

One step closer to career in animal care



■ FEARGUS MCCONNELL (LEFT)
MATTHEW NICHOLAS

Forget the car, the boat and the holiday home offered by Lotto's Big Wednesday. A Mt Albert veterinary student, who has just won a \$2,500 scholarship from Agcarm, has more down-to-earth aspirations.

Feargus McConnell, 21, will invest his winnings in some wet weather gear for calving, a small-animals textbook and some much-needed car repairs.

"Being a student is a costly business," said Feargus. "I'm very grateful to Agcarm for this scholarship funding which I'll put towards some very good causes. I need some new books, the car's a bit dodgy and I certainly need some gear for calving this spring."

Feargus will always call Auckland home but he is living in Palmerston North where he is halfway through his five-year Bachelor of Veterinary Science degree at Massey University.

"I originally wanted to be a palaeontologist, but then decided as a youngster that I was more suited to helping animals - I've always had pets growing up," he said.

Feargus is unsure about the type of animal care he will specialise in, but he has a keen interest in mixed practice veterinary care.

Another student, Matthew Nicholas, of Hawera, has also won a \$2,500 scholarship courtesy of Agcarm to help with his university studies.

Matthew, 21, is studying towards a Bachelor of Agriscience majoring in horticulture at Massey University. He won the scholarship after submitting an application in the hope it would help fund his living and study costs.

From early on in his childhood, Matthew was fascinated with plants and how they grew. "I remember as a child asking Dad how grass grew. The answer I received, however brilliant it was - thanks Dad! - did not satisfy my curiosity about plant growth."

Matthew plans to use the Agcarm scholarship towards the cost of continuing his studies. ■

Agcarm's new president sets goals



Agcarm has a new president. Justin Hurst, a vet and regulatory affairs manager at animal health company Merial New Zealand, was appointed president at Agcarm's annual meeting.

Dr Hurst said he would like to see two important pieces of regulatory work completed well before the end of his two-year term.

"Farmers, growers, and pet owners need and deserve access to the best and latest products. But New Zealand is missing out on new, more effective treatments due to data protection laws that discourage investment in introducing these technologies.

"Almost everywhere else in the world a new product supplier has 10 years before the market is opened up to generics. In New Zealand we require agrichemical and veterinary medicine companies to invest in trials, which can cost up to \$500,000, to register the product and then only give them a five-year window to make back that investment. This means it is simply not economically viable to introduce some products."

For some categories of products, such as new uses and new formulations, there is no data protection at all. New Zealand's agriculture industry and vets bear the cost through limited access to these products and lost production.

Dr Hurst is also looking forward to the Government removing its double regulation of many animal medicines.

Previously vice president, Dr Hurst replaced John Yates, who retired at the end of his two-year term. Bayer CropScience country manager Jon Neal was elected vice president. Joining the 11-strong committee are Peter Holden, from Dow Agrosiences, and Colin McKay, from Novartis Animal Health.

Dr Hurst began his working life in fruit growing in Hawke's Bay before working as a self-employed contractor and then as operations manager for a horticultural management and consulting company.

He graduated as a vet from Massey University in 1993, and worked in mixed practice before joining Fernz/Nufarm in 1997. Roles included technical services and product and business development in New Zealand and overseas.

He joined Merial in 2003 as manager technical services and regulatory affairs. He is principally responsible for liaison with resellers, regulators and the veterinary, agricultural science and farming industries, particularly representing the views of Merial on anthelmintics, their use and issues of worm management and drench resistance.

Dr Hurst was elected to the Agcarm executive committee in 2004, supporting sensible interpretation and enactment of the legislation affecting the animal health and agro-chemical industries. He plays a similar role on the New Zealand Veterinary Association board. ■



Agrecovery scheme now mandatory under NZ GAP

Under recently revised Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) standards, New Zealand growers must now dispose of used plastic agrichemical containers from participating brand owners through the Agrecovery rural recycling programme.

The produce industry's quality assurance programme, New Zealand GAP, is recognised by all leading supermarkets and buyers, and provides a traceable, accountable system from crop to customer for the production of fruit, vegetables, arable crops and olives in New Zealand.

It has tightened its requirements and now stipulates that "growers shall use the Agrecovery agrichemical container programme to dispose of waste or unwanted plastic agrichemical containers belonging to participating agrichemical manufacturers".

The Agrecovery Container programme is supported by more than 50 of New Zealand's agrichemical and animal health companies and the number of collection sites has increased to more than 70, covering all major growing and farming areas. Agcarm is a founder member of the Agrecovery Foundation.

