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PRODUCTION POTENTIAL OF EXTENSION IS NOT FULLY EXPLOITED

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Extension is a two-way process. Many farmers identify their problems and devise practical and management measures to overcome them. Research can develop these measures for wider application. The adviser can encourage this reverse flow from farmer to research, which could be of considerable economic value.

A Dairy Board consulting officer makes an average of 500 visits to 300 different farms annually and services 18 discussion groups, each of about 12 farmers. Farmers eventually drop out of groups in favour of telephone consultations, but within 2 to 3 years some form of contact will have been made with more than half the farmers in the area.

In a study of 10 Waikato discussion groups, those farmers with more than 4 years' membership increased production 36% over those in their first year, mainly through increases in stocking rate. Other surveys have shown similar gains.

The cost per consulting officer in 1978-9 was \$24 000, or \$31.50 per farm visit, \$61 per discussion group meeting, and \$33 per discussion group member. The technical benefits spill over to non-members through personal contact. The cost of a consulting service is estimated to be 0.1% of the overseas earnings of the dairy industry.

High staff turnover reduces the effectiveness of advisers. The resignation rate of NZDB and MAF advisers is said to be 10% per annum. This, with promotions and retirements, reduces their active working life to 7 to 8 years. Many leave for greater financial rewards and a more stable family life.