airpark Drive
Auckland Airport

9.05am, Wednesday 22 February 2017

A lot has happened in the seven months since our last conference, with a few surprises thrown in too.

When I spoke at the July annual conference last year, I outlined my fears about the growing trends of nationalism and the potential impact on global agricultural trade agreements. I also spoke about the marginalisation of science based decision making.

So in some ways it wasn't a complete surprise when Mr Trump was elected and that he quickly scrapped TPP discussions. What does surprise me, however, is the concept of alternative facts and the extensive use of social media to influence public opinion.

The Pocket Oxford dictionary defines – Fact (*n*) *thing that is known to be true, precise information, truth.*

And the word “Alternative” – *one of two or more possibilities*.

So we end up with two or more possibilities of the truth.

Now I am pretty sure the All Blacks lost to Ireland at Soldiers Field in Chicago – but I am open to an alternative truth.

One thing I know to be true is that Agcarm had a significant win in November which, after 15 years of battling, shouldn't have been a surprise. I am referring, of course, to the passing into legislation of the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Amendment Bill. This legislation makes it much more attractive to invest in developing products for minor crops and minor species, as well as improved formulations.

It was certainly a surprise to see this legislation put into effect so quickly. For this, we need to acknowledge and thank the Primary Industries Select Committee, Parliament and the regulatory bodies for their speedy action.

With the National government shuffling some key portfolios around in late 2016, the loss of Minister Jo Goodhew from the Food Safety portfolio was another surprise. Jo was a real supporter of Agcarm and played a vital role in getting the data protection amendment bill across the line. I would like to publically acknowledge the work that Jo did in her role as Minister and her on-going support for Agcarm.

I also want to thank the many Agcarm members who provided examples of how the lack of data protection was holding up investment in New Zealand's horticulture and agriculture. Your examples were powerful arguments which strongly aided our case.

Another fact that can't be ignored was the major upheaval caused by the Kaikoura earthquake in November. This also affected Wellington, including Agcarm, so the secretariat is looking for a new home. I want to thank them for their tolerance and dedication to continuing a very high level of support to members, while often working under trying conditions. Hopefully a solution will be sorted very shortly.

Talking about upheavals – on the political front, Minister Jo Goodhew has been replaced by Minister David Bennett. David has a good grasp of our industry - coming from a farming background - and is keen to engage with us.

No doubt the election later this year will see further political changes and, being a proactive industry association, we will ensure that our voice continues to be heard.

Looking to the future, please rest assured that Agcarm will **not** be resorting to **alternative facts** nor using Facebook to impose such facts to the general public.

Our priorities remain centred on assimilating facts developed from credible, unbiased, research-based science, applied innovation, responsible stewardship and an effective regulatory engagement.

It is critical that we engage with the core Ministries and work together for the good of New Zealand. Like any good relationship, all parties have to work to ensure a mutually beneficial outcome. Meetings like the ACVM workshop, being held here tomorrow, are very beneficial to us.

I would like to thank the EPA and MPI for the time and effort they put into making workshops like these a success.

Please be aware that attendance at these meetings is a privilege and not a right. Respectful engagement builds trust for all parties and ensures ongoing engagement.

As for our other priorities, there are many international activities to address.

Counterfeit products are a worldwide issue, and New Zealand needs to be more vigilant.

Biosecurity is another area we wish to address.

Agcarm members play a vital role in incursion response and pest management. We have products to potentially control and manage pests, so we need more involvement with Government response teams.

The Brown Marmorated Stink Bug would cause major problems for New Zealand, for example. And we need to develop control options for such an incursion, should it occur.

Stewardship remains our key focus, including bee health, plastic container recycling and the responsible use of our products.

Now in its tenth year, Agrecovery is pushing to increase recycling of used containers and recovery of unwanted chemicals. Recovery has reached 38 percent, but this is well below the international average of 60 percent. So there is still a long way to go with significant geographic challenges.

Though all these surprises, and indeed some welcome changes, the Agcarm team remains focused on ensuring that members gain value out of belonging to our organisation.

Our fingers are in a lot of different pies, and we are always working to benefit members. Rest assured that Agcarm will continue to show leadership in supporting our end goal of producing safe and healthy food.

Finally I would like to wrap up this speech by welcoming our new members.

In the past year, we welcomed Ravensdown and Ceva as manufacturer members.

We have also welcomed six individual associate members. They are:

1. Gavin Hall of De Groot Technical Services, based in Australia;
2. Simon Cook of Ranfurly Orchard Services;
3. Rebecca Fisher of Market Access Solutionz
4. Donald Nordeng of BioGro;
5. Gordon Skipage of Zespri; and as of yesterday
6. Lidija Petreska of On Regulatory Ltd.

Welcome to our recent new members! As you can see here today, you are part of a growing and vibrant organisation.

We have some varied and interesting topics on the agenda today – from predicting the weather to predicting the future of agriculture.

Enjoy the day and please feel free to discuss any issues with me or Mark Ross.

Before I introduce you to the next speaker, I am excited to announce that our next Annual Conference in July (27) is our Seventieth. This special celebration should not to be missed. So book early as seats are limited.

Ends