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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Fifty years and the future

K.E. JURY

This Conference is of special significance, both in the context of the Society's Jubilee, and because it falls within the year in which New Zealand marks 150 years of nationhood. It is indeed an honour to have been President during this the Society's 50th, and longest, year, and to present this address.

In doing so, it is chastening to recognise that addresses Presidential are essentially statements for the moment, focussing as they do on areas of interest, or matters of concern, to the person who has guided the Society's wellbeing over the preceding year. The good that they might contain, together with the bad, is largely interred with their printing: their content is seldom, if ever, used as a reference point for subsequent debate. It would be unrealistic to expect that my contribution will experience other than the same fate as those of my predecessors.

One of the good things about this Jubilee celebration is that it gives us the opportunity to pay tribute to those who founded, and to those who have worked for, and contributed to, the Society, and to recognise its achievements. Reference to the inaugural Conference Proceedings serves well to recall its birth and the aspirations of its founders. There were 66 members when the first conference was held in 1941. Our first President, J.M. Ranstead, recorded that, in the previous June "a small band of enthusiasts gathered together in Wellington to consider the advisability of forming a new Society, along the lines of the American Genetics Association. After considerable discussion the original proposal was abandoned and in its place it was decided to form the New Zealand Society of Animal Production on the general lines of the American Society of that name." Its objectives, which have remained unaltered to the present day, were, in summary, to hold an annual conference, and to bring about collaboration among workers in, and to foster all aspects of, animal production.

Ranstead went on to express the view that "in animal production, all roads lead back to the soil" and that the new Society should embrace people from a wide range of disciplines - from soil chemistry, geology, plant research, together with those with interests in animal health, breeding, feeding and management (Ranstead, 1941).

Ranstead's successor, the then Professor C.P. McMeekan, saw himself as restrained from commenting on non-scientific matters. He would, he said, have appreciated the opportunity to use the privilege of his position to inflict upon the audience his views of such topics as the organisation of animal production and marketing, on agricultural education and research. He felt that his caution as a scientist might be over-shadowed by his zeal as a reformer (McMeekan, 1942). It was a measure of the man, so appropriately acknowledged by the Award bearing his name, that he did not want to compromise the fledgling society by controversial remarks as its second President.

Over the years, the office of President has been increasingly dominated by scientists, or scientists turned administrators, with a liberal smattering of University dons. But four have been farmers and only one a female: she one of five whose background has been in extension. Collectively, they have steered the Society's affairs on a consistent, if conservative, course. Supporting successive Presidents, Committee members have made their various contributions in managing our affairs. A special tribute must be due to our Secretaries and Treasurers, who have held office for surprisingly long terms, in view of our expectations of them. Our Annual Conference has provided an effective forum for the presentation and debate of research findings. It has been important in bringing research workers together, perhaps the only occasion in the year for many, and important too as part of the stepping-stone from research to farmer application. The distillation by scientists themselves, by extension workers, and by farmers of the information contained in papers has had a signifi-

cant impact on our animal production systems and their efficiency. Further, the standard of our Proceedings is a tribute to the many Editors who have occasionally had to battle for satisfaction with our more difficult contributors. Through the Occasional Publication series, and its support for international conferences, including Dairy Production from Pasture, Deer, and AAAP, the Society has promoted the exchange of information related to animal production among a much wider audience than its membership.

I doubt that many would dispute these achievements. While the fact that this is our Jubilee year does not, itself, signal the need for a major change in our objectives, the last five years have seen wide ranging changes impacting on all sectors of our animal industries which present challenges and opportunities for us to enhance our value to New Zealand Animal Production. Our future wellbeing is obviously linked both to the industry of which we are part and to the way we - for the Society is its members - choose to channel our future activities.

There are a number of reasons to support the contention that agricultural products will continue to be the basis of our national prosperity for the foreseeable future. We have few secondary industries in which we have a sufficient cost of production advantage to offset distance from overseas markets. The expectation that investment manipulation would secure national prosperity has been well discredited: even the current Government has discovered the importance of agriculture. International market prospects are more or less optimistic long term. As incomes in developing economies increase so does the demand for animal products also increase. Changes, all be they slow, in attitudes towards subsidised production are encouraging but will not eliminate competition. Importantly, too, the sociological barriers to development of efficient agriculture in several countries which are potential competitors seem to override their threat as low cost competitors for New Zealand in the international market place. At this time we can only speculate on the impact of the massive changes taking place in Eastern Europe.

This Society will have a continued relevance to the industry if it has a strong membership drawn from all of its sectors. It is true that our only collective activity, our annual Conference, has in recent years largely become a forum for discussion of research

results, and as such is most valuable to those with research interests. In this context, it is worth noting that Ranstead's view of the Society drawing together those from widely divergent disciplines has not really been fulfilled. But with the emphasis in animal research increasingly moving from the field to the laboratory, we must attract those who are being recruited into research in increasing numbers from outside the traditional animal science streams, to work, for example, in biochemistry and molecular biology.

