OPENING ADDRESS
to 33rd Conference 1980
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It is indeed a pleasure and an honour to be invited to give the opening address to the 33rd conference of your society. I thought, "Oh good, a group of farmers and growers, a group of Noxious Plant Inspectors — a piece of cake." Then I looked at the positions and qualifications of your president, secretary, committee members and speakers and it looked like a listing from de Brett and I thought here I am like a lamb being led to slaughter.

Yet in all honesty I must confess that the fact that such qualifications and expertise so permeate your society and speakers is a very real indication of the importance that your sphere of activities holds in our rural environment.

I deliberately used the word "rural" because this vibrant and changing Tauranga County Area is the centre of a continuing horticultural expansion or explosion (I am not sure which) yet it is still a rural area. Years ago an orchardist or a horticulturalist was something of a strange character who didn't seem to quite fit into the rural scene. Now he is just as much a part of the scene as is the dairy farmer, the sheep and cattle or grasslands farmer, the deer farmer, the forester, the grain farmer, the market gardener and the poultry farmer. To that list I support we should add opossum farming and rabbit farming.

In this age of advanced technology farming or rather any productive use of rural land is becoming more and more a business, where business acumen, and an ability to compare and properly assess complex mechanical, electronic and chemical advances is becoming *nearly* as important as is a farmers "feel" for the land and a feeling for mother nature. I hope this "feel for the land" will never become subordinate to technology or we will lose our fertile land as has happened to over farmed areas in USA.

It seems to be that as our rural scenario advances so does the growth of a bureaucracy to try and control or guide it. I am tempted to ask how many of these self appointed mentors or experts have ever lived off the land or have ever made a success of farming in any one of its multitudinous forms.

There are so many instances and indeed danger signals of what is happening in other countries. In France the commercial growing of marijuana is subsidised under the French agricultural policy as a usable product — hemp. In some EEC countries farmers are paid **not** to produce some forms of farm produce. In the USA, delegation of approval of spray usage and residues has to be made to the Environmental Protection Agency and the approval of spray usages comes under very strong pressure from political and environmental groups and if the American kiwifruit industry is to be believed, greatly to the disadvantage of the rural sector.

I have heard of a description of the American E.P.A. by an American as "Environmentalists, anti establishment, anti industry, anti agriculture, with dedicated anti free enterprise people behind the appointments."

Illuminating isn't it? Surely an area for your society to be interested in if it ever looked like happening in New Zealand. Just as I hope that we will never have the use of chemical spray decided upon solely on its economic efficiency against mite or disease, so do I hope that we will never have that same decision made solely on political or pressure group considerations.

Here in New Zealand there **are** disturbing indications or pointers. Some regulations and legislation designed in good faith to assist the rural sector are degraded in practice through lack of knowledge or appreciation of the practicalities of some of the issues.

We have a rewritten Noxious Plants Act that failed to include in its schedule as did the old act, a form of notice to a farmer to clear weeds. Our council has designed its own form of notice. Other councils may do the same, others will not. Strictly speaking no ability exists to give legal notice to clear weeds. Our own designed notice could well

be rendered null and void in a court of law on argument by an astute lawyer, and so the very teeth of an act have been blunted.

There was a spray subsidy scheme spread over three years brought in by government recently. The first year it went off very well indeed and good results could be seen all around. Now government for reasons best known to themselves have reduced that subsidy to the stage where the first year's expenditure is going to waste, where farmers are backing off the extra cost being saddled onto them and a well thought out scheme to assist an uplift in rural output is being prejudiced.

To be fair not all problems are coming from what I loosely term bureaucratic sources. The development of horticulture in our county has lead to a real "hormone spray damage" fear. Get it clear this development has been brought about just as much by grassland farmers as horticulturalists. The costs of damage to horticultural, market garden, or nursery crops can be large. My council has found that out to its own cost. The coastal nature of our land as well as the steep hills inland, many gullies and gorges and constant and varying air movement has literally frightened away aerial applicators of hormone sprays from many areas of the county. Even many commercial ground spray applicators have given up hormone spraying as being too risky. The subsequent growth of weeds is surely raising problems. I believe a solution to this to be a real challenge to our scientists.

Farmers may well remember the problems of DDT and export meat. Horticulture today is facing problems, of infinitesimal amounts of spray residue on fruit causing a growing furore in America, of rejection of fruit because of mites or other pests that seem to survive despite all the best efforts of man and technology.

I looked through your extremely full programme and the width of its coverage is impressive and I believe indicative of the fact that challenges **do** exist in every sector of production off the land.

I have been fortunate perhaps that through my membership of the KMLA I have visited DSIR research laboratories in Wellington and Auckland. I have studied reports and seed research programmes by private enterprise firms. I have learnt a lot about the spray and pest problems and the research to try and overcome them.

Twelve years of County Councillorship have taught me much of the noxious plant problems that beset rural land users, of their frustrations and of the enormous costs involved.

We live as always in a time of challenge. So I come round in a full circle to my opening comments — you have the qualifications, you have the expertise, you have the interest and therefore your society's conference opening today really is of great importance. Treat it as such. Mr President I bid you, your speakers, your members and your guests a very real welcome to this county and to this host city. His worship the mayor of Tauranga has asked me to give you his welcome.

I wish your conference the success, pleasure and interest it warrants.