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THE NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF ANIMAL
PRODUCTION — ITS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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HITHERTO, no previous President has tried to assess the distance our Society has come, where we are, where we are going, and whether or not we should be going somewhere else. This I shall attempt today.

In June, 1941, a small group met in Wellington to discuss the formation of a New Zealand genetics society. After considerable discussion the scope of the original proposal was broadened, and, instead, it was decided to form a New Zealand society of animal production. Only two months later (in August, 1941, at Wellington) the Society held its first Annual Conference at which 14 papers were read, and the Constitution (a relatively simple document) was adopted.

The list of 66 foundation members includes the names of many of New Zealand's most eminent agricultural scientists. Hence it is of considerable interest that the convener and chairman of the preliminary meeting, and the Society's first President, was not a professional scientist but a pedigree cattle breeder and dairy farmer — J. M. Ranstead, who later became the Society's first Life Member.

By the time of the second Annual Conference it was apparent from the opening remarks of the President (then C. P. McMeekan) that the infant society was having difficulty in surviving. Apparently the decision to hold a conference under the war-time conditions then existing had provoked considerable criticism both from within and without the Society. However, survive it did, and Annual Conferences continued to be held in Wellington (variously, during May, June, July and August) up until February, 1952, when the 12th Annual Conference was held in Hamilton. Except for the 15th Meeting held at Lincoln College in 1955, Conferences have since alternated between Massey College, Palmerston North, and Ruakura Animal Research Station, Hamilton. This, then, is only the second occasion on which an Annual Conference has been held in the South Island during the 22 years of the Society's existence.

Of the Society's Presidents three have been farmers. However, no farmer has served on the Management Committee, nor presented a Conference paper during the past six years. The remaining 20 Presidents can be classified in a broad sense as scientists active in either agricultural extension or research. Of the scientists, five Presidents have held a veterinary qualification.

The Society has honoured with life membership seven of its number. They are J. M. Ranstead (1942), A. H. Cockayne (1947), B. C. Aston (deceased; 1949), C. M. Hume (1951), F. W. Dry (1958), E. B. Levy (1961) and J. F. Filmer (1961).

During the earlier years of the Society's existence membership progressively increased from 66 in 1941 to about 260 in 1949. Hence, to me at least, it was something of a shock to learn that although, as shown by our records, total membership had risen by almost 100 since 1949, members financial at the end of 1962 numbered only 233. (With the receipt of overseas subscriptions the number has latterly risen to 255.) Thus in the past 13 years it is questionable whether there has been any material increase in effective membership. Compare our apparent situation with those of the New Zealand Institute of Chemistry and the New Zealand Grassland Association. Over approximately the same period both these institutions more than doubled their numbers to present memberships of about 650.

Of our 233 financial New Zealand members, 93 are located in the northern part of the North Island, 115 in the southern part of the North Island and 25 in the South Island. A breakdown shows that, of the total, 30% could be classed as professional (non-veterinary) research workers, 27% as farmers, 25% as extension workers, 14% as veterinarians and 4% as technical workers. Incidentally, less than 10% of New Zealand's 350 or so veterinarians are members of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production. Roughly 100 members — including some enjoying great international prestige — have been unfinancial for two or more years. Perhaps it is not surprising to find that our veterinary members appear to experience less difficulty than members of other professional groups in paying their annual subscriptions. The veterinarians are followed by the farmers. The predominantly scientist groups bring up the rear.

Up to the present time Annual Conferences have seemed reasonably well attended, although farmer interest may

have waned, possibly as a result of the competing attractions of farmer's conferences at Lincoln College, Massey College, and Ruakura. Nevertheless, a moment's reflection will show that the manner of conducting the Society's affairs has not changed significantly since its inception. Now, as in the early 1940's, we hold an Annual Conference which is publicized only through our Conference *Proceedings*. We have not hitherto published an Annual Report. Between Conferences there are perhaps two meetings of the Management Committee, the main functions of which are to pass accounts for payment, decide questions of membership and arrange a programme for the next conference. The last year was one of rather exceptional activity since we decided on New Zealand delegates to the World Conference on Animal Production, made one editor aware of the existence of the Society by criticizing his journal, and agreed on a colour for the cover of our own. Certainly we have been blessed with the services of a succession of hardworking Secretary-Treasurers and Editors. Otherwise, now as in the 1940's, between Conferences the Society is virtually functionless. It can be supposed that the form in which the Society emerged in 1941 would of necessity be dictated by the then existing war-time atmosphere of restriction and austerity. It is pertinent to enquire whether the pattern set in 1941 should necessarily determine the scope of the Society's activities in 1963.

