PROGRESS IN SUPPRESSION OF NOXIOUS WEEDS

By F. W. LOVETT, Geraldine County Council

THE suppression of noxious weeds in the County of Geraldine has a definite pattern. Emphasis is given to the weeds which make an annual appearance and which can by neglect prove an infestation beyond control. I refer to hemlock, St. John's wort, burdock, and the two thistles, Californian and nodding. Gorse, blackberry, and broom are considered the backlog type, for which longer-term planning is put into effect.

Recognition of the menace of hemlock, particularly, is stressed and in this County, like the others, it frequently, on account of its appearance mainly on waste land, is overlooked. Results have proved excellent from both manual and chemical control methods and it is our intention next season to conduct a greater publicity campaign. Another part of the pattern is the clearing of road frontages and trimming of hedges. It is noticeable that apart from neglected hedges being responsible for the spread of gorse, broom, and blackberry, the tidying-up process inculcates a pride of property which in turn promotes a desire to clear any other parts of the property infested.

Implementing this pattern represents a progress in suppression of noxious weeds within the scope of an administrative body. Progress there has been without doubt and that conclusion is based on observation and a knowledge of the money expended on control. I could isolate instances of actual work done and describe them in detail, thereby covering the time allotted for this paper, but because nothing unusual arises from such description, it would not represent a contribution to this Conference, nor would it be so thought provoking.

Instead, I will confine myself to making observations which are my own, and not those of the Council which employs me. I hope that in the airing of these observations progress in suppression may be helped.

Progress is to my mind a question of absolute co-operation and I will examine some angles of it objectively to discover if some improvement can be effected.

ADMINISTRATION OF NOXIOUS WEEDS ACT

When the Government invited local bodies to assume responsibility it made a progressive move, even if in concentration alone, for the Department of Agriculture officers could not, in view of their many duties, give to this job the time demanded by it. Many counties, more so in the North Island than in the South Island, grasped this opportunity to play a part in the suppression of noxious weeds both for the benefit of their own prosperity and the national economy. Yet, until such time as *all* counties assume responsibility, the sincere efforts of those who are doing so, are nullified. Then there is the need of a uniformity of enforcement. There is no compromise in the enforcement of the Act, yet by virtue of the various domestic frameworks of local bodies, such non-uniformity will arise. Could these two needs be remedied by a governing body formed for this purpose within the province of this New Zealand Weed Control Conference or would it be a matter for the N.Z. Counties' Association?

HORMONE WEED CONTROL

Secondly, is the introduction of hormone control advancing so rapidly that we have failed to keep pace with it? No one could pay greater tribute to this outstanding contribution than I do. The time spent on research, the academic qualification necessary to carry out this research, and the knowledge gained which has been passed on to the user represent a contribution far ahead of anything else, and to both the Department's officers and the manufacturers must we be grateful. If we had to rely on farm labour alone, then we would be in sorry straits. (I read recently with dismay that this type of labour offering was only 19 per cent. of our population.) Yet I feel that in connection with this boon there are two needs. One is the confusion in the mind of some of the users, especially the farmers with the smaller holdings, who concentrate all their time on making a livelihood and have no leisure to make themselves acquainted with this scientific control. Such a position does exist. I have spoken to many meetings of farmers who are still seeking information of what to use for specific weeds, despite repeated publicity by bulletin and broadcast. What to you is elementary is often not understood by them. The point I am trying to make is that with so many formulations offered to them and the rapidity with which they appear, the smaller farmers are hopelessly outpaced. Can this confusion be solved?

The relationship of the recommended spraying season and the requirements of the Act, I feel, needs clarifying. To quote an example, gorse. There is nothing in the Act which specifies when certain weeds shall be cleared. On requesting a farmer to clear his gorse in winter he invariably asks if it can be left until the recommended spraying time. This tolerance is granted, but usually when that time arrives he is fully occupied with the seasonal work of production and the gorse is left.

The solution for these two needs would appear with the former to be a simplification or greater publicity and with the latter, either a hormone that could be used all the year round or an alteration to the Noxious Weed Act.

THE OCCUPIER OF THE LAND

Thirdly, there is the occupier to whom we look for the practical expression of progress in weed control. He is the focal point of the three attacks: The growth of the weeds, the Inspector under the Act, and the salesman with his products.

The occupier is actuated by a pride of farm, a hope of return for money spent in clearing, or a fear of consequences by ignoring the requirements of the Act. I have no comment to make on this pride of farm; it takes all kinds to make up a farming community. With the weighing up of return of money outlayed, certain answers are available. Statistics have proved an increase in production more than compensating the outlay for clearing over a given period. In many cases this does not apply with leased Crown land on a yearly basis. A man, say, with a year to year tenancy at £2 per year is asked to clear the area, which would involve spending £200. He does not feel inclined to spend this money knowing that there is little or no possibility of getting his money back. Apart from the Act or a covenant in his lease being invoked, the only workable solution would be clearance by the owners and a consequent increase in rent.

Generally his weeds are on his non-utilised land, which would indicate an economic survey. Are some holdings too big to control effectively the infestation of noxious weeds?

To sum up I submit that when solved, the points I have made would materially assist toward a greater progress in the suppression of noxious weeds.

DISCUSSION

Comment: I consider that the Noxious Weeds Act is too old and that the ecological side should be included in a new one.

A.—I agree that some provision should be made.

Comment: The old Act was revised in 1950.

Comment: The new Act revised the number of weeds, but did not make new provisions.

Comment: There should be a more practical approach to weeds. There is a lot of work done just to conform to the Act and not to kill weeds.

Comment: The Act says must clear (which means destroy) and not control or destroy.

Comment: More co-operation should exist between the Extension Division of the Department of Agriculture and the Noxious Weeds Inspectors.

A.—I agree.

Comment: It is time the Act was revised, as it states that a farmer must not allow a weed to appear and this is not practicable.

Comment: If the Crown were to relax its attitude it would be overwhelmed by work and enormous expenditure would be incurred.

Comment: The aim of the Noxious Weeds Act is to suppress low-fertility weeds on low-fertility land and it has not succeeded in any one instance.