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SYMPOSIUM

DISEASE AND ANIMAL PRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

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THIS SYMPOSIUM gives an opportunity for some of the more important infectious diseases to be reviewed in light of current work in New Zealand. It considers, rightly, aspects of animal disease and the effect of these on production. In the past, the veterinarian has been associated with the *treatment* of disease; today this situation is changing as increasingly animal producers are demanding that he should be concerned with the *control* and *prevention* of animal disease.

At present, there is a danger that farming practice will produce new conditions with unexpected results for animal disease. Today, the trend is towards livestock mass production with the concentrations of animals always increasing, either in intensive units or as number of animals to the acre. With these conditions, the spread of infectious diseases increases. Unfortunately, it is only recently that any study has been made of the exact way disease spreads from animal to animal, and much detailed information on this subject is still lacking. About most of the diseases to be discussed in this symposium, sufficient information is available for control or even eradication to be undertaken.

The national cost of loss of production can be very great and this aspect is considered by E. D. Fielden. The national cost is an important sum, because it is related to the amount which it can reasonably be expected will be spent on research and control.

At present, much effort is needed to make the animal producer aware of existing knowledge, and this may involve further investigations into New Zealand farming practices.

One of the current problems of interest to the Animal Health Department at Massey is that of "stocking rate", now rapidly increasing, and it seems that the limit is nowhere in sight. Trials are now being conducted to find out what the limits are. These trials are designed to consider the results of fertilizer, rainfall, type of herbage, but more often than not with no regard for the diseases or parasites of the animals used. It should be clear that it is important to have information on the diseases which may affect production, or those which may give trouble under conditions of high-stocking rates or the stress of reduced food intake. After all, the aim of these experiments is to study the effect on production, and disease, either clinical or subclinical, can alter the production of affected animals. Not to consider the possibility of disease in any feeding trial is rather like consulting the statistician at the end of an experiment. So much more information would be available if the veterinarian as well as the statistician was consulted before the experiments were started.

The diseases considered in this symposium are some of those into which research is in progress in New Zealand. This symposium endeavours to show both the problems involved and the fund of information available. It draws attention to the fact that if animals are used in experiments, their diseases and the effect of these on production must be considered.