

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO 31ST CONFERENCE 1978

E.A. Upritchard

I would like you to consider the position of our Society in the ongoing controversy over chemicals for control of weeds and pests.

Our members, within this room, are individually New Zealand's experts on pesticides, their use, their environmental effects and their toxicology. We individually have access to the world's public and private data on pesticides.

Should we as a Society make use of this expertise and information to rebalance opinion, to put objective scientific interpretations of the facts about pesticide before the public.

Already the Agricultural Chemicals and Animal Remedies Association 'AGCARM' have introduced their publication as a means of putting pesticides in their proper perspective.

I believe we must recognise ourselves as an impartial scientific body who must actively refute wrong and misleading information by the media.

How do we do this?

Firstly, I see a necessity to keep each other more fully informed. We all know the sensations! Birth deformity clusters in New Zealand and Australia, TCDD in beef fat and mothers milk in the USA, but do we really know the subsequent findings apart from the leaders that New Zealand and Australian Health Authorities have cleared 2,4,5-T and university and industry scientists doubt validity of TCDD analysis method used.

As a first step I suggest the incoming executive look at methods of informing members of facts concerning controversial pesticides.

Secondly, we as individuals must take every opportunity to argue the case of common sense of toxicity versus hazard and of risk versus benefit.

The third step problem is more difficult. How can we reach the public with this information.

We do not need to convince ourselves that chemicals are a necessary part of world food supply for the foreseeable future, either alone or in integrated programmes. There is also little need to convince the farmer or the rural community with whom we regularly come in contact.

This leaves the urban community who can really only be reached through the media. The onus is therefore on us to make our interpretations as newsworthy to the media as the sensationalism so effectively used by environmentalists, conservationists and consumerists. This may be difficult with our media who claim their reports to be unbiased, investigative reporting.

2,4,5-T is just the start. Next up could be New Zealand's second largest volume herbicide 'paraquat', or perhaps the MBC dithiocarbamate fungicides and captan, the backbones of our orchard export fruit quality.

Let us be seen to aggressively support the scientific findings of the Agricultural Chemicals Board and the Health Department on the principle of 2,4,5-T as a test case for rationality in the use of pesticides.