WEED PROBLEMS IN THE NURSERY

By - Mr. J.E. Hume of the Horticultural Division.

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An aspect of weed control which I feel is being lost sight of is that of the distribution of weeds. It affects growers of horticultural crops, whether commercial or domestic. I think this particular aspect affects all of us. In this direction we find that in annual crops, such as vegetables and flowers, most of the crops are grown by the nurseryman in soil that has been treated in some manner that has a material effect on the distribution of weeds. This does not apply to the perennial plants or ornamental, shelter or forest trees. It is quite possible to go into any commercial nursery and take home, say, a clump of daisies, and with them we may take home plenty of weeds.

It is our Division's responsibility to make inspections of commercial nurseries and check on disease control. In this respect we have certain powers under the Orchard and Garden Diseases Act, whereby a man who has disease in his establishment has to take all necessary measures to destroy or eradicate the disease. For example, a nurseryman who has some silver blight in some stone fruit trees - we have the right to order him to destroy the plants.

From the insect pest point of view, we have power to enforce on any producer who has plants infected with insect pests a condition of his certificate that the plants shall be washed, hosed and thoroughly cleansed of soil so that weevils are not transported.

But when it comes to weeds, you are not protected from anyone sending you a really good starter for a weed crop. Is it not reasonable that some powers of the Noxious Weeds Act should be incorporated in the Regulations governing nurseries, so that an inspector may stop distribution, whether from a nursery or in transit, of a serious weed? Should he not have power to put a condition on a nursery prohibiting the nurseryman from distributing weed outside his own property until precautions have been taken to clean the plant? And that can be done. In the case of plants transported the plants are frequently washed in any case, so there can be no damage to the plant. Another aspect is that when a nurseryman makes application for a certificate, would it not be reasonable to refuse a certificate where a man is intending to grow plants in already seriously infested soil? I think it is reasonable to suggest that some restrictions could be equitably placed on the producer distributing plants rather than on the actual retailer or seller.

It may be contended that many of the weeds can be dealt with by hormones and chemicals. Practical experience shows that that is not the case. Most nurseries deal with a wide variety of plants in a very small area. You know that it would not be practicable to spray any portion of the small area with any degree of safety with the weedkillers we have today.

Another aspect which I think needs more action is the distribution of weed seeds in commercial seeds. I have here two samples of seeds which came into the country recently. One has eight different types of weed seeds, the other has three. In the first instance, the weed is linseed. It comes in in bulk, is put into small packets and distributed willy-nilly over the country. We have no power to deal with weed seeds which come in like that.

Then there is the waste from a flourmill. It is sold to a poultry-keeper and then the scrapings and droppings are sold to the commercial grower for manure. Each load probably contains a veritable forest of weeds. The waste should not be allowed to leave the cleaning plant in the first place.

I have not prepared a paper, but leave these few important thoughts with you, and hope that you will be able to assist in getting some powers for the prevention of distributing weeds from nurseries.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

- MR. ALLEN: Would you not like to see control extended a little further to stock grown by the commercial people themselves? Some things grown by nurseries are potential weeds in other parts of the country, and there might perhaps be some control over them.
- MR. HUME: I think that if the problem was tackled in the first place at the right time, there would be no worries. It should be tackled at the point of arrival in the country. I suggest that seeds coming into the country be examined for foreign matter. We have very effective, cheap, quick methods for dealing with weevils, and I think that weed seeds could be taken out of imported seeds by seed-cleaning equipment.
- DR. YEATES: Could not many of these problems well be taken up in connection with the Noxious Weeds Act which is due to come forward shortly?
- MR. HUME: I think you should assist by asking that these things be brought into operation. I don't think any Government likes to bring in more restrictions, but in the interests of all I think it is quite reasonable that the commercial growers' organisations can help one another by asking that these matters be dealt with under the Act.
- MR. MADDEN: There are very strict restrictions on the export of grass and clover seeds, so I think it only reasonable that we should place restrictions on what comes into the country. I know of some plants which were brought into New Zealand from the Pacific Islands. They were examined for insect pests and found to be free, but in the soil surrounding the plants there was a weed, Johnson grass, which is particularly bad in the sugar cane areas of Fiji.
- MR. MITCHELL: We have certain problems inside the country itself. In the Department of Agriculture Journal recently there was an article about water hyacinth as a pest in the North Island. Then we have water hawthorn which is a pest in Blenheim, but it is sold here at 2/6d a plant.
- MR. FRICKE: We have effective controls in Australia. All plants coming into the country have the soil removed from them. All seeds are examined at the wharf and examined before release. To come back to the saffron thistle story, we have to examine New Zealand seeds to prevent the importation of ragwort. We have full power to deal with the transfer of weeds. An inspector can do anything he considers necessary for the prevention of weed dispersal. I think there is a precedent in the Australian practice for including all the powers we have there in your New Zealand Act.
- Mr. Hume had made a valuable contribution to the Conference, said the Chairman, and the recommendations he made should be carried out, as there should be no possibility of weed seeds being spread within the country.

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