

“A Larger Team”

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Dr. Cote: Our keynote speaker was raised in the same home that he now lives with his wife Sandra and three children. His father pioneered many of the things that we take for granted in dairy farming today. Around 1940 Peter's father and several other breeders formed the Wellington County Black and White Club. They pooled their funds and bought two or three superior sires which they housed on members farms. The bulls were collected artificially and all club members could use the semen in their herds. This was the first AI service in our area. Then about 1957 before a great deal was written about preventive medicine and herd checks Mr. Hannam suggested that we call in at monthly intervals to do reproduction checks on the cows and see that everything was going well. So you can see that Peter comes from a progressive livestock background.

After graduating from the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph in

1962 Peter started farming with his father and gradually changed from a dairy farmer to a cash crop tycoon. He presently cash crops 2200 acres in the Guelph area specializing in soy beans, wheat, corn and pedigreed seed.

He is past president of the 24,000 member Ontario Federation of Agriculture and executive member of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. He is presently chairman of the Canadian Livestock Feed Board Advisory Committee and President of Canfarm Data System, a Canadian computerized farm accounting and farm management service owned by farmers. Peter Hannam's voice has been heard in the legislatures of this country on behalf of agriculture and I know you will find it well worth hearing.

His topic is “A Larger Team”.



Mr. Hannam: A recent visitor to Canada, who came from a part of the world less fortunate than North America, was hosted at a banquet in Toronto.

As with all banquets, and all dignitaries, the media pressed him for his reactions to our country. They soon found out that the ceremony of a banquet, as we know it, was foreign to him. His reaction to our custom of banquets was summed up in three telling sentences:

“More food was prepared than was served”

“More food was served than was eaten”

“More food was eaten than was necessary”

How true! Those three lines speak volumes about the bountiful role that agriculture has played in North America for as long as most of us can remember. The food industry—the total industry—has been so good to Canadians and Americans that our countries are the envy of the world.

It has become our most important industry. Important, not just from the standpoint of the millions of jobs involved, or the billions of dollars generated for our economy, but because the very health and welfare of so many millions of people in North America and around the world depends on the bounty of North American farms.

The Team Approach

It takes a very large team to keep that constant flow of food moving to consumers. You, as bovine practitioners are an important part of that team.

Your conference theme: “Total Health Management - The Team Approach” is an admirable one. As our volume of knowledge grows, our world gets more complex, and specialization in smaller and smaller segments of activity seems to be one of the ways of coping. As this happens, it is more essential that specialists from many disciplines work closely together so that the overall picture becomes clear.

I know that is certainly true in animal health, as it is in most segments of food industry. So I commend you for taking the team approach this week at your conference.

But the teamwork extends beyond health care. You are a key element in a much larger team—the team that makes so much food available to so many millions of people day after day.

You would think that food—being such a vital component of our daily lives and influencing the economy of our nations so drastically, would be recognized for its importance; and you would think that the team that is responsible for producing it would rate top priority in economic planning.

Not necessarily so!

Unlike the visitor from the less fortunate country who was hosted at that banquet, I think many Canadians, and probably some Americans as well, take food for granted.

The agricultural team has provided so much food in the last forty years that North Americans haven't experienced shortages. In their minds, food has always been on store shelves in abundance, and it always will be there.

In our race to become urbanized, industrialized and commercialized, more and more citizens have lost touch with the production end of the food chain—and their only contact with agriculture is at the retail shelf.

Beyond complaining about the price of food—and consumers will always complain about the price of food regardless of level, many Canadians don't understand the dynamic changes taking place in agriculture. They've never had to worry about where their food is coming from, and they take for granted that the "team" will keep on cranking out tons and tons of food forever.

But that may change!

As we enter the decade of the '80's, there are a number of major challenges facing our industry which must be addressed soon.

None of us can assume things will continue as they have been. In fact, the only thing we can assume is that change will come faster.

Challenges

There is, of course, the energy crunch which will drastically affect the way food is produced and the price that will have to be received. Animal and crop production techniques in North America will likely undergo a complete revolution in the next decade. The only certainty is that production costs will escalate because of it.

There is the uncertainty of our national and world economics. It's one thing to plan for an industry in a stable economic climate, but quite another to try to second guess gyrations in inflation, interest rates, money supply, and currency discounts.

But the challenges that will have the greatest impact on agriculture are the challenges which emanate from a myriad of social and environmental pressures that are bearing down on the food industry. They are complex, unpredictable, and potentially devastating.

They include pollution from agriculture. People who have never seen a cow will know all about the pollution she can cause in our streams.

Intensive housing of livestock in modern agriculture will become more of a target for criticism and, indeed, the same forces that have changed European livestock practices will have an impact here.

As our farming communities become more and more bombarded by residential and recreational pursuits, complaints about the odours, noise and dust that are created by farming will become unbearable. It seems at least in Ontario that more heed is given to those who choose to move

into the countryside—in search of living in a park—than is given to those members of the food producing team that have been there for years.

It will be a major challenge to convince the 95% of our population who are not farmers that a farm community is an industrial zone; that the industry is food production; and that it should take priority over all other land uses in that area.

The safety of food will also be a major issue ahead for us. You are right at the centre of this issue. While many substances could be considered contaminants in food, the highest public profile has been, and will be, devoted to drug residues.

My viewpoint is that we (everyone involved in the total food industry) must produce safe food. We cannot even leave a hint with our customers that there is even a possibility that food isn't safe.

Farmers have had a pretty clean record, but that isn't good enough.

We must ensure that drugs, particularly antibiotics are not abused. It will take more than education, it will take penalties. Systems must continue to be put in place that will, first of all, detect who might be abusing drug use and, secondly, penalize those persons heavily. That approach can be effective, as we have seen in Ontario milk quality standards, and is more sensible than withdrawing useful drugs from the market.

We must also try to ensure an equally responsible attitude by those who make decisions on banning products that we need. We must ensure that those decisions are based on fact, not hysteria.

Conclusion

These challenges which I mentioned are only a few of the factors which could make agriculture so very different by 1990. There are undoubtedly countless others. In your profession, you can most likely envision many other challenges.

I hope that you can take the same enthusiasm and the same team approach to those challenges as you are taking in this conference. You are a key element in this food production team. Everything you do will affect the success of the whole team.

Also remember that the success of the team will have an amazing impact on the success of your segment of that team.

We are all interdependent. We need to pull together. Farmers are recognizing that more and more. In Ontario, farm organizations - the Ontario Federation of Agriculture specifically - are forging ahead with team work on several fronts, including consumers. I hope it continues.

Agriculture has a solid team. I am confident this team can overcome the challenges we face. I am proud to be a part of it.

"It is a gloomy moment in the history of our country. The domestic economic situation is in chaos. Our dollar is weak throughout the world. Prices are so high as to be utterly impossible. The political caldron bubbles with uncertainty, Russia hangs as usual like a cloud dark & silent upon the horizon. It is a silent moment. Of our troubles, no man can see the end."

That, my friends, is a quotation from Harper's Magazine, 1847.

