

2. PROBLEM AREAS FOR RESEARCH

Convenor - J.G.H. White

We agreed that research in grain legumes should be market driven and that we really need to know much more about our markets, particularly overseas markets, if we are to plan our research effectively.

One of the merchant members of our panel pointed out that merchants keep a lot of the specific market information very much to themselves. He did, however, agree that in future there should be much greater sharing between merchants and this is an area we should explore further.

In spite of this, there is more general information available on world markets that New Zealand should somehow be obtaining so that we can plan our marketing and research accordingly.

We moved onto a discussion on funding research: where does the money come from? The feeling was that with crops like peas where there was an obvious return both to merchants and farmers, then there should be some contributions from both groups as well as Government.

For new crops like, for example, chickpeas, it would be unfair to ask farmers and merchants to fund development research entirely, if at all. There was a general feeling that funds for this sort of research should largely come from Government through regional development grants or special grants because of the importance of grain legumes in particular regions, and their general importance for human health. At the moment it looks as if these monies might be channelled through DSIR and MAF and it's up to a group such as merchants, farmers & scientists working with grain legumes to lobby for these monies for work on new grain legume crops.

In relation to market-led research, there was an example given about the asparagus industry which actually did a survey to examine market trends. They then used the results of this work to plan an industry strategy. They found, for example, they needed more product and greater productivity and they are now supporting research along these lines. The suggested

analogy was that we should be doing the same in the grain legume area.

We then discussed research for the farmer on the farm. It was pointed out by a farmer that there are no data available on the areas we plant out annually in peas or lentils. The lack of this information makes it difficult to plan total yields and total production and therefore export possibilities. Somehow we need a much better way of collecting such data in order to plan our growing and marketing strategies more effectively.

We also felt that regular high crop yield was important and that research to improve yield was of greater importance than research into quality. Higher and more consistent yields is a key issue for all the grain legumes.

Finally, we talked briefly on research on added value. Earlier today we talked about added value in grain legumes and agreed that was important. We digressed a little about how people buy grain legumes in supermarkets and elsewhere and how research could help to put dollars on top of the basic price. Unfortunately we didn't have time to develop the topic very far.

Question: In relation to obtaining data on grain legume areas and yields, just how do we get the Department of Statistics to collect this information? In the last set of Agricultural Statistics, I was fascinated to discover that the only grain legume any record is kept for is peas. And yet we get records for garlic and rhubarb to the nearest 0.1 ha. It seems to me to be nonsense to have a crop like lentils that occupies nearly 3,000 ha and have no idea exactly how much is grown. Similarly there are now about 800 ha of dried beans being grown. Where do we attack the Government to get this sort of information collected?

Comment: It's a problem, but if we are to plan any sort of export trade this basic information is essential. However, there are many farmers who object to filling in more details on the Agricultural Statistics forms than they are already. That is part of the problem.