

PRESENTATION BY IAN MCDUGALL, COMMERCIAL GROWER

I'm Ian McDougall. In the past I have been involved in my father's business with my brothers. We were known as M. McDougall Ltd. We have been involved in sheep, beef, dairy, maize, and commercial growing but mainly we would be known for the latter. We have exported lamb, onions, squash and some other vegetable crops.

Along with others, we pioneered methods of exporting onions. And we single-handedly pioneered the export of squash.

We now have a small property (72 Ha) at Orton on Churchill Road, west of the Hampton Downs landfill. At the present time it is used for maize production; in the past it has been a beef, sheep and dairy farm.

In 1972, PCN (potato-cyst nematode) was found on one of our properties. It was an unusual and notifiable disease. The government suggested we cover 16 Ha of land on Pukekohe Hill in concrete! This recommendation was made without appropriate expert advice and was not accepted by us.

After the crop died down, and regrew, it was eventually harvested under strict guidelines. The ground was then fumigated with methyl-bromide and then we continued to crop it but not in potatoes.

We, along with others, got international advice on best practice from a Dr Bedi who came to New Zealand to observe the situation in person.

In this instance, bureaucrats were not best placed to make such decisions.

Before 1972 growing was done along the lines of continuous cropping of certain crops on the same land which lead to disease like PCN occurring. Nowadays PCN is no longer a threat as land is now rotated with different crops.

Commercial growers have come a long way since those days, with the Franklin Sustainability Project leading by example. This is an initiative by growers – not council or government - and along with environmental improvements such as sedimentation settling ponds, bunds, set-backs from waterways, repairing and plantings across hillsides.

Today we apply far less fertilizer and sprays than we used to. We have learnt that if too much fertilizer is applied, the crop is subject to deterioration and cannot be stored for any length of time.

Likewise, we now have technologies that allow the exact placement of fertilizer and sprays where they are directly needed. Such improvements are being made on a continuing basis, and council plans need to give farmers and growers room to keep new practices evolving.

This local area has an advantage to growers due to its ability to grow early spring crops which fetch a premium. As Auckland grows, cropping land is being squeezed out by urban development and yet, the demand for fresh vegetables is increasing. Growers have been moving south as a result but now we find ourselves being squeezed out of the Waikato as well, despite having a footprint here of only 1.7% of the land area.

As a former exporter, I know that there will be new crops and new opportunities if only we have the land to grow them on. We need to ensure that Commercial Growing remains attractive to the young and entrepreneurial minded.

Without the prospect of being able to expand and develop a viable business, we face the demographic reality that no one will want to grow the food we desperately need.

KOI CARP

Koi Carp, in my estimation, could be a larger threat to our goal of clean and swimmable waterways than anything else. They are sucking away at the edges of the river and tributaries, causing loss of land and the destruction of important nurseries for whitebait. To date, my neighbour estimates he has lost the equivalent of 2 ha in eroded stream banks. The build-up of silt damages the ecosystem necessary for native aquatic life and the birds and animals that live along the waters' edge. This will also reduce the oxygen levels needed for a healthy river.



This photo shows erosion caused by koi carp. See how close it is getting to the road.

The herpes virus appears to have a chance at being the answer but whitebait and eels will have to be protected. Netting and baiting are other ways of keeping them out.



Further down the road, Council has fenced off another area of erosion. In the photo below you may be able to see a part of a cable that has been exposed by the erosion.



It seems to me that PC1 must address this as a matter of the highest priority for unless the problem is confronted, koi carp will continue to undermine all efforts by individual landowners.