

Who's greenwashing who?

EVER HEARD of green-wash? It means misleading consumers about the environmental practice of a company and/or the benefit of its product or service.

Accusations of greenwashing usually come from environmentalists, criticising companies, organisations and even countries for not living up to the expectations of

these self-appointed green guardians'.

Often, agriculture is the subject of such sanctimonious lectures from the Green Party, Greenpeace, Soil & Health NZ – or some other ecological do-gooder group – accusing it of unleashing environmental damage on land, water system and/or animals. Regularly these groups call for whole-

sale conversion to organics, claiming only this can save the country – environmentally and economically.

So to learn that certain types of agriculture, such as organics, are not all that environmentally friendly and/or economically sensible, brings a sense of schadenfreude.

An Australian Farm Institute conference

heard how relieving world hunger and ensuring food security are inextricably linked to adoption of new farming technology. United Nations figures show the world's population has been increasing by 78 million/year and is expected to reach 9 billion by 2050, requiring a 70% increase in food production from today's levels.

Roger Cady, Elanco's sustainability leader, says this will have to come from new technology due to limitations in land and natural resource availability. He says consumers have been swayed into organics by impressions and intuition without considering the science, productive efficiency and environmental impact per unit of output.

"Intensive agriculture is actually significantly more sustainable than most people are aware," says Cady.

"Today's technology-aided, intensive agriculture is far more environmentally sustainable than historical agriculture because fewer resources, less water and less land are used with less greenhouse gas produced

per unit of food grown than by historical farming methods."

Meanwhile, Brett Stuart, of US agricultural analysis company Global



COMMS COMMENT
DAVID ANDERSON

AgriTrends, told the conference most consumers do not understand the social implications of perceived "socially-responsible" purchasing.

"Organic, locally grown, free range and other anti-technology production methods typically increase the use of water and feed resources, and can lead to higher greenhouse gas emissions." He says it is actually "socially irresponsible" to impose choice restrictions on producers which then lead to higher food costs, felt mainly in the 'developing world'.

"Utilising technology effectively will mean that while we need to double agricultural production by 2050, we will only occupy

13% more land to do this than was used in 2008."

Australian agriculture and science author Julian Cribb says mankind faces its greatest challenge with world demand for food doubling in 40 years or so. This growing demand comes as the scarcity of land and water available for growing food intensifies.

In 2010, DuPont assembled an external committee, chaired by former US Senator Tom Daschle, to examine the best public policy and business practices to tackle the global challenge to increase agriculture productivity in a sustainable manner.

Its three key recommendations were:

- Produce more food and increase the nutritional value of food – unleashing innovation and ensuring farmers have access to the tools they need will be essential.
- Make food accessible and affordable for everyone – barriers to moving food, such as infrastructure and government policies, must be removed.
- Address the challenge in a continuously more sustainable and comprehensive way – continuously improving agricultural products and practices to address natural resource needs.

With the world's population growth showing no signs of abating, the ever-increasing demand for food makes it even more important for farmers to produce more from less. Those pushing organic barrows won't want to admit it, but the food production increase needed to feed the world's growing population cannot, and will not, come from organic systems.

Footnote: In response to my column in Rural News July 5, on the need for a pan-agricultural sector group, James Horban, of Culverden, says a group – tentatively called Farming For Our Future (FFOF) – is already doing this job. Mr Horban may believe FFOF is filling this void, but I question how an organisation few people know about and lacking a website presence could make any such claim. I applaud the people behind FFOF for taking the initiative, but suggest they need to publicise it better – and more widely – if it is ever going to be anything more than an idea.

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PRODUCT LIST POINTS TO GENETIC SOLUTION?

You really have to wonder about the state of sheep health when you see the list of sheep internal parasite treatments 2011 (July 19 Rural News) which are on the market – presumably to increase sheep profits.

You have to ask why on earth do we need 64 different products, from seven companies with mind-boggling differences in active ingredients, ingredient dose rate, formulated dose rate and withholding periods – even up to 128 days!

But these horrendous tables show one clear thing – that the only long-term sustainable solution for internal parasites is through genetics and the survival of the fittest, like farmers used to solve Facial Eczema. This will

at least start to cut down this burgeoning chemotherapy. Many sheep farmers are well down this track.

Of course, I don't expect international pharmaceutical companies and veterinarians to agree with me. Genetic solutions don't make them money, so why don't they offer free dagging and drenching services with their products, instead of iPods and golf clubs?

Clive Dalton
Hamilton

ANIMAL HEALTH BOARD

Director Positions x 2

Animal Health Board

The Animal Health Board's (AHB) mission is to eradicate bovine tuberculosis (TB) from New Zealand in order to protect farmers' businesses and New Zealand's access to export markets for dairy, beef and deer products. The AHB was formed specifically for this purpose and is legally responsible for managing and implementing the National Pest Management Strategy for bovine TB.

The AHB is a non-profit making incorporated society, made up of representatives from the farming sector, central and local government.

Two directors are retiring by rotation and the AHB is seeking two directors for its Board of Directors for a three-year term. Applications are sought from individuals who have the ability and willingness to make a substantial commitment to the Board.

Proven high level governance skills and experience are essential. Relevant primary sector experience would be valuable. Commercial, food industry or experience managing national insurance risk issues would be beneficial.

Applications close 5pm, 22 August 2011.

Please contact David Burt for an application pack and mail your completed application to:

David Burt, Federated Farmers of New Zealand
PO Box 715, Wellington 6140
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