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OPENING REMARKS - THIRD VERTEBRATE PEST CONFERENCE

MAYNARD W. CUMMINGS, Assistant State Director, Agricultural Extension Service, University of California, Davis, California

To open this Third Vertebrate Pest Conference is a real privilege. It is a pleasure to welcome all of you in attendance, and I know there are others who would like to be meeting with us, but, for one reason or another cannot be. However, we can serve them by taking back the results of discussion and by making available the printed transactions of what is said here.

It has been the interest and demand for the proceedings of the two previous conferences which, along with personal contacts many of you have with the sponsoring committee, have gauged the need for continuing these meetings. The National Pest Control Association officers who printed the 1962 proceedings still are supplying copies of that conference. Two reprintings of the 1964 conference have been necessary and repeat orders from several universities indicate that those proceedings have become textbooks for special classes. When Dr. Howard mentioned in opening the first Conference in 1962 that publication of those papers would make a valuable handbook of animal control, he was prophetic, indeed.

We are pleased that this has happened, but not surprised, since to many of us in this specialized field, the conferences have provided a unique opportunity to meet colleagues with similar interests, to exchange information on control techniques and to be informed by research workers of problem solving investigations as well as to hear of promising basic research.

The development of research is a two-way street and we think these conferences also identify areas of inadequate knowledge, thereby stimulating needed research.

We have represented here a number of types of specialists—animal ecologists, public health and transmissible disease experts, control methods specialists, public agency administration and enforcement staffs, agricultural extension people, manufacturing and sale industry representatives, commercial pest control operators, and others—and in addition to improving communications among these professional groups an equally important purpose of these conferences is to improve understanding between them and the general public.

Within the term general public are many individuals and also organizations dedicated to appreciation and protection of certain animal forms or animal life in general. Proper concepts of vertebrate pest control do not conflict with such views. It is worth repeating for the record the definition of "vertebrate pest" which has been stated at our previous conferences. "A vertebrate pest is any native or introduced, wild or feral, non-human species of vertebrate animal that is currently troublesome locally or over a wide area to one or more persons either by being a general nuisance, a health hazard or by destroying food or natural resources. In other words, vertebrate pest status is not an inherent quality or fixed classification but is a circumstantial relationship to man's interests."

I believe progress has been made in reducing the misunderstanding and emotion with which vertebrate pest control was formerly treated whenever a necessity for control was stated. If this is true, I likewise believe it is deserved, because control methods and programs have progressed. Control no longer refers only to population reductions by lethal means. We have learned something of alternate control approaches and the necessity for studying the total environment; where reduction of pest animal numbers is the required solution to a problem situation we have a wider choice of more selective, safe and efficient materials.

Although increased attention has been given to control methods, research when we take a close look at the severity of animal damage to so many facets of our economy, particularly to agricultural production and public health, we realize it still is pitifully small and slow. The tremendous acceleration of the world's food and health requirements seems to demand expediting vertebrate pest control to effectively neutralize the enormous impact of animal damage to vital resources.

The efforts we are making here at problem delineation, idea communication and exchange of methodology could well serve as both nucleus and rough model for a broader application elsewhere. I know we all hope this Third Conference will advance these general objectives, and I think there is no doubt of its value in increasing our own scope of information.