

## CHAPTER NINE

# THE AGRI-BUSINESSES

The commercial sector was a keen participant in NZGA right from the start. It was an Australian businessman representing the giant British company, Imperial chemical Industries (ICI), who suggested the formation of a forum for grasslands people in January 1931.

Livestock farmers need essential materials to carry out their businesses - fencing, fertiliser, seed, farming machinery, and the current times, computer gear as well. In the early years companies were formed to supply farmers, usually through stock and station agents and over the decades, several large companies were formed through mergers to service farming needs.

Firms like Wright Stephenson, which evolved into Wrightson Limited and recently PGG Wrightson by merging with Pyne Gould Guinness, developed their own retail stores; others like Hodder & Tolley were bought by the Australian firm Elders to service both countries, then changed back to Hodder & Tolley again. Horticultural needs were supplied by Arthur Yates Ltd, who also marketed Trevor Ellett's *Mangere ryegrass* selection as *Ellett* ryegrass, the first privately released pasture variety in New Zealand.

Fertilisers were another large business that grew along with farming. Supplies were imported from different countries, with the 3 by 4 km Pacific island, Nauru, being a source of phosphate. Phosphate was mined extensively from 1907, and for decades it was Nauru's main resource. The phosphate quality was the highest in the world, but the mining ruined the small island, and even the trust that managed settlements after a court case is now penniless after poor investment policies.

Two main co-operatives now dominate the NZ fertiliser industry - Ravensdown and Ballance Agri-Nutrients - and where is the best place for staff to meet? NZGA conferences! The Association is a neutral ground and the business sector has increasingly used the annual meetings as a venue for mutual debating and education of their more inexperienced personnel.

NZGA membership numbers from the commercial sector have been growing in recent decades, while numbers from crown research institutes have dwindled as the research has been trimmed and focused mostly on food and environmental issues. While NZGA has always had environmental issues at the forefront of conference subjects, the interest in genomics and developing food aspects hasn't featured beyond farming the primary products of milk, meat and fibre.

However, the New Zealand Government stopped agricultural subsidies in 1985 and began cutting its funding to research after it formed the crown-owned institutes in

1992. The government, as part of its deregulation of the economy, also directed that Advisory Services Division (ASD) become fully funded by user fees within five years.

So ASD was merged with the Agricultural Research Division in 1987 to become MAF Technology - known as MAFTech. In 1990, the advisers were reformed yet again as Agriculture New Zealand, a national consultancy service. This organisation was sold in 1995 to PGG Wrightson Ltd.

Though now part of a private company, Agriculture New Zealand was contracted by the government to provide technology transfer, farm monitoring, economic surveying and industry training. So ASD shed large numbers of advisers and they set up their own businesses, and swelled the NZGA membership, as they needed to be up-to-date with the latest pastoral farming information.

Since 1931 all the annual conferences have featured aspects of soil fertility, fertiliser use and pasture seeds in some way, in addition to grazing management. Every year there are some facts and ideas that businessmen can learn about, take back to their offices and possibly build into their product use or advice. Other sectors present at NZGA meetings have learnt something from the businessmen and have also benefitted.

## **Sponsorship**

Once they saw how NZGA was developing, some businessmen (they were all male in the earlier years), joined in by election to the Executive Committee and encouraged their companies to sponsor the Association in some way.

The most obvious sponsorship was in the form of advertisements in the Proceedings in post-war years. In the early years the sponsors paid for full-page advertisements in The Proceedings. These were placed where the readers would not miss them but did not interfere with the reading of the papers. During the past 40-50 years conference events, bags, folders, booklets and even pens were donated by sponsoring companies.

NZGA has had to adopt along with the industries and now has a professional structure that maintain financial viability. It appreciates that the agri-businesses are a growing part of the Association, as they were when it was formed in 1931.

For Proceedings of Special Conferences there are Principal Sponsors, Premium Sponsors and Gold Sponsors listed on the back cover; the annual Proceedings/Journals have sponsors graded into Premium, Level One and Level Two.

It may well be the case that the future of NZGA will rest much more heavily on the agri-business sector to keep it going.

## Prominent Agri-business members

Throughout the decades several business people were prominent in NZGA progress. The following are some examples:

**Harry Woodyear-Smith** came to New Zealand from England in the early 1920s and spent several years with the Department of Agriculture as an economist, instructor and as a seed certification officer. He then joined the Challenge Phosphate Company in Northland.