Graeme Norton, of 3R Group, programme managers for Agrecovery, says he's delighted NZ GAP has recognised Agrecovery as the only safe and fully compliant agrichemical plastic container recycling programme in New Zealand.

"Agrecovery is based on a proven international model, is accredited to ISO 14001

environmental management standard, and ticks all the boxes when it comes to being safe and fully compliant.

"Basically we don't cut any corners managing the programme and it operates to best practice right down to ensuring that the plastic we collect is recycled in New Zealand into an acceptable end-use product."

NZ GAP ensures best practices are in place for the production, packaging and distribution of New Zealand fresh produce, and reduces the risk of health, safety and environmental issues so customers can buy with confidence.

And, although NZ GAP is primarily for suppliers to the domestic market, it has expanded to include export markets by benchmarking to international quality assurance programmes such as GLOBALGAP. ■

	Plastic recovered (kg)
Year 1* (07/08)	22,610
Year 2 (08/09)	75,081
Year 3 (09/10)	91,064

*year ending March.

What is Agcarm?

Agcarm is an industry association which represents crop protection, animal health, and rural supplier businesses. Agcarm members distribute and sell the majority of veterinary medicines and crop protection products in New Zealand. Agcarm members promote responsible use of products right through the product life cycle, from research to disposal. Agcarm is also a positive voice for its members and lobbies for a progressive regulatory environment.

Agcarm is proud to represent the following organisations

Agriculture ITO
Wellington

Agronica
Nelson

Allied Farmers
Taranaki

Ashburton Trading Society
Manakau

BASF
Manakau

Bayer
North Shore

Becker Underwood
Sydney

Boehringer Ingelheim
Manakau

Growsafe trainer Brian Calcina
Napier

CRT Society
Christchurch

Donaghys
Christchurch

Dow Agrosciences
New Plymouth

Dupont
Manakau

Elanco Animal Health
Manakau

Evatech Limited
Nelson

Farmlands Trading Society
Hastings

ICD Group
Central Otago

Intervet/Schering-Plough Animal Health
Upper Hutt

Mantissa
Cambridge

Merial Ancare
Manukau

Monsanto
Melbourne

Novartis Animal Health
Auckland

Nufarm
Otahuhu

Peter Menzies
Dunedin

PGG Wrightson
Christchurch

Pfizer Animal Health
Mt Eden

Philistic Labels
Auckland

RD1
Hamilton

Syngenta Crop Protection
Auckland

Venture Exports
Auckland

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THE AGCARM NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2010

HSNO exemption proposal gains traction

A joint campaign to trim the double-headed bureaucracy that regulates animal medicines is making progress.

The government says there are merits in a proposal to exempt many animal health products from the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act.

Agcarm, Federated Farmers, the New Zealand Veterinary Association and the Animal Remedy & Plant Protection Association (ARPPA) made a joint case for an exemption from the HSNO Act. Human medicines sold in small pack sizes are already exempt.

Speaking at the Agcarm annual conference, Environment Minister Nick Smith said officials had advised him that there were merits in considering the proposal for an exemption in more detail. He wanted to ensure that the regulatory compliance burden was reduced and had instructed Ministry for the Environment officials to look into the proposed exemption as well as any regulatory change that would be needed.

"It's very encouraging that the Minister has accepted that the industry has made a valid case worth exploring as it shows the Government is listening for ideas and willing to implement them if they stack up," Agcarm chief executive Graeme Peters said.

"Animal medicines are already regulated by the New Zealand Food Safety Authority under the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Act. They do not need to be regulated by the HSNO Act.

The double regulation of animal medicines is over the top and adds unnecessary compliance costs, which in turn is limiting innovation and the range of treatments available in New Zealand. The HSNO Act is also creating labelling headaches because it requires the addition of unnecessary health and safety information on already crowded labels.

In addition to being concerned about risks to animal welfare, market access and agricultural security, and domestic food residue standards, the New Zealand Food Safety Authority must take into account any risks to public health when assessing veterinary medicines. The Authority has a robust system which includes compliance audits. These responsibilities are sufficient to cover any concerns about the effects of animal medicines on people.



■ ENVIRONMENT MINISTER NICK SMITH AT THE AGCARM CONFERENCE

"A sensible outcome is an exemption across the vast bulk of medicines such as antibiotics, vaccines, surgical drugs, management of internal parasites, and flea treatments for cats and dogs," Mr Peters said.

It is recognised that some products used on farm animals could be hazardous if used improperly. These are mainly bulk drench insecticides used in a dispersive manner and these should not be exempted.

