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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

M. S. FOREMAN

WHEN CONTEMPLATING the evolution of this society over the eighteen years of its existence, I have been struck by the faithfulness to which we have adhered to our initial objective—"To pool and exchange information concerning weeds and methods of weed control".

Unquestionably there have been changes in our approach. Initially, our efforts were devoted largely to educating the user in the proper handling of these new agricultural tools. Some ten years ago the emphasis was changed. Technical papers directed at a more sophisticated audience replaced the essentially practical information. Later an attempt was made to fill the void resulting from our new attitude by instituting Summer Field Courses catering especially for the practical field advisers. More recently, we have broadened our horizons by encompassing the field of agricultural pest control.

Throughout the years, however, this annual Conference has changed only in the topics discussed. Year after year a familiar band comprising an unlikely blend of commerce and officialdom harmoniously gather to "pool and exchange information". A sturdy little volume each year faithfully reproduces the year's crop of accepted contributions and is circulated to a modest list of financial members.

Although this society—undoubtedly the pre-eminent forum concerned with weed control in New Zealand—is gradually gaining greater respect in the field of agricultural pest control, no recommendations come from its annual deliberations. Despite its vital interest and its probable competence to comment, the heat and fury of the Rachel Carson controversy passed without the society's position being established or its policy endorsed. Legislators legislate and traditional compounds are restricted almost to the point of oblivion and not one voice is raised here in protest or question. Apparently oblivious to the clamourings of the chemical industry we ostensibly support, we continue simply to "pool and exchange information".

Despite the seemingly cloistered atmosphere surrounding this Conference, members have no cause to think we are moribund. Although it would be exaggeration to claim research is initiated as a result of this Conference, it is probably fair to claim that some stimulation is imparted. In any event, we have a deserved record of first hearing and publishing many exciting and unique developments. Almost despite ourselves, we continue to improve our position as *the* herbicide forum in New Zealand and one day soon will enjoy equal recognition in the agricultural pesticide world.

What then of the future? Many of us think we should continue to do no more than "pool and exchange" information. Should we bother with recommendations? The Agricultural Chemicals Board was created to ensure that recommendations are accurate.

Should we have joined the *Silent Spring* controversy? Now a much more senior body than ours has effectively discredited Rachel Carson's views, virtually at the legislative level. As lately as April last, the Agricultural Subcommittee of the United States House Appropriations Committee declared officially than in its opinion

Carson "unnecessarily alarmed the public, created an atmosphere of panic, foretold an impending disaster and barely mentioned the immensely useful note played by pesticides in the U.S. economy." And as for legislation, we might ask ourselves, "Can we influence Government, and are we competent to try?"

I think that any change in the content of our annual conference itself would be a retrograde step. I would most strenuously resist any move to make this forum some kind of evangelical rostrum for, say, the Agricultural Chemicals Board. Equally, I would not agree that this gathering should attempt to pass remits which protest loudly or even condone. Let us continue in our traditionally restrained manner to objectively present and assess information of mutual interest.

However, I believe we must review our basic objectives — if not to change them, at least to widen their scope. I cannot accept we justify our existence by merely "pooling and exchanging information". I believe the time has arrived when we must "pool, exchange and widely publicize information".

New compounds of exceptional activity are coming forward almost by rote. The need for them is urgent if we are to come even within striking distance of our declared production targets. Increased activity is frequently associated with increased hazard. New skills will be needed if these potent weapons are to be used effectively but without risk. This is going to require education.

Already, official extension services available to agriculture are stretched too thinly across the country. In their depositions to the Trade Practices Commission, users have clearly indicated their reluctance to pay for skilled advice, and commerce is therefore unable to extend its facilities. The need is great but the means are lacking.

I suggest to the incoming Executive this thought: that ours is a competent, dynamic body, equipped with the latest knowledge, selfishly kept as the exclusive property of financial members and a few farm advisory officers of the Department of Agriculture. But we have an obligation to the weed and pest control industry which is not now being discharged. *Proceedings* of recent vintage contain facts aplenty which are not greatly appreciated. A publicity subcommittee would extract the most appropriate ways and means of placing this important information in the hands of those most in need of it — the users of agricultural chemicals.

Full knowledge of the problem is a prerequisite to proper employment of agricultural chemicals. Lack of knowledge resulting in improper usage can only result in more restrictive legislation. I cannot imagine that this alternative is in the best interests of the industry.

Surely we are bound to take some positive action — now.