Harry was a Foundation Member of NZGA and a member of many kindred agricultural organisations. He spent over 30 years promoting pasture improvement, and he had a broad knowledge of pastoral farming.

After attending his first conference Harry went on to serve NZGA for many years. He wasn't an intrusive person but was there to venture an opinion if needed.

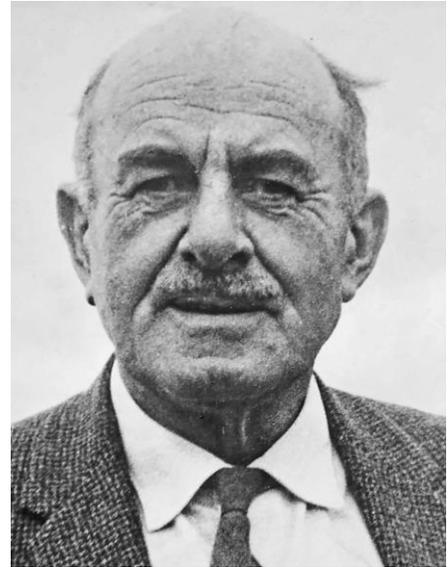
He received the NZGA Award for "Betterment of Grasslands from Dr Lionel Corkill in 1958 at the Dunedin Conference.

Harry served as President in 1963 and as the immediate Past President, he was one of the NZGA Executive in 1964 to form the Grassland Memorial Trust following the death of Dr Peter Sears. He was also a Life Member of NZGA.

**Mike Manning** graduated with a BAgSc from Massey University in 1981. He first became involved in NZGA as a member of the LOC for the 1983 Annual Conference in Gisborne. He was elected to the Executive Committee in 1994 and served as President in 1997. Over that time, Mike also presented papers at several NZGA conferences.

Mike has extensive experience in the fertiliser industry with 39 years of involvement. He started as an adviser with the East Coast Fertiliser Company, based in Gisborne and covering the Northern Hawke's Bay to East Cape region and then in Feilding, working directly with farmers.

Since 1988 he has undertaken several senior management positions within



*Harry Woodyear-Smith*



*Mike Manning*

Ravensdown Fertiliser Ltd. Mike is currently responsible for Innovation Investments by Ravensdown; ARL, the company-owned soil and plant diagnostic laboratory; the Ravensdown Environmental Consulting team; and the Regional Council policy team.

Mike has successfully emphasised two key aspects in his position as GM Innovation and Strategy. Firstly, he has ensured that Ravensdown continues to lead with the provision of robust science that translates into real value when implemented by farmers. Secondly, he has several agricultural innovations currently under development which, once coupled with appropriate investment and commercial acumen, will lead to further significant technological advances for Ravensdown shareholders.

**Alan Stewart** graduated B.Ag.Sc at Lincoln University in 1977 and then obtained an M.Ag.Sc (1st Class Honours) in Plant Science.

He joined Pyne Gould Guinness Ltd from 1979 as a plant breeder and later as research leader. At the Ceres Research Farm near Lincoln Alan bred many novel pasture and forage varieties that became familiar successes on farms, here and overseas, including: 13 pasture species, five forage species, the same number of turf grasses and two very successful grazing herbs - chicory and plantain.



*Alan Stewart*

He arranged international and local trial of his selections in suitable temperate countries and worked with marketing people in local and international companies to ensure he had the right research priorities.

Alan also ensured that pure seed of his cultivars were maintained to provide breeders seed for seed certification. He ensured all his cultivars were bred with realistic commercial seed yield potential. Finally, he developed suitable instructions for managing his varieties and ensured that seed growers and company agents knew these “recommendations on the seed packets.” Having bred 72 cultivars over the years, his list of overseas trips associated with his efforts is extensive.

In 2003 we worked together for NZGA to produce a practical guidebook for the farmers on using all the New Zealand pasture plant varieties in their enterprises, based on a paper I presented at the Gore Conference in 1992 (Volume 54: pp 99-104). This book (*Pasture and Forage Plants for New Zealand*, Grassland Research & Practice Series No 8, Fifth Edition 2021) has been continued and further developed by other NZGA enthusiasts.