Today there is intense public interest in the impact of people's activity on plant and animal life, and in the conditions under which food is produced. As a Society we need to acknowledge and react to those public concerns.

There has been a great deal of comment in recent times about future climatic change and its potential effect on agriculture in New Zealand. This debate builds on the accelerating international interest in environmental issues generally. The greenhouse effect, the explosion in world population, increasing pollution and the recognition that world resources are limited all contribute to the attention now being given to the interaction between agriculture and the environment: indeed, land care or sustainable agriculture will be the popular catch cry of the 1990's. Sustainable management of agricultural resources rather than maximising development is already widely proposed overseas.

The Society should encourage a greater contribution from the animal science community to projections of the effect of global warming - what are the possible changes in feed availability and quality, in pests, diseases and parasites likely to mean to animal production systems? Suggestions were made in a recent Conservation Department report that, to reduce the exhaustion of harmful gases into the atmosphere, we should decrease animal numbers. Even a tax on animal emissions was suggested.

Public concern over animal welfare is not as sharply channelled through pressure groups here as it is overseas. We may feel that our pastoral systems are relatively free from welfare concerns but either as farmers, or scientists, we will surely feel the impact of extreme views on animal rights. Consumer lobbies, influencing public reaction to what may, or may be perceived to be, non natural products, are growing - these and other pressure groups will surely question

technological developments which currently excite us as scientists. The potential for DNA and other new technology and their implications are dealt with in detail elsewhere at this Conference. We must promote and influence public awareness of the issues involved and we will need to find ways of influencing tomorrow's activists as well as today's policy-makers. Only by a proactive approach to informing the public of its objectives will we counter emotionally based rejection of the benefits of biotechnology.

It is my view that this Society cannot insulate itself from the debate of these and other issues of public interest related to animal production. This Jubilee programme gives us an excellent springboard for re-shaping our Conference to promote this debate.

Several Past Presidents have strongly advocated the importance of extension to technology uptake. The linkage between scientist and adviser, so long a strength of New Zealand agriculture, is now largely illusory and there is a great danger that research findings will not be translated into practical farming situations unless there is a financial reward. This Society should aim to facilitate this process. Just as participation in professional societies plays an important part in a scientist's development and awareness of what his peers are doing and thinking, so too it is important that those in extension are encouraged to be involved in discussions of research and the Society should promote discussion in which the scientist is exposed to an extension viewpoint.

Later Presidents have not been so inhibited as was McMeekan in commenting on issues of the day either as the topic of, or within the broader context of their address. Some have focussed on particular areas of research related to their own expertise and interest; some have highlighted technology developments. Topics that have recurred over the years include the unrealised potential for increases in agricultural production, industry structures, the need for extension services, agricultural education and research organisation, priorities and funding. It is chastening to conclude that the changes that have occurred apace in recent years have generally not produced the type of outcomes that our various Presidents have proposed.

As late as 1978 Conference papers advocated production incentives: as output by contrast with input subsidies for meat and wool (Taylor, 1978) and dairy (Hutton, 1978) production. The thesis that increased

output was a national goal was also widely promoted: for example, Hight (1979), Macmillan (1980) and Rattray (1981) discussed the unrealised potential for agricultural growth. Rogernomics dealt the deathblow to subsidies. Maximising agricultural output is no longer supported as a national goal and the principle that the user should pay has largely removed extension from Government funded activity.

As early in the Society's history as 1945, Filmer addressed the topic of the organisation of animal research, and this and the adequacy of funding have subsequently been discussed by several Presidents. The issue of the division of work between MAF and DSIR has predominated, with agricultural research councils of various forms proposed to coordinate our national effort.

In 1978, Bryant foresaw winds of change being generated by changes within MAF, increasing to a gale from the struggle to cope with financial constraints at that time. This was to develop, on the Bryant scale, to hurricane proportions through the implementation in 1985 of staged cuts totalling 37% in research funding.

Reductions in funding levels coupled with the so-called "user pays" principle and, latterly, the establishment of mechanisms to develop contestable rather than precedence funding, have successively caused a great deal of discomfort to our research community. Given the economic changes sought by the new Government in 1984, and its zeal for reform, it was unrealistic to expect that national research effort would escape scrutiny. It seems that a perception had developed that national priorities were not being assessed and that there was duplication, or at least unnecessary replication, of effort. It is tempting to speculate that had there been a greater degree of cooperation and rationalisation between science departments then the advent of another science Ministry might have been unnecessary.

The questions that have been answered with the formation of the new Science Ministry and Foundation are how, and which, research Government will fund. The question that has not been addressed is how we can create an environment for high research output and scientific excellence. Science is one activity in which the opportunity to pursue the work itself is a major component of motivation and reward. For that reason the environment which will ensure success is more complex and different from most other occupations.

The motivation of scientists to succeed is far more critical to the success of our research investment than are the structures under which the research is carried out. People are our key resource: they must have freedom of inquiry - freedom to invest their intellect within a framework in which freedom of choice might be limited by decisions on funding priorities. I see no real evidence that those reshaping science policy, who seem bent on increasing bureaucracy in the name of ensuring accountability, recognise the importance of fostering an environment in which science will prosper. Indeed, it seems that a cost accountant approach has hijacked national research administration.

