

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES
AT THE WHEAT RESEARCH INSTITUTE, NARRABRI,
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Sir, and ladies and gentlemen:

I have been listening to the Chairman's speech with great interest and it has left me with a very, very clear impression that he is rather favourably disposed to the wheat industry. (Laughter) I hope he will correct me if I have the wrong idea.

But one error he certainly fell into: he seemed to think that this was one of the rare occasions on which I could hear about the wheat industry. I have been sitting in Parliament, man and boy, one Parliament or another, for 31 years, or 32 years, and I have never heard about anything else except the wheat industry! And I don't suppose I will fail to hear about it in future.

As a matter of fact I have been looking forward to this very much because though I belong to that group of people sometimes referred to as "city slickers", being a lawyer by trade, I was born in the Mallee, in the middle of the wheat country and wheat was the commodity I heard most about for the first 12 or 14 years of my life. I am old enough to remember the great drought of 1902 when in our district 2½ inches of rain fell in the year, and that at the wrong time. By the time summer was well on there was no grass, dead or alive, and the north winds blew, and the sand came up out of the sandy loam and deposited itself over any object that it encountered. These were tremendous experiences for people.

But I can also remember, as a small boy, an occasion when up from Melbourne came an agricultural expert from the Department of Agriculture and he was a very good man, indeed. On all counts a man of considerable authority. But in those days - of course I am sure it isn't so now - wheat farmers looked rather suspiciously at scientific gentlemen from the city. And he went out and had a field day and I remember, as a small boy of about 9, hanging around at the fringe of a group of about 20 or 30 or 40 farmers and he was explaining to them the great importance in that particular soil of the use of superphosphates. This was the first time that any of us, or any of those listening had ever heard of them - even as short a time ago as that. This, Sir, was regarded with immense reserve. "What's this new-fangled business" "How much does it cost?" "How much do you need to use?" And he was explaining to them that in their particular circumstances 1 cwt. might be a good idea. Three or four farmers, who were the most advanced, decided to give it a go, but in some moderation. So they put on half a hundredweight. But as a result of putting on half a hundredweight they so improved their yield that other people began to look on and be interested and to follow the example. But as you, Sir, know, it literally takes years in the ordinary course of events for ideas of that kind to be commonly accepted; and profitably acted upon.

It is, after all, not so very long ago, is it, that we began to have our first great investigators in the breeding of strains of wheat? We forget sometimes about these great men. Many people today have forgotten about Farrar. And yet Farrar began his experiments about 6 years before I was born. And when I was, at the time I am talking about, 9 or 10, or 11 years old, I can remember the enormous results that accrued when Federation wheat came into general use - Federation and Barts Imperial and these strains that had been bred as rust resistant strains. Not entirely successful in the long run, but with a tremendous, immediate impact on what occurred. And ever since then you have had dedicated men going on with their work in the investigation of wheat. You have had, particularly in recent times, the tremendous novel attention, I rather think it is, given to the chemistry of the soil - things which once were regarded as acting according to some immutable law of nature. You can't interfere with that: you fallow and you sow and you have a stubble and there it is.

But time goes on and research is finally winning its battle in the minds of the industry and of the men who run the industry itself. This to me is a tremendously important thing because by research you bring about changes for the better; by research you accelerate progress, you improve production, you improve quality, you make yourself more competent to meet the demands of the world.

And you need to, because the world is changing around us every minute. I don't merely refer to the fact that there are threats of war, or the circumstances even of the last few weeks which give the whole world cause for anxiety. But you take a problem that at this very moment our officials are discussing overseas, the problem of the Common Market. I am not going into any detail about this matter because a good deal has already been said about it. But the wheat industry, it is quite clear, can be affected by Great Britain going into the Common Market. It may almost be a certainty that the old pattern of trade in wheat won't remain unaltered. I don't know. We are all going to do our best to preserve it, and to improve it. But nobody can say what is going to be the outcome of discussions in which Great Britain is negotiating with six countries of Europe and at the same time negotiating with every country in the Commonwealth.