Alan was NZGA President in 1997 and still serves on the NZ Grassland Trust.

## **Richard Green**

Richard Green is a ‘Canterbury product’ in most respects. After his school years he spent eight years as an agricultural consultant, working predominately across Otago. He then worked in the herbage seeds industry and I knew him during the time he worked with businessman John Mckenzie to develop a successful Agricom Ltd based in Ashburton.

When PGG Wrightson was formed, Richard joined John McKenzie to be General Manager International, and Sales and Marketing Director of Agricom. For several years Richard also served on the NZGA Executive Committee and in 2005 he was a most capable President.



*Richard Green*

Since then, Richard has enjoyed his passion for investing in and building wealth-creating businesses and helping leaders to grow and develop through all aspects of this country’s business.

He is a shareholder and executive chairman across several main businesses he owns with his wife Vicki and others, including a retirement village, a honey production and sales business, and a farming business.

He also sits on several other boards, farming boards, and also is currently (2021) chairman of AGMARDT, AbacusBio and Headwaters NZ. He has served on the board of FAR (the Foundation for Arable Research) and Rural Leaders.

**Warwick Catto** is the Science Strategy Manager at Ballance Agri-Nutrients, working in nutrient management, particularly on environmental management and productivity in farm systems. He grew up on a Central Southland sheep farm, took a degree at Lincoln and won the Young Farmer of the Year contest in 1995.

He joined Southland Co-operative Phosphate Co in 1989, which merged with BOP fertiliser and eventually rebranded as Ballance Agri-Nutrients. Warwick was a Commonwealth Scholar in 1998 and moved to BOP Fertilisers head office at Tauranga in 2001. He will have been with Ballance for 32 years in September 2021.

Warwick joined NZGA in 1989 when the conference was in Whanganui and became an enthusiast. He first joined a LOC for the Gore conference in 1992. As a result he developed strong associations with Gore’s MAF Regional Adviser, Peter Hook, scientists at DSIR Grasslands in Gore, and seed company technical managers Richard Green and Graham Kerr.



*Warwick Catto*

Warwick was chairman of the LOC in Invercargill during 2000 and was elected to the Executive Committee then. He served as President in 2005-06. He chaired an LOC again for the Tauranga conference in 2013.

At Ballance he was also programme manager for the cooperative's recently completed \$19.5 million Clearview Innovations Primary Growth Partnership (PGP) programme. This programme aimed to produce products and services that would increase nutrient efficiency and reduce the environmental footprint of pastoral farming creating *Surephos* product, *Spreadsmart* service, *MitAgator* and *My Pasture Planner* tools.

He has also been pivotal in the establishment of the national Ballance Farm Environment Award (BFEA) and has ensured their continued success for over 15 years.

He is one of two on farm judges for the National Supreme Award. The Ballance Farm Environment Awards is the only awards programme in the industry that covers all sectors with a holistic outlook. The Ballance Farm Environment Awards have become nationally recognised and respected and they are highly regarded by the best New Zealand farmers.

Warwick has been instrumental in developing fertiliser industry policy over the past 30 years, including contributing to the establishment of Fertmark, Spreadmark, the Fertiliser Code of Practice, and the development of *Overseer*.

**John McKenzie** has been a successful businessman in the herbage seeds industry, in Canterbury farming, and he has exerted much effort into supporting pasture science and technology. He's CEO of PGG Wrightson Seeds, the largest New Zealand seed company and he is the majority shareholder of Agricom (New Zealand) Ltd. He developed this well-regarded Ashburton-based company from small beginnings. He was awarded the NZGA Regional Award in 2004; and then the Ray Brougham Trophy in 2010.



*John McKenzie*

Born in Canterbury, John graduated BAgSc from Lincoln in 1976 and joined Engelbrecht, Royds, Tavendale & Co Ltd in Ashburton, working as a farm management consultant for four years. There he served 45 clients, dealing with a broad range of technical, financial and management decisions.

John then became a partner in JB Tavendale & Co Ltd, and continued working with farmer clients, property supervision and business supervision clients. He also supervised Agricom (New Zealand) Ltd; Winslow Feeds, a feed milling operation, and was involved in livestock exports and developing the Five Star beef feedlot farm near Ashburton.

