

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

MORALITY AND PARTNERSHIP IN CROP PRODUCTION

Harvey C. Smith
Crop Research Division, D.S.I.R.
Private Bag, Christchurch.

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to have the opportunity to make this Presidential address.

It will be brief.

I will try to highlight only two facets impinging on Agronomy.

The first I call Morality in Crop Production.

This is based on the concept that it is more moral for New Zealanders to be conscious of the underdeveloped countries' need to develop markets. To this end I wish to examine the need for New Zealanders to consider the priority for crop production in relation to those that New Zealand can produce best.

I suggest that we should not do extensive research on crops that the underdeveloped countries can do best. A prime example here I think is sugar.

Secondly, I think that there is another facet of Agronomy that we should give greater attention to and that is to increasing the scale of production of new crops. Whether this should be done in partnership with industry at all stages or only at the later stages and to what degree Government should foster co-operation in research at the State level are also very important questions. A typical crop to illustrate this development is Solanum.

MORALITY IN CROP PRODUCTION

Sugar can be produced from two main crops. Sugar cane which is essentially a tropical crop or from sugar beet - a temperate crop.

I suggest that the present and previous proposals to establish a sugar industry are based on a lack of appreciation of the significance of two aspects.

First: That under-developed tropical countries, e.g., India or Indonesia have a shortage of crops that they can market in the developed countries.

Second: That the per hectare production from these tropical countries can be much higher than that obtained in temperature countries. For example, in India under irrigation yields of sugar from cane are better than those likely to be obtained in New Zealand from beet.

India	Best	Sugar cane 300 T/ha at 12%
		= 36 T/ha - 1½ years.

New Zealand	Best	Sugar beet 60 T/ha at 20%
		= 12 T/ha - 6 months.

Convert these to an annual basis and it becomes obvious that the 12 month season in the tropics gives greater production.

Sugar 24 T/ha in India cf. 12 T/ha in New Zealand.

Even if the present efficiency of farming does not result in average yields in this ratio I think the comparison give is a valid one. It is the potential that is important. If the under-developed tropical countries are not reaching their potential, then New Zealand has an obligation to provide training in agronomy for these countries and to send agronomists as part of our technical aid programme.

NEW CROP DEVELOPMENT

Experience of Crop Research Division over the past five years has shown what I believe to be a weakness in the pattern of Agricultural Research and Development. I think there is too long a period between the research evaluation of new crops and the establishment of a viable industry. We certainly lack the impetus that existed with the wartime establishment of the linen flax and linseed industries in New Zealand and the brassica seed production.

These two crops illustrate that with confident and positive planning by Government large scale production can be organised in a very short time. The company structure was obviously not perfect but there is no reason why Government cannot give a more positive lead to assist the establishment of new crop industries.

It is obvious to me that there should be far greater sponsorship in partnership between D.S.I.R. and Industry.

This must be assisted in a financial way to encourage company investment.

CONCLUSION

New Zealand has a greater obligation to assist underdeveloped countries and can do this:

Firstly;

by not growing competing products, e.g. sugar and

by sending technical aid; and secondly,

New Zealand should foster greater active partnership between D.S.I.R. and Industry in developing new crops.