As a first step, the Environmental Risk Management Authority and the New Zealand Food Safety Authority will conduct a study on the various types of animal health products and the risks they pose, and report back to the Environment Ministry.

"A commitment from the Environmental Risk Management Authority, Food Safety Authority and Environment Ministry to work together to study an exemption is very positive progress and should be applauded," Mr Peters said. ■



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Growers pass residue tests with flying colours



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Agcarm's new president sets goals





■ GRAEME PETERS

Growers pass residue tests with flying colours

Farmers and growers should be congratulated for their breathtaking results in recent tests looking for chemical residues in fruit and vegetables.

They have done extremely well and where the tests show they haven't done well, the reason is due mainly to regulatory failure and little to do with growers not doing their job properly as claimed in the media.

Each year the Food Safety Authority tests fresh, unwashed produce grown in New Zealand or imported. It doesn't matter where the produce comes from as long as chemical traces are below maximum residue limits (MRLs).

For example, a common fungicide applied to beans to control rust has an MRL of five milligrams a kilogram - or five parts per million. If a bean tests above that level, it would be deemed a non-compliance and the grower could be in the gun. MRLs are legal limits so there is always the threat of recalls, seizing products, suspending production and legal action.

It's important to note that MRLs have been carefully assessed. Any possible health risk is so small that it's called 'notional zero'. Large safety margins are built into the MRL system so that food is safe to eat as part of a sensible diet.

Back to the results; the authority tested 173 fruit and vegetable samples for 53 substances which means there were 9,169 possible outcomes.

Clearly, the lower the number of outcomes that breach the MRL, the better.

How many MRL breaches, called non-compliances, did the authority find in its latest Food Residue Surveillance Programme?

In total, there were 46 non-compliances. Flipping the coin, that means there were 9,123 results that complied with the MRLs. That's a pass rate of 99.5 percent - an impressive success, so well done, growers.

No back-slapping

But there was no back-slapping in the media. Instead, the food jeremiahs put out a negative spin. "Pesticide residue in food worst ever" thundered pro-organic lobby groups, who called for regulators to throw the book at growers.

The reality is that growers and industry are doing their best to work within a system that's stacked against them. For example, nine of the breaches were for a fungicide found in bok choy. The highest of these breaches was a residue tested at one part per million.

That might seem low but the Chinese vegetable has a maximum residue limit of 0.1 parts per million. This is well below the fungicide's MRL for other produce which, on average, is 10 parts per million. So why is bok choy's MRL 100 times lower and why are bok choy growers in hot water?

The reason is that the MRL on bok choy is set at the 'default level' used in New Zealand when no specific MRL has been set - which is 0.1 parts per million.

Most minor crops such as bok choy have to put up with the default MRL because of New Zealand's regulatory system, which sets growers up to fail.

An MRL is set after a chemical manufacturer assembles vast quantities of safety and environmental data to prove that traces of the chemical are safe to consume when eating bok choy and other produce. This data can cost up to \$500,000 locally to generate because it involves expensive field trials, regulatory fees and a mountain of paperwork.

If the data was provided, it might find that the 10 parts per million for other similar vegetables is acceptable for bok choy too. But until the regulator can review the data, the MRL is stuck at the default level.

Data Protection

For small crops such as bok choy, New Zealand discourages chemical companies from doing field trials and assembling the data package. One of the reasons is that New Zealand has no data protection for new uses of a product.

That means data that has been submitted by the data owner can be used by the food safety regulator to approve generic products made by rival manufacturers. This free riding keeps prices down, so the argument goes.

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But a perverse outcome is that there are fewer products available because manufacturers are not given the opportunity to recover the costs of assembling the data package to obtain marketing approval. The consequence is that growers have to continue to use products 'off label' or not registered for bok choy, and meet MRLs set at the default level.

After carrying out residue testing for eight years, the New Zealand Food Safety Authority has identified that non-compliances often involve minor crops.

Wider Issue

But this is a wider issue than vegetables not commonly grown in New Zealand. Farmers of minor species such as goats face the same challenge. Lack of data protection also holds back options for growers and farmers of mainstream crops and animals.

To its credit, the Authority understands the data protection conundrum. It is driving a review that should increase protection to a level that will encourage sensible decision making. Although the review has been dragging on for more than two years and deadlines keep getting put back, these are encouraging signs.

There are other solutions for growers. New Zealand could adopt an off-label permit system used in other countries. This sets an MRL based on limited data for a particular crop or animal, and uses data from other similar crops or animals.

Another solution that has worked overseas is cost sharing. In cases where the small size of the New Zealand market does not justify an investment from chemical manufacturers, joint funding from the data owner, growers and the Government may be a workable solution.