From 1980 to 1987 John farmed in partnership on a 336 ha fully spray-irrigated, mixed cropping unit, growing approximately 200 ha of arable and horticultural crops. He then farmed himself, running a 95 ha property that grew into a 980 ha mixed cropping, 750

ha of arable and specialist seeds, and an area for livestock. John is also involved in a large scale dairy partnership.

John was a founding partner of Agricom New Zealand, a startup company in 1985. This became full-time employment for him in 1996. John closely managed all R&D investments since its inception, and he acted at various times as Production Manager and International Sales Manager, in addition to company management activities, until Agricom was sold.

He took on the management of PGG Wrightson Seeds when Agricom and Pyne Gould Guinness merged with Wrightson Seeds Ltd. The PGG Wrightson Seeds business was sold in 2019 to DLF, a Danish Seed Grower Co-operative and John has continued to have responsibility for DLF's NZ and Australian business. As CEO of Oceania he also sits on the Executive Management Board of DLF.

John's tremendous integrity is well known and respected throughout the herbage seed industry and within New Zealand's pastoral research community.

**Pat Garden** is a farmer and agribusiness leader from Central Otago who was elected to the NZGA Executive Committee in 2004 and served as President five years later.



*Pat Garden*

When it came to Pat learning about farming, his father took a different approach. When Pat returned to the 200 ha family farm in Moa Flat, full of ideas and enthusiasm, his father said, "Ok, Pat, you're in charge – I'll tell you whether I think your decisions will work or not, but you'll have the final decision."

Results from the research stations were permeating the grassland industry by then, so Pat was soon able to put them into practice on the farm, Avenel, a 2200 ha high country property up on the Lammerlaw Range above Millers Flat. The farm has four well developed income streams – prime lambs, beef finishing, timber from 300 ha of forestry, and carbon through the forest portfolio.

All along Pat has been a great believer in the information farmers can acquire through learning from each other; and when expertise is included in the mix, then so much the better. Several discussion groups operated in his valley, including a Farm Forestry group, a Conservation group, a Share Investment group and the Millers Flat Farm Discussion group. He learned from them all, but 25 years of the Millers Flat Farm Discussion Group was the biggest influence in terms of innovation, benchmarking and maintaining enthusiasm.

In January 1977, Pat met Marcelle, a young Swiss girl and they married and settled on Avenel and had a son (Nick) and daughter Jo. Marcelle joined a group of valley wives

who started a share club, and everything they touched turned to gold. Their husbands decided to do the same, expecting to show them how to really make money, but a year later the women suddenly sold up. Three weeks later the share market crashed and the men's club was left holding expensive but worthless paper! Recently, Pat and Marcelle handed Avenel's management to Nick, so Pat's is now a mentor and adviser on strategy.

Pat's has also had several external roles in the local community and at a national level, including:

- Chair of High Country Section of Federated Farmers 1990-1993.
- Director of FORST (the Government funding body) during 1993-1999.
- Chair of Technology New Zealand 1998–2006.
- Chair of MAF's Sustainable Farming Fund 2003-2006.
- Chair of numerous Advisory Panels for several organisations from 2004 – 2010, including the Tertiary Education Commission Advisory Panel; the AgResearch Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Panel; and the Enterprise Scholarship Panel.

Pat was elected an NZGA Life Member at the Timaru AGM in 2016. He had served as NZGA President at Waitangi in 2009 and he was the Chair of Colin Brown's *TracMap NZ* from 2007 until 2017. He also gave the Inaugural Levy Oration at the 2012 NZGA Conference in Gore.

He chaired the Otago Conservation Board from 2014 to 2019 and is currently serving as a trustee of the Roxburgh Medical Services Trust and the NZ Grassland Trust. Pat Garden was made a Member of NZ Order of Merit at the 2006 Queen's Birthday Honours for services to science and farming - not a bad achievement list for a self-taught high country farmer!

### **Untold influence**

All the businesses have had a major effect on NZGA - without them it would have never been established or existed. Indeed it was a businessman who suggested the idea in January 1931 - Mr WV Blewett, the Australian representative of Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) Ltd. AH Cockayne had placed high regard on him and had arranged the first meeting on the particular days when he was available.

Throughout the annual and special conferences, the commercial sector always had a presence and a significant influence, though never captured the Association for commercial purposes, other than to make a good living from the ideas that were presented each year.