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## BRIEF COMMUNICATION

### A bibliographic database on the biology of the sheep and goat

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**Keywords** Database, bibliography, sheep, goat, anatomy.

#### INTRODUCTION

As a preliminary goal, but an ongoing one as well, the book *A bibliography of sheep and goat anatomy* was published in 1990. It contains 3857 records, and has been distributed to 60 colleagues in 20 countries world-wide. Many of these records have been subsequently re-edited, and the database has been expanded by 45, and indexed to enable rapid topic searches. Because the database covers the morphology of muscle, bone, fat and skin, it includes references to many aspects of the production traits of small ruminants. It would now be possible to further expand this database to include:

- Physiology and biochemistry not already covered
- Genetics and breeding
- Integumentary fibre characteristics (skin and follicles are already included)
- Nutrition
- Diseases

#### IMPLICATIONS

##### Why produce this database?

This would be a major international endeavour; there would be a total of about 25,000 records to incorporate. However, it would lead researchers to literature produced in two centuries of investigation. If it were like the present database, less than half of the references would be in English.

Until recently, computer technology was cumbersome, but it is now possible to access a huge amount of data within seconds on a note-book sized computer. Subsequent upgrades will be

easier than the initial compilation; they can be made directly off magnetic disc (as supplied by Current Contents) or from compact disc storage.

##### Why choose the sheep and goat?

Because of their relatively small size and ready availability, the sheep and goat have been used in research as models of ruminants generally, especially for the digestive and reproductive tracts. They have often been used as a convenient larger sized laboratory animal. Scientific interest in the sheep goes back to the early years of the 19th century when illustrations of the sheep were included in an anatomy atlas by Gurlt, and the first embryologists began their observations. Because sheep and goats are commercially important in their own right, the development of fibres and carcass tissues has been extensively studied in recent years.

##### Who would use the database?

This New Zealand initiative would be available for world-wide use. Data exchange would be made by electronic mail or by posting discs, rather than by printing hard copy.

#### CONCLUSIONS

To make this proposal work, those with the ability and interest, who may have already compiled records appropriate to an expanded database, will need to communicate and collaborate. The result will be of permanent benefit to those that contribute and anyone else that wishes to access references on small ruminants. Hopefully, it will set a precedent for improving the efficiency of data searches, not only in other areas of animal production, but also in other disciplines.