

AN ADDRESS AT THE FINAL PLENARY SESSION

By Ken Sarsons, Canada

It is a great opportunity for me to address this Plenary Session. While there are many who could do the job better, my purpose will be served if I can underline the tremendous importance of the scientific contribution, on an international basis, made to rapeseed and its products.

As part of the Canadian Delegation, we are deeply grateful to our hosts and our host country for the hard work and dedication that has gone into the preparation of the 5th International Symposium. We are deeply grateful to Dr. Andersson and his colleagues. Historically, we believe this Symposium will be noted as a turning point in the history of the rapeseed industry.

Over the years, rapeseed and its products have suffered considerable adversity. The modern western rapeseed industry has had to dedicate itself to overcoming great problems, not only of quality, but also of image; of a magnitude that could well have precluded the realization of the modern rapeseed industry. Erucic acid and glucosinolate problems were highlighted at the Symposium at St. Adele, Quebec. At that time, the problems of erucic acid and glucosinolates appeared to be insurmountable to many of us and we wondered if our industry could grow and survive. Yet, in spite of these serious handicaps, the unique co-operation in our industry that combines science with commercial and producer interest to achieve results has led to a significant story of perseverance, growth and achievement of which we can all be proud.

As against the problems we talked about in St. Adele, we in Canada now have the following statement from Dr. A. B. Morrison, Assistant Deputy Minister of Health and Welfare:

"Let me assure you that on the basis of research conducted by the Health Protection Branch and studies undertaken by Canada Agriculture and elsewhere, the Health Protection Branch has given the product (rapeseed oil) a clean bill of health as a source of fat in Canadian diets. Canadian rapeseed oil is a safe and nutritious ingredient of margarine, salad, cooking and frying oils and shortenings."

This statement is in remarkable contrast to the situation when we met at St. Adele and we were faced with the Canadian Government, along with others, raising questions about erucic acid content of the oil.

During the last ten years, science has made rapeseed into a new product. In terms of its oil, meal and the performance thereof, present-day rapeseed meal and rapeseed oil are as different from that of ten years ago as though they were produced from an entirely different plant species.

In all the areas of processing, formulation and utilization, progress has been made to assure these virtually new products can be most beneficial to the consumers.

I was born on the great plains of Western Canada, a region that is about 80 years old in terms of economic history, with that history dependent almost entirely on agriculture.

The Prairies of Western Canada were opened to the plow as a potential source of wheat. However, it was the development by plant breeders of particular hard, red, spring wheat varieties which opened world markets to Western Canadian wheat at premium prices and provided a base for a wheat economy. Wheat has been the dominant economic factor in the region ever since.

Nothing in the annals of plant science has been as significant to our Western Canadian farmers until the momentous achievements in changing the nature and quality of rapeseed and its products. This new achievement has been a complete breakthrough which has now made rapeseed and the rapeseed industry a potential billion dollar per year industry for producers of Western Canada.

On an international scale, rapeseed is certainly the oilseed crop with the greatest potential for the north temperate zones. It can provide a necessary and useful supplement to other sources of vegetable oil and protein meals in a food-scarce and politically unstable world.

We feel sure, Mr. Chairman, international collaboration in rapeseed in the years to come will mean that all those concerned will share in the advances that are now possible. The industry must set its sight on the new challenges of international co-operation in the development of rapeseed utilization. Unfortunately, we still have with us a residue of bad product image as a legacy from the past. In France, for example, where a significant amount of rapeseed production takes place, one is hard put to find the vegetable oil products on the retail shelves. We need to face the challenge to change such situations.

It is tremendously important for the rapeseed producers of all countries that the new quality and new capability of rapeseed products shall be known on a worldwide scale and appreciated. The proper explanation of the virtues of the products to the non-scientific community is now a matter of high priority.

Mr. Chairman, I am sure that future conferences will mark the advances made at Malmö in this direction. We believe that our industry now has the required product and capacity to reach a new plateau in contributing to the supply of vegetable oil and protein meal in a hungry world.

Consequently, we pay tribute to the scientific achievements which have built this industry. These achievements have brought significantly greater opportunities for the future within our grasp. As a commercial representation, we humbly recognize the tremendous importance of continued scientific achievement to even further improve and enhance rapeseed production and its products.