



Speech

Agcarm President Mark Christie to the Agcarm Summer Conference

Sudima Hotel, 18 Airpark Drive
Auckland Airport

9.05am, Wednesday 24 February 2016

I've mentioned data protection in every speech to every Agcarm conference I've ever spoken to since I became President of Agcarm.

So I can't break with a well-established tradition now. In fact, the four years of me standing in front of you discussing data protection is just the tip of the iceberg. Agcarm has persisted in trying to rectify New Zealand's dismal data protection regime for well over a decade now.

To demonstrate how far we've come and the tenacity Agcarm has had over this issue, I will read to you an excerpt from an Agcarm newsletter to members dating back to August 2001:

'Work is proceeding (slowly) on development of an ACVM Amendment Bill; it is expected to include enhanced data protection provisions (which Agcarm will attempt to enhance through the select committee process).'

So here we are - 15 years later.

This either tells us:

- that Agcarm is future focused and striving for improvements for the greater good of animal health and agriculture productivity;
- or that Agcarm is very persistent;
- or that government is inherently slow and unfocused in finding simple solutions to improve primary production productivity.

Agcarm's perseverance will pay off when new and improved products become available to New Zealand farmers and growers.

Products that can address things like New Zealand's grass grub problem – which costs our farmers and growers up to \$90 million a year in lost production. A problem treated by a product which is being phased out. A more environmentally-friendly option is needed and we understand is available...

...but I ask anyone in the room: Who would spend five hundred thousand dollars on something with no protection on their investment?

Because that is the minimum investment required to register a new product, or even new use for an existing product, in New Zealand. And this is the dilemma that data protection seeks to address.

So it was encouraging to get cross-party support for extending data protection during the first reading of the Bill in Parliament. Agcarm is now working with the Primary Production Select Committee, agricultural and other stakeholders to further data protection to 10 years. The first Select Committee meeting hearing is on Thursday 3 March. If you would like to attend please contact either Mark Ross or myself.

Bee health

Another vexing issue is bee health. We all know that bees are absolutely critical for agriculture, horticulture and our native fauna.

So it is great news that the number of bee hives are the highest we've ever seen - at close to 600,000 registered hives (582,302) in 2015 compared to less than 300,000 (294,886) in 2005.

Hive numbers have doubled in a decade. Everybody but my wife couldn't be happier – to be fair, she is allergic to bee stings.

The vexing issue is the misinformation continually being placed in the media about bee health in NZ.

So Agcarm financially supported a bee survey to seek hard data detailing the issues facing the health of our bees.

This survey enables industry to make better choices to protect bee health. It will also allow us to track changes on bee colony loss and survival into the future.

366 New Zealand commercial and hobbyist beekeepers took part in the survey late last year representing 40 percent of the hive numbers in NZ.

The results show that hive losses during last winter were just over 10 percent. With the highest losses recorded in the North Island and especially amongst hobby apiarists.

Losses were most frequently attributed to queen problems (the largest commercial operators attributed at least 35 percent of their hive losses to queen problems), followed by colony deaths (34.4 percent), then wasps (14.4 percent). Starvation was the most common cause for colony loss (45 percent) with this being a particularly noticeable trend amongst those with small hive numbers.

The evidence indicates a healthy and growing bee population which is excellent – but we cannot rest on our laurels. We need to maintain our strong focus on keeping NZ bees healthy and productive into the future.

Growth in rural recycling

Stewardship of our products and how they are used is fundamental to Agcarm members.

Therefore Agcarm has proactively supported the rural recycling programme – Agrecovery - which disposes of unwanted chemicals and recycles empty containers and other plastics used on the farm.

The programme is funded by brand owners and I'm proud to say that all Agcarm members participate in the programme.

Agcarm is also a trustee of the recycling programme and actively works to improve the service to farmers.

I am pleased to report that Agrecovery has had nine years of continuous growth, showing that farmers and growers are increasing their recycling efforts. In actual fact, there has been a 50 per cent jump in container recycling over the two year period from June 2013.

Over one million kilos of container plastic has been recycled since Agrecovery's inception in 2007. That's a tremendous amount of plastic that would have otherwise been burnt, buried or heaved.

However, we can, and indeed have to, do better - as an estimated 31 percent of packaging is recovered annually. Despite members paying levies on every kilo or litre of product sold.

Managing resistance in crop and animals

Another area we have gained significant traction on over the past 12 months is resistance management.

A very significant effort by Agcarm members, government departments and industry bodies into management of disease, weed, insect and antibiotic resistance is leading to very manageable programmes. I want to thank these many people and their employers for their effort as many are completing tasks for the industry good – often with no direct benefit to themselves or who they work for.

One of the projects Agcarm is working on, with veterinarians and other stakeholders, is managing antibiotic resistance. This includes co-ordinating surveillance to detect resistance and research to identify where and when it is most likely to occur.

To reduce reliance on antibiotics, animal health manufacturers are also researching and developing new medicines, vaccines and new strategies to help veterinary professionals identify and treat illness in animals.

The year in review

A key part of Agcarm's role is working closely with government on regulation to ensure our members operate efficiently and effectively. This past year we worked with:

- Worksafe on agricultural health and safety;
- The Environmental Protection Authority on the amendment bill and regulations; and
- The Ministry for Environment (MPI) on rural recycling and biotechnology.

We are also actively working with the MPI on data protection as well as developing KPIs for the new product application process. The result of this good relationship should see fruition shortly.

We also advocate on behalf of members and the wider industry to stop the sale of illegal pesticides. Trade Me has unfortunately been a frequent port of call as we work to put in place a sustainable solution that at least minimises the sale of clearly illegal items.

Other activities your board and its members have been involved in include significantly updating our strategies and, more importantly, how we present these - as they direct our actions for the future.

I welcome your feedback on these.

Rest assured that at Agcarm we will continue to show leadership and advocacy to benefit science-based regulation and to support our end goal of producing safe and healthy food.

Finally I would like to wrap up this speech with some welcomes and thanks.

I would like to welcome our new members.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome a new crop protection manufacturer member - Agrinova (Grochem).

We also have two new individual associate members:

- Julia McNab from Intuit Regulatory and Marketing Ltd; and
- Gordon Skipage of Zespri.

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

I would also like to acknowledge and thank my fellow board members for their hard work, our members for their continuing support, and to all of you for coming here today and thus ensuring another successful summer conference.

We have some interesting topics on the agenda today – from the economy and trade to pet food, bugs and biosecurity.

Enjoy the day and I look forward to talking with you during the day to discuss any of these or other issues.

Our first speaker of the day needs little to no introduction.

Up next we will hear from the Right Honourable Winston Peters.

Ends
