2.6 The Crop Protection Adviser

2.6.1 The Crop Protection Adviser in Public Employ: Tasks, Limitations, and Contacts

Y. Elkana, J. Palti, and R. Ausher

2.6.1.1 Aims and Tasks of the Adviser

In considering the overall aims of the adviser's work, it must be realized that certain difficulties often arise, both against the background of tasks imposed by his employers and in his relation with growers.

The government's farm policy does not necessarily coincide with the cropping aims of individual farmers. The government may wish to promote certain crops it can market at a profit, or favour growing out-of-season crops for export rather than crops for consumption in the country, although such crops may present particular crop protection problems. If the adviser is seen to push the crops advocated by the government, his advice may lose credibility in the eyes of the farmer.

It follows that the tasks of enforcing the law and of promoting cropping schemes serving government policy should as far as possible be kept separate from advisory work. This is true for all farm advice, but perhaps even more important in crop protection where urgent control operations may fail unless based on factual information only the farmer can furnish.

The crop protection adviser has a wide range of tasks and responsibilities. He should attempt to foresee possible crop afflictions, he has to be able to diagnose their nature as they become apparent, to estimate their future course, and to recommend preventive action or control operations. These recommendations have to be based on damage thresholds, prices of produce, costs of control operations, and on environmental and legal constraints of the proposed treatments. What the adviser requires for this purpose is:

a) Detailed pest and disease control know-how, including methods of diagnosis, prognosis and control.

b) Field experience to assess crop damage apparent and expected; and preferably also.

c) Some economic training to translate expected crop damage and estimated costs of control into a viable appraisal of benefits likely to accrue from the control.
The crop protection adviser thus has to master a considerable range of knowledge and information, which needs constantly to be brought up-to-date. This is one reason why the question arises, whether he should specialize in one of the disciplines of crop protection, i.e. be an extension phytophatologist, entomologist or nematologist dealing with a limited range of parasites and problems in all or most crops in his region, or whether he should preferably aim to be an all-round protection man with adequate knowledge of all that could damage a more limited number of crops.

The answer to this question for crop protection advisers employed by public agencies depends on the tasks (additional to farm advice) imposed on the adviser, on his professional proficiency, and on crop and personnel considerations, which will be discussed in this chapter.

An important aspect of advisory work in general, and of crop protection work in particular, is current liaison with legislative, regulatory, research and commercial organizations. Such liaison devolves most commonly on the superior grades of crop protection advisers, as described in the chapters on advisory work in European countries and Israel (Chaps. 3.1–3.3).

2.6.1.2 Non-Advisory Tasks Sometimes Imposed on the Crop Protection Adviser

As mentioned above, the urgency often inherent in pest control causes many governments, especially in developing countries, to set up crop protection services before arrangements have been made for general advisory services. Under such conditions, the tasks of the crop protection personnel is apt to include elements of farm instruction as well as policing and supervising implementation of pest control operations. How effective can crop protection advisory work be under such circumstances?

Advice vs. Policing and Policy. More than any other discipline in agriculture, crop protection has numerous legal, regulatory, supervisory and even policing aspects (see Chap. 1.1.2). These may include matters relating to the use of land, water and seeds, the yield of crops (is it free from pests?), the use of pesticides, storage practices, and many other aspects. The primary aim of the agricultural adviser is to help the farmer to increase his income. However important it may be, especially for the longer term, to execute government policy, the farmer's trust can only be acquired if he is convinced that the benefits he can reap from his field are the adviser's chief concern. There are obvious limits to this, and they are most pronounced in the case of crop protection, where one farmer's practices may affect the health of other farmers' crops. But apart from such special cases, it must always be remembered that the basis of all farm advice is accurate information on all that concerns the crop; if the farmer cannot expect such information to be treated confidentially, to be used for advice to his benefit, he may withhold important details and thus impair the effectiveness of advice.

Advice vs. Implementation. The crop protection adviser is likely to be the person most familiar with all practical aspects of pest and disease control in his region.