Farmer's View

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I WOULD say that the farmer's viewpoint is that manuka is native weed No. 1. It is widespread, insidious and costly to eradicate. I have seen farming country in New Zealand, especially hill country, very fully indeed, both on the ground and from the air. There are literally millions of acres which are scrub infested. There are large areas which although they have been expensively hand cleared, continuously go on reverting to manuka. There are also to-day considerable areas where the scale blight *Eriococcus* has killed all the large scrub.

Many millions of pounds have been spent in this country in a more or less vain effort to control this weed. Labour is steadily becoming more difficult to obtain to do this essential work, and the result is that large areas of otherwise good hill country are becoming what is termed marginal. Any large decline in prices will accentuate this trend greatly. This hill country farming land is vitally necessary to uphold the economy of this country by producing wool and store stock.

There are many types of farmers, as in all other types of the community, but I am sure the vast majority are what I would term good farmers. Now, what is the aim of a good farmer? I would say to increase his production, to improve his land, and to leave it in better condition when he passes on.

Farmers by the nature of their calling have to wage a continuous war against Mother Nature. In many cases, though, Nature does assist, and in this particular case is assisting with the scale blight *Eriococcus*. This blight works day and night, at no cost, killing manuka. A tremendous saving in expenditure takes place where the blight is working and farmers should and will assist Nature by spreading these insects.

Farmers know that manuka is a very poor preventative of erosion. It is shallow rooting; there is little grass, and that of a poor type, where manuka has control. To those who fear erosion should manuka ever be killed out completely, I would ask if they would suggest planting other weeds to prevent it; for instance, nassella tussock. In an overgrown state, certainly this imported weed would be a greater preventative of run-off, and so of erosion, than manuka ever would be. Should they not advocate this, then why worry about manuka, also a weed, and a costly one at that.

Farmers are aware, none better, that erosion requires control, and here the leaders of the good farmers I have mentioned are showing the way, where the blight has killed the manuka. On these properties over-sowing with clovers and sowing with phosphate and in some cases with sodium molybdate from the air have literally changed the face of the countryside. Clovers followed by better types of English grasses can now be seen growing knee deep in the season. Where underrunners exist these grasses and clovers can be seen growing through holes or parts of the underrunners which have collapsed; and the run-off on these properties is much slower than it was when they were covered with manuka.

After this insect has done its work the rooting system of manuka seems to be affected, and it is comparatively easily knocked over. On easy country a Cambridge roller drawn by a caterpillar tractor can be used to roll the manuka down. On steeper country cattle are being used in greater numbers, and they perform a very useful service in breaking down the dead manuka. In passing I would like to comment

that more cattle are urgently needed on our hill country, and point out that prices for beef are good, and seem to be on safer ground, than most of the rest of our produce. On these properties also care is being taken that secondary weeds such as gorse, blackberry, broom, etc., are closely watched to prevent their becoming a menace. As the sunlight reaches the ground there is always a danger of this taking place, and I would urge that great care should be taken by farmers, the Department of Agriculture, and weed inspectors to prevent this occurring when Nature has killed the manuka.

Farmers hear a lot of talk and also a great amount of ink has been used giving the aesthetic viewpoint on manuka. The Soil Conservation Council, catchment boards, etc., stress the erosion angle. I must again ask the question, "What does this country require most? Is it not increased production?"

Farmers and, I think, everyone who has studied this question will agree that to maintain and improve our standard of living here we must have increased primary production. Therefore we must make use of every means to hand to maintain and increase our farming areas. Nature has provided us with *Eriococcus* scale blight. Let us make every use of it.

This blight is working extensively on my own property, and I have studied it closely there and on many parts of both islands. Manuka was causing me a great deal of anxiety when I first saw this insect working on odd bushes. It was impossible to get labour to cut it and, even if possible, the cost would have been excessive. Burning, admittedly a poor substitute, had been used over the years to check its spread, and latterly more and more cattle had made burning impossible. Yet it was spreading continuously in spite of the cattle. The first bushes I noticed blight on are long since dead. Large patches are dead and dying and whole faces are darkened with blight. I would estimate that in 2 or 3 years all large manuka will be dead on my property. This year I oversowed 300 acres from the air with clovers, phosphates, and sodium molybdate. I did this before the manuka was dead so that I could get a good strike before sheep could punish the young clovers.

I have recently been round the North Island and I am aware large areas are being cleaned up. I do not think manuka will ever be killed out entirely. There is a tremendous amount of seed in the ground, a lot of which will grow. This in its course will be killed, but my observation shows me it frequently seeds in its very early life before being killed in its turn.

Eriococcus was not, as far as I am aware, introduced into New Zealand intentionally, if at all. Nature must get the credit and the thanks of farmers for its appearance. A farmer in the Hinds area of Mid-Canterbury told me recently he had first observed this insect on manuka about 1925. It began to kill stands about 1945 in the Orari Gorge area, and since then it has spread rapidly, mainly in a northerly direction. Where the manuka is killed it assumes a very blackened appearance which, in the distance, is not unlike that of manuka which has recently been burnt. Where the insect is working in a large way a sickly, pungent odour is very noticeable. When one has smelt the odour one could easily say blindfolded where the insect was working.

To the best of my belief this insect does not kill any other plant in New Zealand. It does get on to kanuka, sometimes known as white manuka, but it does not kill it or appear to affect it to any great extent. What a relief it would be if it would only kill tauwhinu as well.