In this connection it is of interest to consider some activities of kindred bodies holding regular conferences and concerned in part or in whole with scientific agriculture. Of these the closest comparison with our own Society is probably afforded by the New Zealand Grassland Association. Their Annual Conferences are, however, held in various localities throughout the country. The theme of the Conference usually centres around agriculture in the particular district in which the meeting is held and a measure of farmer participation and publicity is achieved through field days held in conjunction with the Conference. The Association also publishes an Annual Report and makes an award in recognition of outstanding contributions to grassland farming.

The New Zealand Institute of Agricultural Science has affiliated regional sections in eight main centres. The Institute produces a newsletter and may make submissions and recommendations to legislative bodies. The Council of the Institute has the responsibility of making recommendations to the Royal Agricultural Society of New Zealand

concerning the latter's award for the best published agricultural research.

The New Zealand Soil Science Society keeps in touch with its members through a newsletter issued monthly.

The New Zealand Institute of Chemistry has regional affiliated branches. Branch meetings are held during the year and the Institute produces a two-monthly journal. Various awards are made by the Institute for outstanding work in chemistry, including chemistry with an agricultural background. Nevertheless, the immediate past-President of the Institute of Chemistry apparently considered that these and other seemingly worthwhile activities were insufficient reasons for the Institute's existence. He saw fit to castigate it for what he termed "coasting along on the organization of 15 or so years ago" and urged a policy that "would turn the Institute into an activating body, instead of a functionless, ostrich-like organization, in danger of dying, through keeping its head in the sand".

The various branches of the New Zealand Veterinary Association hold local meetings every month or so. Their council meets at approximately monthly intervals, and their journal appears every two months. The Association appears to wield appreciable influence through its representation on bodies concerned with veterinary policy at national levels.

Across the Tasman the Australian Society of Animal Production was conceived in 1950 and held its inaugural meeting in 1954. Its constitution is a more sophisticated document than our own Rules. For example, it lists 8 objects of their Society as compared with 3 objects listed for the New Zealand Society. The Australian Society's Conference is a biennial one. However, all members are attached to one or other of five branches, each managing its own affairs, and holding meetings at intervals of from one to two months. According to H. J. Lee, the immediate past-President (who has kindly supplied details of the organization of the Australian Society), at some branch meetings one half or more of the members present may be producers.

For good or ill a specialist body will, of course, tend to be preoccupied more with the narrow professional interests of the group it represents, rather than with national interests. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the criticism levelled at the N.Z. Institute of Chemistry by its past-President, with one exception the specialist and less specialized bodies I have discussed share alike the tendency

to function continuously, and I suspect that some, at least, exert considerable direct influence in shaping national agricultural policy. These features are not shared by the New Zealand Society of Animal Production, despite the almost complete dependence of this country on the group of industries from which the Society takes its name. We neither shape public opinion nor influence policy. Cabinet ministers remain unaware of our existence. The interests of farmer members appear better catered for by farmers' conferences at Ruakura, Massey and Lincoln. The scope of our Conference papers is not perceptibly different from that of the New Zealand Institute of Agricultural Science. As far as I can see, in 22 years our Society has not progressed in any definite direction, and at present is not going anywhere in particular.

What of our future? In this context let me consider two emerging problems of which our founders could have had no foreknowledge.

It would, I suppose, be the understatement of the year to say that the most catastrophic foreseeable event that could engulf New Zealand's agriculture would be a sustained nuclear attack on our main centres in the event of world war. There is no need to labour the point — it is technically, and no doubt politically, feasible. Perhaps half of our human population, mostly urban, would die quickly, from blast, heat, and direct radiation. Likewise, half of our livestock population might also die, although rather more slowly from radioactive "fallout", since they could not know to take shelter. The million or so human survivors would need to be fed, and should, of course, eat food uncontaminated by gross radioactivity. Of their many remaining problems not the least would be the disposal of millions of radioactive animal carcasses. Undoubtedly, if the possibility of a nuclear catastrophe were faced up to and planned for, some of its effects (if it occurred) could be ameliorated. Means of protecting and assisting the human population are now being organized by the New Zealand Ministry of Civil Defence. Except for the part-time efforts of a few individuals associated with civil defence, or in Government departments, there seems little evidence yet of an agricultural plan to meet the possibilities of nuclear warfare. Should this concern our Society?

