



Fascinated by the problems of developing countries, Mississauga's Dr. Ken Pretty travels to India, China, Japan and still finds time to return to the 200-acre farm he owns with his brother.

Ken Pretty—farm boy making it big in the city

By BOB BERGEN

Mississauga's Dr. Ken Pretty hardly fits anyone's stereotype of a farm boy gone to the city. This one-time farm boy is now a world traveller, a leading expert in the agriculture industry and more recently, an appointee of the Lieutenant Governor in Council to the University of Guelph Board of Governors.

The reason for this incredible success story is an insatiable love of farming.

"I still go back to the 200-acre farm I own with my brother, but I don't get back very often now and I miss it," he says.

While the nature of his work takes him to India, China, Japan and the other developing countries of the world, his imagination still drifts off to the concession roads where, he claims, "It's funny you know, people the concessions, when they hear a car, they look to see who it is."

TURNS

Dr. Pretty's career in agriculture has taken a great number of turns since he graduated from the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph University.

"I worked as an extension worker in soils and crops in Middlesex County and while I was working there I realized how little I really knew, even though I had a degree in agriculture," he said.

He knew he had to go back to university.

In 1955 he received his Master of Science degree from Michigan State and in 1958 his Philosophy

doctorate. He then joined the staff as a lecturer and assistant professor.

"I found the environment at university just wonderful," he said, "and I really enjoyed the tremendous amount of student contact."

"To leave the university faculty was just about the most difficult thing I had to do," he maintains.

When he left the university in 1969, he became the Canadian director for the American Potash Institute.

He says when he went into the business aspect of agriculture he knew absolutely nothing about business. "Now if I went back to teaching at a university, I think I would find it just as difficult as it was for me to leave it."

PRESIDENT

Dr. Pretty is now the president of the Potash Institute of Canada.

"Working for this organization," he says, "which is a commercial organization, is a different side of agriculture than what I dealt with before. This is essentially a market organization and I was used to universities and the research and teaching aspect of it."

The connection between potash and agriculture is easy to understand once you know that 95 per cent of all potash goes into chemical fertilizer.

Canada is the world's leading producer of potash and yet we only use 4 per cent of what we produce

(incidentally, the last number on a bag of chemical fertilizer is the percentage of potash.)

Asia is one of the largest markets for Canadian potash and consequently that's where Dr. Pretty focuses much of his attention.

"I'm fascinated by the problems of developing countries," says Dr. Pretty. His travels have recently taken him to India, China and Japan.

Pretty maintains that Canada is one of the most fortunate countries in the world even though food prices seem to be rising astronomically.

The average Canadian worker spends less of his disposable income on food than he did 25 years ago, according to Dr. Pretty.

"In fact," he says, "The amount spent in Canada is less than anywhere else in the world."

Workers in India spend about two-thirds to three-quarters of their income on food, according to Pretty and, "This makes us look good by comparison."

SOCIETY

"Of course," he adds, "This doesn't help those on low or fixed incomes but that isn't really the responsibility of the farmer, that's the responsibility of a total society."

"I think the agricultural industry is very much misunderstood by the public," he says.

"If the price of beef goes up or, if the price of tomatoes goes up, most people think it's the farmers."

"The fact is consumers pay more for the label or the

tin than what the farmer got for the tomatoes in the first place."

The amount of processing and handling before a product reaches the consumer is tremendous.

If you start with the farmer and include everyone else who is involved with a product, truck drivers, railroads, processors, etc., it involves about one-third of the total employment in Canada.

Directly involved are also the dealers of fertilizer, dealers of equipment, the steel worker who makes the farm equipment. It goes all the way down the line.

UNPROFITABLE

"In fact," says Dr. Pretty, "it has become so unprofitable for farmers that they just don't want to do it any more."

"We've lost a lot of farmers. Ten years ago they used to account for about 10 or 12 per cent of the population. Now they're down to seven per cent."

"Individual farmers are going out of business every day," says Dr. Pretty. "They might get small labor returns but nothing for their investments. Some have tied up investments of \$150,000 and they only receive 4 per cent back, for all the work they do. They could be making 8 to 10 per cent just investing the money elsewhere."

"Really, though, it's the life farmers are after, in most cases," says Dr. Pretty, who speaks from a wealth of experience. "It's very hard work but it's satisfying."