The assumption that the Treasury's new wave methods of managing research and providing measures of its effectiveness will produce a greater output of innovative and relevant technology is fallacious. As well as producing more readily identifiable outcomes by way of products and technologies, science converts physical capital into intellectual capital, the development of which is a key part of the research process, yet which cannot be readily evaluated in dollar terms. Management of science does not fit the models developed for business, themselves subject to fluctuations in fashion. Innovation is a process that defies ready definition which cannot flourish in an environment of bureaucratic rigidity. For other than simply descriptive research, the amount of effort and the time scale needed to produce a result may well be unpredictable. Projects can be long, with no intermediate payoff, or results may be achieved in an unexpectedly short time, sometimes by serendipity. There can be no promises in science: to rigidly steer research programmes to meet preset targets, will favour the "safe" approach, so clearly demonstrated by Fennessy (1984) as no longer relevant. Further, this approach may well block off avenues in the end more profitable than the original purpose of the project. The purist may also argue that the quality of research has little relationship to its outcome.

To achieve the efficiencies so eagerly sought by Government the degree of distraction now confronting scientists will have to be reduced. The added burden of bidding for external funds can be accepted if the research so supported is allowed to proceed in an environment encouraging the lateral thinker and even inspired guesswork.

A major change since 1985 has been the policy

that science should earn some sustenance from other than the taxpayer. There have been some real benefits from this, including contractual and joint venture associations with industry, if one can find a way around the barriers of outdated financial rules. Access to new technology through involvement in contract research also has been a positive result, and there has been a sharpening of focus on the potential commercial outcomes of research.

But the drive to generate revenue also has negative consequences. Importantly, it places obstacles in the way of the flow of information between scientists that is so important to research progress. Of particular concern, too, are some of the effects of the marketing activities of business units with commercial goals attached to research groups. Packaging of research - putting it into the context of the whole farm operation - has long been recognised as an essential part of the extension process. Where we are selling research or its outcomes, the danger is that it will be packaged to be attractive to the client with neglect for the quality of the product within the packaging. Some have proposed, I understand, that they are selling the sizzle not the sausage, an attitude that spells doom for the long term credibility of our science. It is already of great concern that the impartiality of research groups is being questioned by some in the industry because of those sorts of attitudes.

The concern that longer term, or basic research, is at risk under so called "user pays" has been widely canvassed. In fact it is our applied work, work that can be directly exploited by farmers, that has been under threat.

The dairy industry saw this dilemma three years ago and responded with a proposal for a joint programme in farm production research with MAF. While consistent with Government policy that appropriable research be funded by the beneficiary, it has encountered successive obstacles, including a Minister of Science who found it easier to buy frigates than to conclude the research contract. The Dairy Board's enthusiasm has obviously been hard pressed by the difficulty it has found in setting up a long term programme tailored to industry needs.

The Government has not been prepared to give an assurance that it will not reduce its contribution when there is an industry injection of research funding. Fur-

ther the control agencies have found extreme discomfort with the prospect that they might not be able to make the industry contest for its own funds. Our Producer Boards have now committed themselves to funding applied research - the Government must match that with an unequivocal commitment to funding levels of strategic research, to the right to industry participation in the selection of programmes and to the free flow of the resulting information to farmers.

Given the rapidity of changes that have taken place over the last five years, a period of stability is essential for us to recapture enthusiasm and commitment to research programmes, many of which have themselves been materially affected by reduced resources and changes in priorities. However, there appears to be little prospect of a return to the comparative security that applied before 1984 and further structural changes seem inevitable.

In this context, the existing division of animal related research between MAF and DSIR has little to recommend it. Disbandment rather than amalgamation of MAF Technology and DSIR must be an option with the resultant stand-alone institutes bidding directly to funding agencies, thereby reducing overheads and replicated steps in decision-making processes.

Recognising the importance of graduate teaching programmes and associated research, and the difficulties they are experiencing, leads one back to the argument put forward by Anderson (1985) for the affiliation of research institutes with the Universities. There is, I believe, a strong case that can be argued that there would be significant national benefit from such a structure.

This Jubilee takes place at a time of unprecedented economic and social change. I have commented on but a few aspects of this change, mainly affecting research and development. Economic restructuring, exacerbated for some by flood or drought, has placed even greater stress on our farmers who have responded by setting a simple goal - farm for their individual profit. Those of us in research must focus even more sharply on supporting their efforts and retaining the international competitiveness of New Zealand's animal production.

This Society has, no less than in the past, the opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution to these goals. It will do so if we its members accept the

responsibility to ensure that it retains its relevance in an environment where change and insecurity will undoubtedly continue. If we make and take opportunities arising from this change, our future contribution will be as worthwhile as that since those men of foresight founded the New Zealand Society of Animal Production 50 years ago.

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