

FOREWORD

May I welcome you to this programme on barley, and express our thanks to the Agronomy Society and the College for providing this timely review of the barley crop.

This review is very appropriate, not just because of the recent big upsurge in interest in barley, but also because some would suggest this crop has received less attention than wheat. However, a lot of work has gone on quietly with barley over the years, and the people directly involved are here today to lead us through the history of the crop and its management requirements.

The speakers will be introduced by session chairmen, but I would still like to take this opportunity to record our thanks to one of today's speakers, Mr Jim Malcolm, who has recently retired after a lifetime in the barley industry and has become our "Mr Barley".

One most important aspect of today's programme is that we see the marketing of the crop quite properly treated as a part of a technical session on growing barley. Too often in the past our consideration of crop production has stopped at the farm-gate.

Nationally, we have seen barley come from 12,000 ha in 1900 to 20,000 ha in the 1950's (with up to 90% being for malt), and to 100,000 ha in 1982 (with 25% being for malt). These figures reflect the great upsurge in barley use in the stock food industry in the 1960's and early 1970's and more recently the export of appreciable quantities of feed barley. The export market has also seen the development of increased grower involvement in marketing.

So there have been a lot of recent developments with the crop, but it now appears that any further expansion will have to be export orientated. In this we must continue to assess the agricultural policies of the U.S. since they dominate the world market for coarse grains.

Barley is a crop very responsive to management (or mismanagement) and this is directly reflected in the quality of grain produced. It is the dominant cereal in this particular district and has surpassed wheat for many years. It is important to appreciate that a reservoir of skills has been built up over many years in growing this crop.

Consider these skills along with the present trends in arable farming, the increased specialisation in a narrower range of crops, and the attention to detail in manipulating crops and their yield components. Consider also the present pressures on the arable cropping industry, the cash flow problems which are arising, the costs of machinery replacement and the industry's sensitivity to our monetary exchange rate. Then, the barley crop, like arable farming itself, may well be at the cross-roads.

We have to make some clear decisions. I believe the New Zealand farmer and marketer must get together and both decide clearly what we can do best, what we can do most profitably, and what is our niche (specialist or otherwise) on the world arable crop scene; and then jointly set out to see that we deliver the goods in the best possible marketing package.

Let's make it happen — let's not just drift.

G.H. McFadden
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