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National Cottonseed Products Association, Inc., and Chairman, International Sunflower Conference Executive Committee

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BIRD DAMAGE TO SUNFLOWERS

Dalton E. Gandy, Agronomist
National Cottonseed Products Association, Inc.
Chairman, International Sunflower Conference Executive Committee

First I would like to commend the Bowling Green University and Dr. William B. Jackson for this seminar. The last two days have been most informative to me because I think you have some of the solutions to the problems that we have and is the reason why I want to attend this seminar.

Most of you are wondering why the National Cottonseed Products Association, which is the trade organization that I am a staff agronomist for, and have been for twenty-five years, is looking at sunflowers. I hasten to remind you that we are in a changing time and that we must adjust to those changing times. We were a one crop system in the South raising cotton only. It was our trade association that began to look for new oil seed crops as another crop to process and another crop for our farmers to grow.

We brought soybeans to the South. We brought safflower into the western area. We have continued to look to new oil seed crops as a partial alternative. Having viewed sunflowers ten to twelve years, I thought they had a potential in our country. Seeing what Russia was doing with sunflowers, I made a trip into Russia at my own expense in 1967 and have been back twice since.

I am convinced that this crop can grow in this country and will probably be a potential crop within the next ten years. So we may have a crop that offers a great potential in our country, and I just wanted to alert you of this new crop and of the problems involved. I ask for your help when you are screening chemical materials, because we have had the help of the chemical industry in screening some of the herbicides and insecticides needed for developing this crop.

We have many problems involved. The birds were here when this country was founded. They will be here when we leave. We can live with them, but it is with a conference of this type in working together and sitting down and airing our differences that can solve these problems. And I think they can be.

If we can put a man on the moon and bring him back, we can solve our bird problems. We are just a little late in starting. I appreciate the opportunity of having a chance to say a few words and to let you know of our problem. I am vitally interested in the bird problem now because I think we can alter the agricultural patterns in some areas and we will grow sunflowers in all probability.

In the three years of our observation of commercial trial planting across the South, I have observed where there is water and woods close by we have a bird problem. Where there is no woods or water close by there is not much of a problem. In early planting in January, February, and March down in the southern area with harvesting in June and July there is no problem with the birds because they are

seeking other food. But during the fall migration, we have a problem. One farmer in Alabama just last year had 120 acres ready to harvest. He delayed a little bit because he wanted to go to a football game on Saturday, and when he returned on Monday, the blackbirds had gotten his sunflowers.

Now about a month ago in north Alabama, to show you the extent of this damage, one of our cooperators who had 110 acres near Huntsville near a bird refuge suffered 25% bird damage. We estimated this on a sampling technique of (average) estimated size of the heads, the damage to the heads came to over twenty-five per cent damage on this amount of acreage. He harvested 2,250 pounds per acre of sunflowers on this particular plot. You multiply that by four cents per pound and you get around 90 dollars. Production cost was 35 dollars. So he had 22 dollars and 50 cents of bird damage per acre. You can see the magnitude of this problem when we go into large scale production of this crop. You in the chemical or bird repellent industry need to take a look at this. We will need your help.

Again I appreciate the opportunity of appearing on the program and just share with you our interest in this. If we can bring in other groups that are interested, we can seek a solution to the problem that is now bothering all of us.

RESEARCH DISCUSSION

Chairman: JOHN SEUBERT, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland

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