

2016 Young Horticulturist of the Year winning speech

Andrew Hutchinson¹



Andrew Hutchinson delivering his winning speech at the 2016 Young Horticulturist of the Year Competition.

The topic for the speech was:

While urbanisation and agriculture have led to significant increases in phosphorus and nitrogen concentrations in waterways in many New Zealand locations, these remain relatively low in comparison to other OECD countries. (Ministry for the Environment 2013). What is your industry sector doing to maintain or improve waterways? What more could it do?

The question tonight is very topical for us vegetable growers, especially ones that have the privilege of operating under the Waikato Regional Council. What is our industry doing to maintain or improve the waterways? Let me first get an answer to another question I'm struggling with. What is the level that we are maintaining to or improving from?

Right now it isn't very clear where we are at, which makes it really hard to know where we should be aiming

to be. This brings me to my one and only message this evening. We need better science to help drive the decisions on farms that are currently impacting on water quality.

The statement that our rivers are much healthier than other OECD countries means nothing to me. New Zealand is not the type of country that sets the bar because others are at that level. We are a country that leads by example and uses science to set its standards. With 4.6 million people in our entire country, we are in a prime position to show the world how to grow sustainably, and I mean grow in both senses of the word. Let's not forget that growers are in business too, and we want to grow our businesses just like any other.

Right now vegetable growers in the Franklin district feel like American voters, caught between Hillary and Trump. To our north we have the sprawling monstrosity that is the Auckland super city. And to the south, just over the border, we have the Waikato Regional Council looking to restrict land use change and make it nigh on impossible for growers to expand.

I now have some questions I want to pitch to you. Do we want our growers going out of business? Should we stop growing in New Zealand, have the most pristine rivers in the world yet import our produce from overseas? Out of sight out of mind? I'm sure potato growers in China are doing a great job looking after their waterways.

I think 100 percent of you will agree with me when I say the last thing we want to do is stop growing in New Zealand. What growers need

more than anything else are tools in the collective toolbox to tackle the issues they are facing on farms which are having these negative effects on water quality.

Work by the Franklin Sustainability Project, beginning in 1997, has helped develop a number of sustainable land management techniques which have become common practice in our industry. The use of silt traps, land contouring and cover crops has been in practice for so long now that it is hard for growers to imagine growing without them.

Advancement of fertiliser technologies now enables companies to create fertiliser release curves which better match crop demand. Products like SustaiN, a slow release nitrogen fertiliser aims to reduce leaching and increase the amount of nitrogen being taken up by the plant.

It won't be a silver bullet solution that allows us to achieve our water quality aspirations, rather a sustained, combined effort by all primary producers. Funding the science needs to come first however, so that we can better understand what water quality means to us as New Zealanders. Alongside the science, further investment in the likes of the Franklin Sustainability Project will see technologies and techniques continue to improve, better resourcing growers and enabling them to do what growers do best, grow.

Andrew was winner of the Best Speech Award for this speech, presented at the grand final of the 2016 Young Horticulturist of the Year Competition, and held 9–10th November at the Auckland Botanic Gardens and Millennium Hotel Auckland.

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