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A CHALLENGE TO STEP AHEAD

C. Hunter Andrews¹

Stepping Ahead

Well, how many of you folks out there are farmers? Let me give you some advice - I have first-hand word from my farmer friend and neighbor that here in Miss. they are charging farmers with child abuse - now I consider that to be serious - child abuse. And do you know why? He was caught trying to give his farm to his children.

Well, thank you, Dr. Delouche, and greetings to each of you here this morning. It is truly a pleasant experience to appear before such a distinguished audience of seed specialists representing various segments of state, regional, national and international seed industry. As always you people in attendance at this Annual Short Course really are the ones who make the program so successful.

For many of the past 34 Short Course Years, I have participated in some manner-first as a young aspiring student at MSU and later as a staff member. However, this is my first time to appear before this distinguished group in this particular slot on the program. And believe me, I've been somewhat apprehensive about the prospects.

Just what does an audience expect from a Keynote Speaker. I don't want to disappoint those of you who may be sitting on the edge of your seat with anticipation expecting a brimming cupful of profound knowledge, optimism and solutions. On the other hand others of you may be thinking that a good rain would do a lot more good particularly after the next 45 minutes. However, I've found out that a keynote address is designed to present issues of primary interest to an assembly and often to arouse unity and enthusiasm. I will hasten to say at this point in time that if anything is needed, it is in fact, unity and enthusiasm. But unity and enthusiasm does not pay bills.

So, in trying to address these two issues I've decided to first discuss my philosophy about where we've been and to offer a little encouragement about where we are possibly going.

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Secondly, I wish to show a few slides of 30 years of progress and stepping ahead in the Seed Industry.

In talking to you this morning I'm reminded of my firm opinion that good things come in small doses - or, more appropriate in this case, a few well chosen words are sufficient. For example, Damn the Torpedoes, Full Steam Ahead - I never met a man I didn't like - one Small Step for Man - One Giant Step for Mankind. So, I tend to believe that we remember brief messages a lot longer. So good things are often spoken in a very few words.

To illustrate this: a little story I heard a short while ago which I think emphasizes this point that a lot of meaning can be said with a very few words.

Well, enough fun - its time to move ahead - TO STEP AHEAD - with our meeting. I'm here today to address our Short Course theme - STEPPING AHEAD - or better yet stepping ahead in the seed industry.

Now, I find it somewhat difficult to step ahead without first taking a look behind to see where I've been - or just where I'm coming from in order to know if I am, in fact, stepping ahead.

In looking back, I find that I'm coming from a background in seeds that has seen a number of significant steps ahead over the past 30 years. I've seen changes in cultural practices, harvesting, handling, drying, storage, processing - (I've even seen the step ahead in changing the name from processing to conditioning) - treating (machines & materials), bags and bagging - and yes - even in economics and marketing. Some steps have been rather abrupt - others somewhat gradual and subtle.

To some people (unfortunately) these steps are meaningless and immaterial because to them seed are just another agricultural input to be bought where ever the "cheapest" source may be. They seem to think that seeds always were and always will be. Remember the lady's reply - - - "why at the super market, of course." To some people there is little difference between SEED and GRAIN.

However, by your presence here today, your interest and enthusiasm, I know that each of you appreciate and realize the significance of seeds - their role in successful agriculture and consequently the need to step AHEAD with seeds.

Now, we must make a few assumptions when we make preparations to step ahead in any venture.

For instance, I'm assuming that all of you know by now that seeds are alive, that they exhibit a quality status and that they

deteriorate and die within some prescribed time interval. These very fundamental and basic concepts are vital to our stepping ahead activities: (1) Seeds are alive (2) Seeds have a basic quality status (3) Seeds deteriorate and die.

The length of a seed's life, however, can be influenced by how it is produced, handled and marketed. In other words the sequence of events that take place in a seed's life from the time of seed formation and development - which include exposure to frequent hazards of production - throughout harvesting, handling, drying, conditioning, storage, treating, bagging, transporting, marketing and finally planting. These events, to a great extent, can be controlled by the seedsmen - people such as each of you. You as seedsmen, with your knowledge and perception of seeds and with your dedication to an appreciation of seeds, have, no doubt, pledged to do all within your power to prolong seed life and minimize effects of those events which may shorten the life of seeds. Your prompt and proper actions and reactions and precautions in all phases of seed production and handling indicate that you appreciate seeds and are dedicated to a quality product - that is to seeds for planting purposes.

However, as human nature prevails, it becomes quite apparent that many of us seem to forget the discussions and advice concerning life and death of seeds - or maybe even the fundamentals and concepts pertaining to seed quality. Therefore, a reminder may be periodically appropriate to keep us informed and up-to-date. Maybe we should even declare a SEED APPRECIATION DAY (or week) - a SEED AWARENESS week - as is the case for so many other special events these days. Maybe we should proclaim a special day just for Seeds in Agriculture.

Well, I am here today to seek from each of you a re-newed commitment for seeds - a sense of awareness - appreciation - dedication - a sense of Stepping ahead in the Seed Industry.

In our society it is periodically appropriate to re-new, re-dedicate, re-commit, or just plainly be reminded of our responsibilities, challenges, obligations and duties with which we address certain issues. And remember, these few days we are gathered here to re-examine, re-dedicate, re-commit ourselves to seeds. In other words to commit ourselves to seed appreciation. I encourage each of you to take this challenge and make this commitment. That's What I Call Stepping Ahead.

Now, what's the good news in view of all the current adversity and seemingly insurmountable bad news, those of you who do appreciate good seeds and make the necessary commitment will, in my viewpoint, be those few good seedsmen who survive. Those of you who are willing to take a step ahead, who are good managers, good producers, conditioners, etc. will become those who will be able to enjoy the new ideas,

concepts, and practices which will rapidly become available over the next few years.

So, how can each of you do this? First of all, I suggest that most of you here today have a long history in the seed industry - production, certification, multiplication, quality control and evaluation, marketing, or some other chosen career in seeds. Otherwise, you probably would be somewhere else today. Therefore, I challenge each of you to seek out during these next few days those program topics and areas which will benefit you most. Discuss and exchange ideas and viewpoints with your friends and co-workers and then choose which opportunities will enable you to gain the most benefit. And you can then step ahead in your chosen profession. Now, let me reminisce for a few minutes. As I look back and attempt to reconstruct my own personal steps ahead in seeds, I clearly remember my enrollment in the new Seed Technology Curriculum at MSU - one of its kind. Later, I became associated with the Foundation Seed Program and had the great opportunity to visit and work with the real seedsmen in Mississippi. There is no doubt in my mind that this early experience and exposure with the dedicated seed growers who were specialized in seed production made a lasting impression on me which is still remembered quite vividly today. This was one of my first steps ahead in understanding just what seeds mean to agriculture. Some of the basic ideas gained from these dedicated seedsmen were passed along to seedsmen in other states where I was invited to discuss seeds.

There have been some heartaches and numerous rewards from working with seeds and in seed programs. However you may have judged already that I'm still convinced that seeds deserve appreciation and respect. Even each of my three kids made it to the State Science Fair with seed projects. I feel that I have been stepping ahead for about 30 years.

I'm convinced that a few good Seedsmen will survive. I truly hope that each of you will be one of the good seedsmen by stepping ahead and meeting the challenges?

Let me leave you with a few ideas:

1. Even if you are on the right track you will get run over if you just sit there.
2. If you want a short winter have your loan come due in the spring.
3. Always borrow money from a pessimist, he never expects to be repaid.

4. It's a world of credit we live in, swing now - pay later. I ran up a \$1500 bill on my Diner's Club Card and charged it to my American Express.