Despite recent reversals it seems not impossible that Britain may eventually join the European Common Market. But here the enquiring but uninformed layman is bewildered and bedevilled by a variety of opinions regarding

possible consequences. On the one hand, we are told that, unless "suitable provision" is made for New Zealand's special needs, Britain's entry would spell major economic disaster for us. Another facet of opinion is that ultimately it would matter little, whether or not Britain joined the European Community, since, if she fails to do so, her capacity to pay for our animal products will be greatly curtailed. At the other end of the spectrum, a New Zealand economist is quoted as having estimated that the greatest economic loss we could sustain would be a mere 10% reduction in the present value of our overseas exports — uncomfortable perhaps, but scarcely a disaster if the possibility of alternative markets is considered. I do not know if there exists a body of experts that does know approximately where the truth lies, or to what extent the planning of this country's economic future is adequate. But I do believe a body calling itself the New Zealand Society of Animal Production should know, and might expect to be concerned in the planning.

There is, of course, no lack of other problems. For example, it is claimed (although not without some conflict of opinion) that the results of the research workers are quickly and effectively made available to the farmer through various extension activities.

What of the reverse process? Can we yet claim that problems on the farm are continuously reviewed and satisfactorily evaluated in terms of their relative national importance, so that our applied research facilities, at least, are allocated on some rational basis? Or in the absence of guidance do more senior scientists sometimes have little alternative but to select their fields of research according to their personal tastes and ambitions, and the staff and facilities they can command by virtue of their seniority? It is true that past Presidents and others of our members have, at times, dealt forcefully and well with questions such as the organization of research, agricultural education, and the like. But their recorded opinions gather dust on the shelves. As a body we have remained indifferent to matters such as these. Are we necessarily committed to this state of inactivity or should we aspire to lead?

As most scientists belong to specialist groups catering for their individual interests, should the Society continue almost solely as a forum whereby, once a year, scientists engaged in some aspect of agriculture can discuss their problems? Or should it have additional functions to perform? Should it (and here I quote an object of the Society

as laid down in its Rules) "provide an organization to bring about *active* collaboration of *all* workers in the field of animal production". (The italics are mine.) "All workers" must surely include the farmer who, as J. M. Ranstead pointed out in 1941, "is the man primarily concerned with animal production".

I would be surprised if, in retrospect, our founders were today quite satisfied with their creation. To my mind, the Society has had little direct impact on animal production, although in its restricted capacity as an association of animal scientists it has functioned tolerably well. It might continue in that capacity if in the meantime its supposed functions are not taken over by more bustling bodies such as the Institute of Agricultural Science. As I see it, four possible courses are open to the Society.

It can continue as it has done during the past two decades, in which case it may eventually become extinct. Or it might, by amalgamation, merge its identity with that of another body with similar aims, as was suggested a few years ago. Thirdly, it could deliberately take the course of increased specialization in animal science as distinct from animal production. But if it does so the scientists who already dominate its ranks will need to consider whether it should change its name, re-write its Constitution and re-state its aims. Fourthly, the Society, in a revitalized form, might really aspire to encompass within its horizon the immense field of animal production. But if it does so, it cannot remain satisfied that participation of its farmer members in its affairs, ends with the payment of their annual subscriptions. It should be watchful that producer representation is effective. The great potential strength of this Society lies, I believe, in the variety of talents that could be drawn from the widely diversified interests concerned in the welfare of animal production. Surely the Society could use those talents to play an active and decisive part in policy matters concerning the production, processing, and marketing of our animal products.

It has been argued that greater non-scientist participation in our Conferences would lower the standard of our papers. Assuming that the welfare of animal production is really our aim my answer is that the interests of even our scientist members already cover so broad a spectrum that a paper that is gibberish to an intelligent and informed farmer, may well be equally unintelligible to a scientist of another discipline. Such papers rightly belong at specialist meetings, formal or informal. Furthermore, our scientist

members should consider whether they have a duty toward their farmer colleagues and others outside their own particular disciplines — and prepare their papers accordingly. To my mind they do have such a duty. However, as I hope I have made clear, Annual Conferences, whatever their form should, I feel, form only a part of our activities. I see no reason why we should not consider having affiliated bodies centred, say, at Hamilton, Palmerston North and Lincoln, despite the competing interests that already exist in those particular centres. Regular branch or section meetings would not only give continuity of existence to the Society, but could, perhaps, cater more especially for farmer interests. Some bias of our Annual Conferences toward scientific interests might then be more justified. Above all, we should have a strong Council empowered to make bold decisions and to act on them.

The elder statesmen responsible for the Society's inception have largely left the stage as active participants. The middle-aged group (my own) have, in my opinion, coasted unquestioningly along on the terms under which the Society was founded. It is my hope that some of the younger members at least, will question whether we are in danger of reaching a stage of petrification, beyond which we could only ungracefully bow out, or whether, in one way or another, we should aim at a more dynamic role than hitherto for the New Zealand Society of Animal Production.