A SUMMARY OF THE OPENING ADDRESS TO THE 34th CONFERENCE

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A weed is a plant whose virtue no one has recognised. Weeds and pests are organisms in the wrong place at the wrong time.

If only we could turn more weeds into assets but there is a long way to go. Noxious animals are now being farmed, not only opossums and deer but feral goats for both scrub weed control, milk and cheese production.

In this district Hieracium or mouse-ear hawkweed is a serious problem as it is not palatable and pushes out grass and tussock. Chemical control is too expensive. However, Maku lotus shows promise in beating Hieracium. The scrub weeds, sweet brier and matagouri, are problems in the high country as both respond to fertilizer and are expensive to control.

These and other weeds put production at risk. Of the 750,000 ha occupied in Marlborough only 15% is topdressed. Topdressing and oversowing with legumes is one way to increase production. Control of weeds and pests can also make a major contribution or a major loss if not controlled.

Cost effective solutions are necessary and these include biological control and pasture and stock management. Insects that feed on nodding thistle flower-heads have been established on more than 29 sites in New Zealand, including Marlborough where more releases are planned. Introductions at Whakatane have reduced chemical outlay on one large property from \$25,000 to \$10,000 a year. Satisfactory biological control of this one weed would save \$3-4 million a year nationally. Management of pasture swards is intricately tied up with stock management, fencing, fertilizer and controlled grazing. An integrated approach is needed.

What about changing land use?

There are many parts of New Zealand where net income and even foreign exchange per hectare may be greater from various combinations of goats, bees, opossum trapping, game harvesting and trees — not just pine trees — than from grass. It is likely there will be 2000-4000 extra beehives in this district within 3-5 years and most won't be collecting clover honey. This suggests that if you can't (afford to) beat them join them!

Lucerne to grapes

Lucerne has been an important crop in Marlborough but following the oil price rises and pest problems acreage has declined. Grapes have replaced much of this acreage. Though this is the only district without phylloxera it is a real danger since only 3% of the grapes are on resistant root stock.

A Challenge

Why after three generations of research are we at the point where the cost of controlling gorse is getting close to being beyond the reach of the land owner, both farmers and foresters? Is that not a matter of extreme concern and urgency? What are you doing about it? Plenty I hope, even though there are no papers on the subject at this conference.

Any 50 of you, cost us a \$1m a year. Have you asked yourselves are you giving value? Please always keep foremost in your minds the ultimate customer of your research, the person who pays to have his weeds and pest controlled, the landowner. We must have, and are entitled to demand, cost effective solutions. These may be chemical, increasingly I believe they will be managerial and biological.

I am glad to have had this opportunity to be with you, even though only briefly. I acknowledge the importance of your work. I would go so far as to say it was critically important to new Zealand's future. For it is certain that much of the future of our society is at risk from weeds and pests, even such things as our health, education and social services. They cannot be maintained, let alone expanded, without a strong successful, profitable economic base. Day by day weeds threaten that base, threaten our society; I wish you success in your deliberations and in your day to day work.

I declare your 34th Conference Open.