

COOPERATION

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I am delighted to have been asked to speak on this vital topic. I say vital because it involves the future of the cotton industry, aerial agriculture, the farm chemical industry, consultants, shire councils, the people of country towns and many Government officials. All of these must cooperate for the good of their region and Australia. Should any of these groups act for themselves alone it would be the equivalent to saying "Your end of the boat is sinking!".

Emotional campaigns by actresses, professional agitators and the media have generated a frightened, misinformed majority which is opposing technology in general and our industries in particular.

I was shocked to find that my brief was to present the AVCA (Agricultural & Veterinary Chemicals Association) "point of view" and cover responsibility to the environment, drum handling, drum disposal, spraying technology, alternate chemicals and the establishment and maintenance of acceptable practices. Each one of these issues could occupy a full seminar program so it will not surprise you if I do not attempt to cover the topics in the remaining nine minutes.

There is a deplorable tendency in the community, and it is very much in evidence in the cotton industry, to abrogate one's responsibility and blame it on the "other guy". One section of the industry's problems are your problems so don't sit back and wait for AVCA to solve the drum problems; the Aerial Agricultural Association of Australia (AAAA) to solve spraying problems; and the Cotton Foundation to solve the environment problems. Each and all of these problems can be resolved but only if there is cooperation between all of the groups involved.

How can cooperation help in solving our problems? If we look at what the individual groups are doing we can see the potential benefits of cooperating.

AVCA and AAAA have both instituted an education/self regulatory program for their members. The aim is to improve and standardise the level of expertise of personnel engaged (in the case of the AVCA scheme) in all aspects of the manufacture, distribution and advice of farm chemicals.

In the case of AAAA's a similar exercise has been directed not only at pilots but also at all ancillary staff.

What do these groups hope to achieve with the large expenditure of effort and money? It is not a public relations exercise, it is a means by which the groups will improve the self-image of their members and demonstrate to the critics of their activities that pesticides can be employed without adverse effects.

Cooperation in this sense means active support of these accreditation schemes. Buy from accredited dealers and use only AAAA accredited personnel. It will mean you are getting service from people vitally concerned in the industry.

There have, for example, been a few well-publicised cases where individual pilots have drifted sprays into towns causing much concern. Whether the cause was ignorance, carelessness or weather changes does not matter - such incidents must cease. If most operators can and do avoid problems, all operators must; as one incident undoes all the good work done by many. The industry should not support those who bring discredit on the cotton industry. This form of self regulation should be exercised pending possible deregistration by Government in the future.

COTTON GROWERS AND CONSULTANTS are not always blameless. There have been situations where they have not planned well enough (or cooperated with the aerial operator). Pilots have the right to refuse to do an unnecessarily urgent spray job under marginal or unsuitable wind conditions. Those that don't refuse such work will ultimately be sued out of business as they have been overseas.

Alternatively, growers and consultants who do not cooperate with the best professional operators could be the culprits who force themselves off specific areas. They could even close down large areas of cotton grown by better growers who have not caused problems.

Let's put an end to the "blame the pilot" syndrome and cooperate with the best pilots to do a safe job alongside towns. Should the grower have to change chemicals or pay more for professionalism that's better than losing the right to farm certain fields for himself and ultimately the whole industry.

COUNCILS AND LOCAL PESTICIDE COORDINATION COMMITTEES can do a lot at the local level to promote understanding and cooperation. It is not their job to develop rules for aerial spraying nor do they have the expertise. This is the responsibility of Government who have the necessary powers and access to aerial operators and scientists who know how to prevent problems.

As the Government authorities have been too slow to act it is not surprising that local authorities have drafted their own recommendations. Some of these recommendations could even make spray drift problems worse and prevent cotton growing over large areas - without technical justification.

Logically the definition of safe spraying techniques and their policing must be in the hands of one competent authority. This can only be the Government. We at AVCA urge all growers, councils and consultants to cooperate with and help the one Central Authority. In this way it will be possible to set standards and punish those who cause incidents. This concept is much more credible to the worried townspeople and should be therefore accepted by concerned councils.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS have a key role as they alone are seen by the public as impartial. This places a huge responsibility on them to become technically proficient and have the courage to make hard decisions. Moves have been made in this direction but not fast enough. Government inertia and general failure to stand up for the hard facts have allowed the media to generate excessive fears in the general public.

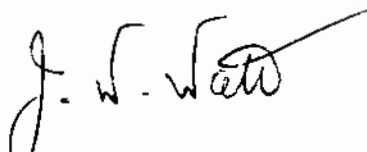
Admittedly we would be much worse off if we did not have the services of the pesticides inspectors and strong Pesticides Acts but that's not enough. Government officials rarely stand up and refute outrageous statements in newspapers and they're what the public believe.

So what will we have achieved when everyone is trained and accredited and we are all cooperating? Not much. We'll have removed any factual basis for complaints but this won't stop the media generated hysteria.

Already we've seen a scare campaign based on a new aircraft spraying water for a movie film. The wild assertions that were made about health effects were never retracted and it took 5 days and some pressure to even get a small letter to the Editor published!

On a grander scale, an American actress alleged (without toxicological reasons) that "Alar" on red apples affected health. In Australia the label "Alar free" on green apples has not stopped the serious drop in consumption and the price slump of all apples.

Thus, unless there is a coordinated, continued effort to educate the media and tell the truth to the townspeople many of our efforts will be in vain. This is the ultimate in cooperation. We must cooperate with one another and the townspeople. This will not be easy as it will involve the Government, growers, consultants, AVCA, AAAA, resellers and applicators in general. Unless we do so we can expect continuing criticism and the possible loss of large sections of our various industries and even the industries themselves.


J.W. Watt

ADDENDUM TO PAPER ON COOPERATIONDRUM HANDLING AND DRUM DISPOSAL

Firstly, it must be stated that disposal is a world-wide problem and as yet no long term schemes have been successful. Australia, with its high transport costs and long haulage distances, faces the additional problem of funding disposal operations.

Again it is an area where cooperation must occur for any scheme to be successful. Users must accept that they have an obligation to rinse drums and dispose of wastes. Manufacturers have to be involved in the disposal phase as while they do not have a "cradle to grave" responsibility they have a moral responsibility to ensure safe disposal. Governments must cooperate in providing pragmatic regulations for the disposal and facilitate the establishment of either whole drum recycling programs or scrap metal reclamation schemes.

Two schemes are under investigation by AVCA:

The proposal is to return 200-litre drums via a washing facility to the manufacturer for refilling. Such an operation is designed specifically for aircraft operators who invariably end up with large stocks of 200-litre drums which are in very sound condition. Difficulty has been encountered from certain government authorities who will allow transport of full drums into the area but require a multiplicity of permits to transport the empties out of the area as it will involve transport of dirty drums.

The second scheme proposes that washed drums are crushed and transported from the area for scrap metal recycling. This scheme could apply to 20 to 200 litres and involve old farm stockpiles. The drums must be washed to eliminate the need for the extensive permits and to prevent problems with recycling. Development of an extremely effective washing rig is under way to handle those situations where washing has not been carried out.

We must all cooperate to solve the drum disposal problem, both in the aspects of cleansing and recycling, but also in the costs involved; for the costs involved in either of these schemes are too much of a burden for any one group to bear. A successful pilot scheme in the US along similar lines to proposal two involved farmers, industry and government on a cost sharing basis as well as an effort basis.