

WELCOME ADDRESS

Hon. J Anderton

Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, speakers and representatives of the international community,

Welcome - and greetings to you all-

I thank you for the opportunity given to me to deliver the opening address of this conference. I have a strong interest in the way that New Zealand has developed its economy, which is sustainable. However, we need to have more employment, while preserving our natural environment and strengthening our local and regional communities. Since becoming the Minister of Economic Industry and Regional Development, I have visited many industries and regions in New Zealand - I did not know that our country had so many regions! I do hope that I can help them develop in a sustainable way.

On these visits, I have seen how New Zealanders are trying to improve their country both innovatively and creatively. In this venture, organic agriculture presents significant opportunities. I have met individuals and visited communities across New Zealand, which are investigating how they could produce food that is safe and free of harmful chemicals and toxic materials. The growing use of natural microbes in waste management promises large benefits, particularly for New Zealand and the clean green environment, which we have sought to develop here. Agricultural initiatives and waste management opportunities fit well into the goals of this government, for sustainable economic development in New Zealand.

Sustainability is a hard word to explain - However it is a fashionable word today - where everyone puts this word in front of everything. It is discussed within the government on a regular basis and it echoes in other corners of New Zealand and around the world. Hence it is certainly fashionable - but this is neither a recommendation nor a criticism. In my view, sustainable economic development is being talked about because it is an idea whose time has now arrived. We understand that it means meeting the needs of the present generation, without compromising the future generations to meet their own needs. This is a definition adopted by the Labor - Alliance government last year, and which appeared in the United Nations publication of 1987 called "Our Common Future."

Talking of the environment and using resources wisely are important goals. I understand that the background to Kyusei Nature Farming, which is contributing significant elements of this conference, has a strong lesson for New Zealand. The website of the Asia Pacific Natural Agriculture Network states that Nature Farming was developed in Japan. For many years, the results were not sufficient to provide adequate food for the majority of the population. This changed in the 1980's when Professor Teruo Higa, distinguished international professor introduced the concept of microorganisms. Beneficial microorganisms were cultured and used as a means of improving soil conditions. These

microorganisms suppressed diseases and improved the efficiency of organic matter utilization by crops. By 1989, the results were so successful that an international conference was organized, where the Asia Pacific Natural Agriculture Network was formed. The primary aim of the Asia Pacific Natural Agriculture Network was to establish an international network of scientists in the region to test the new technology and promote its use.

Today, science, especially biological sciences could have a significant beneficial impact on communities. This is true even in New Zealand. New Zealand is learning and benefiting from your innovative and important work, and of course, New Zealanders are themselves contributing to nature farming development. Christchurch itself recycles green wastes using organic technologies and I understand that delegates will hear more of this from the City Council staff during the conference.

Ways and means to improve how food is produced is of great interest to New Zealand. Agriculture is an important part of our economy and we are doing much better than most of our trading partners. As agriculture and its development are very fundamental bases for our economy, new technologies must be used to improve this sector. The new technologies must be applied and our resource base developed, as agricultural production is worth between 12 - 19 billion dollars per year, which is approximately 45% of all our exports to the international community. I must emphasize that one of the reasons that the regions of New Zealand are so strong at the moment is because of the applied technologies that are used on our renewable resource base and agriculture.

A stronger organic industry will certainly have significant benefits in economic terms for us in New Zealand. As you begin this conference, I am reminded of the current debate globally and in New Zealand on genetic engineering. This government today has adopted a recommendation of a Royal Commission to safeguard our environment from genetically modified crops. I reiterate that this coalition government has ensured that there will be no release of genetically modified material for at least two years and even then, nothing will be released unless proven to be safe. Under the new conditions proposed by the Alliance party, which is led by me, all materials associated with any trial in the laboratory or in the field must be removable. This goes a lot further than the previous moratorium, which required that all heritable material be removed. We now have a compulsory requirement for inspection and monitoring of all GM research. This government is adamant that GM research must not contaminate the environment, while so many risks remain unknown. We have argued for the safe and sensible containment of GM research in the absence of certain safety guidelines. At the same time, we need to broaden the debate. We need to pursue organic and non-genetically modified farming technologies. The government is committed to the organic industry and hence in April last year, parliament was presented with a report from the Primary Productions Select Committee, inquiring into organic agriculture in New Zealand. This report recommended that a national minimum standard be developed that will certify New Zealand produce to ensure access to the high value markets and for better consumer labeling. This recommendation was adopted and a quarter of million dollars was allocated last year by the government for this purpose. Standards New Zealand is now developing these standards. Last September, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry published a report

for the organics-working group. This report recommends the development of a national strategic plan for the organic industry. This is similar to the development plans for other industries, which are being laid by this government. I as Minister of Economic Development has established a process to create industry plans for key transforming industries. The industries already involved are word processing, manufacturing, clothing and footwear.

At the time of establishing lists of transforming industries, we also identified biotechnology. Biotechnology is the scientific use of living things, specifically cells and bacteria in industrial processes. As we ensure that we have the safeguards to prevent genetically engineered elements entering our environment, we also need to pursue the benefits of non-GM technology. My colleague the Minister of Agriculture announced the award of 80,000 dollars for national strategic plans for the organic industry and the terms of reference will be finalized in the coming weeks. These plans will be completed by the end of this year.

This conference provides an ample opportunity to raise and debate these issues again. It also provides an opportunity for New Zealanders to learn from your experiences. The knowledge that you bring with you is of great importance to our country. I must inform you that we in New Zealand are very good at learning from others and adopting and hopefully making those technologies even better. I do believe that New Zealanders are among the most creative people on this planet. In March this year, there is an innovation event here in Christchurch - which is a showcase to promote innovations of New Zealanders, who sometimes are reluctant to celebrate the triumphs of their own country.

This conference is one of celebration of innovation. I welcome and acknowledge your innovations and pioneering spirit that you have brought with it, along with eminent scientists and guests to New Zealand. I wish you all well for the rest of the conference and with great pleasure, declare this conference officially open.

Thank you.