Meanwhile, the technical breaches in the MRLs are always seized on to create some cheap publicity at the expense of growers, the chemical supply chain and our otherwise-very-good food safety regime.

A data protection regime similar to that in Europe, Australia or the United States would help alleviate this problem.

Agcarm is calling for 10 years' data protection on new uses and reformulations of existing products. That would give New Zealand farmers and growers better access to the products needed for high-yield agriculture, and set bok choy growers some achievable targets. ■



■ LET THEM EAT CAKE - SCIENTIST BOB BROCKIE SAYS LUDDITE ANTI-GM LOBBYISTS ARE HOLDING BACK A HUMANITARIAN BREAKTHROUGH.

'Savour of mankind's' golden rice blocked from use

By Bob Brockie

In the 1990s, Swiss scientist Ingo Potrykus invented a new strand of rice, rich in vitamin A. In a technical tour de force, Dr Potrykus took carotene genes from daffodils and spliced them into rice plant DNA. The improved rice promised to save the lives of thousands of people dying of vitamin A deficiency and prevent hundreds of thousands going blind every year.

Unlike ordinary white rice, Dr Potrykus's genetically engineered rice is yellow in colour and came to be known as golden rice. Not wanting to make money from golden rice himself, nor wanting big business to profit from his discovery, he negotiated away all patent rights so that he could give the stuff away to countries that needed it.

Time magazine featured Dr Potrykus on its cover in August 2000, proclaiming him a saviour of mankind.

Eleven years down the track and what has happened?

Almost nothing. Golden rice is mired in ideological controversy and absurd legal regulatory requirements. Dr Potrykus complains that Greenpeace and its attendant timid bureaucrats have blocked every attempt to move golden rice from his lab to people's plates.

He says that, since 1999, Greenpeace and other agencies opposed to his GM rice have been responsible for at least 6000 people a year and several hundred thousand children and young mothers going blind every year.

It took him more than two years to get permission to test golden rice in the field and more than four years collecting data for a regulatory dossier that would satisfy any national biosafety authority. In the intervening period, new and more

productive varieties of golden rice have been invented and each has had to face the same labyrinthine time-wasting procedures.

Genetic engineering has massive potential to tackle the world's food problems - increasing yields, protecting food crops from pests and diseases, strengthening crops' competition with weeds and improving the nutritional value of plants.

The safety of hundreds of GE crops has been thoroughly studied during the past 25 years, endless trials showing that the technology is harmless. Even in the litigious United States, where hundreds of millions of Americans have eaten the stuff for more than 20 years, no one nor anything in the environment has been harmed by these products.

Dr Potrykus argues that Greenpeace's demands for politically telling, spurious research into hypothetical risks of GE crops wastes time, money and human lives. He hopes, nevertheless, to have his rice on people's plates by next year.

He should count himself lucky that he works in Switzerland and not New Zealand. Fear-mongering Luddite Greenies have so put the wind up New Zealanders that our New Organisms Act imposes more expensive, heavy-handed, paper-wasting, restrictive and crippling Byzantine restrictions on our gene scientists than any other country on earth. Greenies' calls for more information about imaginary GE dangers are simply a political strategy to stall the whole process rather than bring enlightenment.

Dr Potrykus wouldn't even reach first base in New Zealand.

■ Bob Brockie is a New Zealand scientist, columnist, and cartoonist.



■ MARK NORMAN AND MATTHEW SPENCER



■ REBECCA FISHER AND EMMA WILSON



■ SPEAKER LIVIA ESTERHAZY, SAATCHI & SAATCHI

Seen at the Agcarm Annual Conference



■ PETER JACOB AND BEN STAPLEY AT THE QUIZ NIGHT



■ ONSLOW COLLEGE KAPA HAKA GROUP



■ JON NEAL, MICHAEL DUNBIER, AND ROBERT BREWER

Thank you

Two former Agcarm presidents and valued members of the Agcarm executive committee stood down at the Agcarm Annual Meeting. Elanco's Derek Moore (president 2001-2004) served two stints on the committee, totaling 15 years. CRT's Steve Metzger (president 2006-2008) served on the committee for nine years. Both have made a huge contribution to Agcarm.

Intervet/Schering-Plough's Roger Marchant has stepped down after completing seven years as Agcarm's nominee on the National Animal Ethics Advisory Committee. The committee provides independent advice to the Minister of Agriculture on policy and practices relating to the use of animals in research, testing and teaching. His knowledge and experience in the commercial use of animals have been invaluable to the committee.