So that you have all these cross discussions and cross negotiations. All these talks will go on a long time, a very long time. But from our point of view what we have to get into our minds is this: that this is one more proof that it is a changing world, that it isn't the old lines that can be followed quite so simply, that it is undoubtedly true that if the wheat industry is to go on being one of the most valuable significant industries in Australia we must find new markets for wheat, we must find new methods of cheapening the production of wheat, new methods of getting the greatest possible value from the land, maybe new methods of marketing, I don't know. But above all things we must find new millions of people in the world who will want to buy from us. That is true of wheat. It is true of every other agricultural product in Australia, but it is particularly true of wheat because wheat, in the agricultural field, is one of our great major undertakings.

Therefore, Sir, I want to make clear that all the discussions that will occur about the Common Market are not just arguments between politicians, between people who are making a business deal about some commodity or other. They are that; but they are far more than that. These are discussions which remind us that for Australia, growing at the rate at which Australia is growing, we must never rest until we have increased our markets all round the world. We can, because most of the people in the world today live at a standard of living immeasurably lower than any we know. But as time goes on, as help is extended, as great international schemes bear fruit, the standard of living among the millions in Asia and Africa will rise; and so will their demand for the kind of thing that we produce so well in Australia. Therefore markets, markets, markets - we must look for them. But we mustn't fall into the error of thinking that all you have to do is to find the market and all other things will be added to you. The fact is that, though it is vital to find the market, it is equally vital to fill it when you find it, to produce the goods for that market. I have had some experience myself of people who took a few orders on some trade mission - this is fine - but when orders came in by way of follow-up the supplies were short. We must be able to supply every market that we can find.

That brings us back, once more, to the problem of research because research is, in its nature, a slow business. Science doesn't proceed by a series of brilliant improvisations. Above all agricultural science, the kind of thing that is going to be done here, requires patient work and testing and examination year by year. Research is a slow, painstaking thing, aiming at a great percentage of accuracy and a testing of results under every conceivable circumstance. Therefore there is no time to be lost about starting research, no time to be lost about encouraging it.

Let me remind you of this: when we were younger, a great deal younger, there was a disposition to think that scientists had almost reached their limit. They knew some of the broad principles of science, but so far as the land was concerned, well, everybody knew what type of soil it was, everybody knew, in the appropriate areas of Australia, that he ought to have a three-year rotation and that in the black-soil country he wouldn't need one at all - I only discovered that during the Gwyder by-election. But you know, all sorts of people knew all sorts of things and that was the end of knowledge. But what has happened in Australia? What miracles have occurred? Whoever thought, only a few years ago, of the trace elements work that has gone on in Australia, of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of acres re-claimed from uselessness into high productivity, either pastoral or agricultural? Nobody ever thought of it only a few years ago. Whoever thought, as I said, a few years before I was born myself, of the breeding of strains of wheat in order to

produce certain results which would avoid damage in the field? Somebody thought of them. Somebody got on with them. I venture to say that the man who goes onto a farm today, if he is prepared to take advantage of the knowledge that is available to him, will go on twice as well equipped from the beginning, as his father was. Then, if he can add to that, as much work as his father did, as much enthusiasm as his father had, well there is no limit to what may result from it.

Sir, I don't need, I hope, to say any more to satisfy you that it is no mere formality for me to come here. I think this is a great enterprise. I am perfectly certain that without this foundation, and other places in which work of this kind is being done in Australia, we will not be able to take our place in the world of international commerce in wheat that we must be prepared to take as the world changes around us. So that in the name of our own country, in the name of new and expanding markets, in the name of that necessary efficiency which will reduce costs mounting otherwise to the point of destruction, in the name of all those things I call this Foundation, blessed. I think this is a splendid business.

I wasn't entirely surprised to hear my friend the Chairman throw out a broad hint of a financial kind - I'm accustomed to that. I always say, "Yes, my dear fellow, you must drop me a line about it". Between ourselves they never forget. But we will put that on one side. We happen to be a modest contributor to this thing. But that this thing is good, that this thing is, in its nature, essential I don't for a moment doubt. It is a very great honour to me, a very great privilege, to be here, to say something to you, however briefly, and to declare it open. (Applause)
